BANDITRY AND POLITICS IN PUEBLA, 1846—1848: THE CONTRA-GUERRILLA OF MANUEL DOMÍNGUEZ AND THE MEXICAN-AMERICAN WAR

by

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Abstract

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In the midst of the war between the United States and Mexico (1846—1848) a group of Mexicans from the state of Puebla began to work for the U.S. army as spies, couriers and fighters. The group operated under the leadership of Puebla's famous highwayman Manuel Domínguez, "*El Chato*." U.S. officials called this group the Mexican Spy Company, while contemporary Mexicans named Domínguez's band *contra-guerrilla poblana.* Given the collaborationist nature of the counter-guerrilla it comes as no surprise that Mexicans and Americans alike still remember Domínguez and his followers as no more than criminals and traitors, unnatural Mexicans who betrayed their homeland in its darkest hour. I argue, however, that the *contra-guerrilla* can be seen as an example of popular political action. Evidence suggests that, on the one had, the activity of the *contra-guerrilla* seems to have been anchored in a desire to exercise power. On the other, the *contra-guerrilla* deliberately challenged governmental authority. Overt violence perpetrated against fellow Mexicans was the way in which the *contra-guerrilla* made its claims public.

Although the study of popular violence concerns both the scholarship on banditry and the scholarship on popular politics, these fields remain disconnected. Scholars still debate whether or not banditry can be considered political while those who study popular politics often overlook

popular mobilizations not tied to formal or high politics. As a result, we continue to misunderstand phenomena that do not fit neatly into either area of study. The *contra-guerrilla* is a case in point. This dissertation draws on Charles Tilly's theory of collective violence to revise dominant conceptualizations of banditry which tend to deny it a political dimension.

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CONTENTS

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS ix

Introduction 1

1. The Province and City of Puebla (1810—1847) 20

2. Puebla and the U.S. Military Occupation 66

3. The Mexican Spy Company 112

4. Social and Judicial Background of Three Contraguerrilleros 151

Conclusions 190

Maps and Images 197

Bibliography 204

ILLUSTRATIONS

Map Page

1. Scott's campaign to Mexico City 197

2. Last Battles in the Valley of Mexico (August-September 1847) 198

3.1 Territorial division of New Spain, eighteenth century 199

3.2 The Province of Puebla 1824—1849 200

Image

1. "Wanted. The Mexican Spy Company for Treason." 201

2. Engraving of Manuel Domínguez 202

3. Uniform of the Mexican Spy Company 203

Introduction

Few figures in Mexican history have traditionally been more excoriated than Manuel Domínguez and his *compañeros* in the *Mexican Spy Company*. Emerging out of the chaos of the Mexican American War (1846—1848), the "Company" or *contra-guerrilla poblana* by its Mexican name, was constituted by Manuel Domínguez, a well-known highwayman and his associates who were hired by the United States army to serve as spies, couriers and guerilla fighters. Needless to say, Mexicans of the time regarded this group of bandits as despicable traitors to the homeland who pursued their own lowly interests instead of the preservation of the *Patria*.

Despite recent studies that have demonstrated that internal social conflict at the local level was an important dimension of the Mexican experience of the war, the participation of Manuel Domínguez and his associates as U.S. allies continues to be seen as treason motivated by greed.[1] However, the evidence presented in this dissertation suggests otherwise. The fact that most of the members of the Mexican Spy Company came from the popular sectors of society hints at the possibility that their participation in the war had an important component of socioeconomic conflict. Furthermore, I argue that their participation in the war may be regarded as an example of popular political action. Based on Charles Tilly's idea that collective violence is a form of contentious politics, that is, "where people make discontinuous, public, collective claims on each other," I interpret the actions of the individuals who enrolled in the Mexican Spy Company as political because these actions seem to be anchored in a desire to have at least some

[1] See for instance Jaime Sánchez Sánchez, "El territorio tlaxcalteca y la guerra con Estados Unidos," in *México en guerra (1846—1848). Perspectivas regionales*, coord. Laura Herrera Serna (Mexico: Museo Nacional de las Intervensiones-Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes, 1997), 635-655; and Alfredo Ávila, "La contraguerrilla de Manuel Domínguez 1847—1848," article online, Mexico City: Instituto de Investigaciones Históricas-Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1997; available from http://sunsite.unam.mx/revistas/1847, (accessed on July 2007.)

access to power or deliberately challenge existing authorities.[2] Members of the Mexican Spy Company pursued power in a particular way. They did not aspire to a sustained political role, nor were they interested in entering the realm of high politics. The Mexican Spy Company seems to have had a well-established group identity but it did not have a coherent political ideology or program. Rather, their ambition centered on instilling fear as means to both obtain whatever they wanted (whether provisions, a place to stay, etc.,) and to command respect. Domínguez and his band also used the power they acquired through their collaboration with the U.S. army to take revenge for past prosecutions. Finally, the Mexican Spy Company was also political inasmuch as it was a product of local and regional political conflicts. The fears of Puebla's elite about social disarray made them adopt measures that increasingly narrowed the access of the middle and lower sectors of society to better positions in the socioeconomic pyramid. Since the 1830s Puebla's elite moved to conservatism, which reduced the possibility of political participation by the masses. A state of vigilance over the popular classes was exacerbated by the elite's constant suspicion that these groups were a lurking menace to social order, not to mention an impediment for development. In the arena of regional conflicts, the historical rivalry between Puebla and Mexico City, which was but one example of the state of national disintegration, also contributed to making Domínguez and his men allies of the United States army.

Historical Background

With Agustín de Iturbide's triumph in 1821, conservative groups in Mexico were assured that Independence from Spain would not—as it was feared during the first stages of insurgency—result in a subversion of the existing social order and caste war. However, Iturbide's empire did

[2] Charles Tilly, *The Politics of Collective Violence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 26.

not last long. In 1823, Antonio López de Santa Anna and other generals proclaimed a plan to overthrow the short-lived monarchy and install a republic. Santa Anna's plan expressed a generalized discontent among politically ambitious *criollos* and *mestizos* who felt their opportunities threatened by Iturbide's absolutist moves. In 1824 a new constitution declared Mexico a federal republic. This opened up opportunities for political participation to the majority of the male population and thus the debate between factions centered on how much political power was convenient to give to the masses. Violent episodes linked to political events in the late 1820s persuaded the elite that empowerment of the masses was a major mistake and made it possible for conservatives to hold power between 1835 and 1846.[3] But the question of what form of government to adopt was far from settled. For three decades after Independence, Mexico's political elite would continue to debate whether the country should be a centralized or federal republic and regimes of one or the other kind would be installed and overthrown frequently. By and large, conservatives advocated for the first and liberals for the latter. Key points in the dispute between these two groups were the power of the army and the Catholic Church, as well as what constituted adequate channels of popular political representation.

Used to maintaining a high degree of control over their territory and resources, Mexican provinces resented attempts to curtail their autonomy. Protesting the adoption of centralism in 1836, Texas seceded from Mexico. The wide support that Texan settlers received from the U.S. upset Mexico's government and the conflict between the two countries intensified in 1845 when Texas was formally annexed to the United States claiming the Rio Grande as its southern border. This was considerably to the south of what Mexico acknowledged as its border with Texas, which was the Nueces River. Therefore, when the troops of General Zachary Taylor moved

[3] See Michael 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.)

from Corpus Christi across the Nueces River, the Mexican government saw it as open aggression. Considering it legitimate defense of the national territory, Mexican forces repelled the American troops that had crossed the Nueces. This initial military encounter became a perfect pretext for the presidency of James K. Polk, which had previously made clear its expansionist goals, to declare war against Mexico in April 1846.[4]

The war started when Mexico was in the middle of significant changes in the national government. In December 1845, General Mariano Paredes y Arrillaga had overthrown José Joaquín de Herrera. But the government of Paredes only lasted a few months since in August 1846, when the war had already started, the movement led by General Mariano Salas ousted Paredes and called for the return of Santa Anna. The Mexican general returned to Mexico from a brief exile in Havana, Cuba, in August 1846 and assumed the presidency and the command of the Mexican army.

The climate of political uncertainty and lack of military leadership on the Mexican side contributed immensely to the fast advance of Taylor's troops through the north of Mexico. New Mexico, California, and important cities such as Matamoros in Tamaulipas, Monterrey in Nuevo León, and the port of Tampico in the Gulf of Mexico were under American control by November 1846. As a commander in chief, one of the principal problems that Santa Anna faced was lack of resources. The treasury was exhausted and, given the American blockade of Mexican ports, the government was left without its most reliable source of income, namely, tax revenues from imports. Desperate governmental measures to finance the war, such as the decree to disentail Church property, were met with strong opposition that hindered the centralized efforts to

[4] See Josefina Zoraida Vázquez, *La intervensión norteamericana 1846—1847* (Mexico, Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores, 1997) and, Josefina Zoraida Vázquez, coord. *México al tiempo de su guerra con Estados Unidos (1846—1848)* (Mexico: Fondo de Cultura Económica, El Colegio de México, Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores, 1998.)

effectively organize the defense of the territory. For instance, the disentailment decree precipitated a political crisis that gave way to an uprising against the federal government in Mexico City that further debilitated national unity in the midst of the U.S. invasion.

General Winfield Scott's march toward Mexico City (famously compared to the advance of Hernán Cortés, the Spanish conqueror of the sixteenth century) started with the attack on Veracruz on March 23, 1847.[5] (See map 1) After four days of intense fire Veracruz capitulated. A crucial military encounter then took place in Cerro Gordo only a few miles from the city of Jalapa and where the forces at Santa Anna's command were defeated on April 18 causing massive desertion along the Mexican lines. The Mexican general tried to reorganize his army and get reinforcements in Puebla. Only about 80 miles from the capital of Mexico, Puebla was the second largest city of the country. Santa Anna entered Puebla on May 11, and to his disbelief, authorities in Puebla had not taken any steps toward the fortification of the city. In fact, the *Ayuntamiento* (city's governing council) of the city of Puebla was planning to surrender the city. After the hasty signing of an agreement between the municipal authority and U.S. authorities, Puebla was occupied by the troops of General William Jenkins Worth on May 15 1847. The surrender of Puebla caused fury, indignation and fear especially in Mexico City, which was then precipitously close to the enemy. Soon after Puebla's occupation, public opinion accused the city's authorities of betraying the *patria*. Urban authorities in Puebla defended themselves arguing that they had surrendered to protect the population, save innocent lives and deliver the city from destruction. But this did very little to change the sense that Puebla's capitulation amounted to national treason. In fact, the reputation of Puebla as treacherous became even more strongly embedded in the minds of many Mexicans just a few weeks after the

[5] See Robert W. Johannsen, *To the Halls of the Montezumas: The Mexican War in the American Imagination* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985.)

U.S. occupation of Puebla when the public learned about the formation of a Mexican Spy Company, many of whose members were former Pueblan bandits who agreed to collaborate with the U.S. army.

After the occupation of Puebla, Mexican military commanders decided that all efforts should be directed to fortifying Mexico City. General Scott left Puebla on August 7 and days later his troops were already approaching Mexico City. The last battles before the occupation of Mexico City were those of Contreras, Churubusco, Molino del Rey and Chapultepec where lack of communication, poor military organization, desertion and insufficient armament contributed to Mexico's defeat. (See map 2) With the fall of Chapultepec on September 13 1847, Scott's army was at the doorstep of Mexico City and the capital was defenseless. Santa Anna resolved that what had remained of his army should leave the city to avoid more destruction. From that moment on the city's Ayuntamiento had to deal with the Americans alone. Two representatives of the Ayuntamiento went to General Scott petitioning guaranties for the city in advance of its occupation. Yet, the decisions made by Santa Anna and later by the Ayuntamiento did not prevent an upsurge of violence. The first signs of American presence in the capital ignited the fury of the masses, which began their own battle against both the invaders and the capital's oligarchy. For about three days, the crowd remained in arms until its force was subdued.[6] On September 15, 1847 the flag of the United States was installed over Mexico's National Palace. Although regular warfare was officially over, hostilities against the Americans did not stop with the occupation of Mexico City. Guerrilla attacks became a major problem for the American army and posed important challenges to their main line of communication, the road between the capital and the port of Veracruz.

[6] See Luis Fernando Granados, *Sueñan las piedras. Alzamiento ocurrido en la ciudad de México, 14, 15 y 16 de septiembre de 1847* (Mexico: Era-Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes-Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, 2003.)

Late in September 1847, well aware that Puebla remained with a reduced American presence, Generals Santa Anna and Jose Joaquín Rea attempted a siege. The plan was to regain control of Puebla and isolate Scott's forces in Mexico City. But Colonel Thomas Childs, the American officer in charge of Puebla, quickly received reinforcements and was able to combat Santa Anna and Rea. The pursuit of Santa Anna ended in the village of Huamantla, Puebla the last battle and last defeat of the Mexican general in the war.

Negotiations for peace began in January 1848, between Nicholas P. Trist, the American envoy and various representatives of the Mexican government. On February 2, a peace treaty was signed. Vanquished Mexico had to recognize the Rio Grande as the southern border of Texas, cede the Alta California including the port of San Diego and the territory between California and Texas. Altogether, Mexico lost about one half of its territory.

The war had very important consequences for both the United States and Mexico. While the victory made it evident that the United States was in the process of becoming a continental power, the acquisition of new territories brought a significant imbalance between slavery and abolitionist states, which had important political consequences in the long term. For Mexico, the war was a major trauma and a powerful wake up call about the harm done by internal political divisions.

Historiographical and Theoretical Considerations

Until the second half of the twentieth century, the historiography of the Mexican American war focused on investigating its causes. Establishing which party—the United States or Mexico—was to blame for the conflict that had such important consequences for both countries, seemed vital. Two preferred genres of the early literature on the war were military histories and

biographies of war heroes. Most of the literature produced on both sides of the border before the 1960s, featured heavy patriotic undertones. While American historians celebrated the U.S. triumph over Mexico, Mexican historians, lamenting the disastrous consequences of the war, concerned themselves with drawing a patriotic lesson from the defeat. The voluminous work of Justin Smith, *War with Mexico* (1919) and José C. Valadés *Breve historia de la guerra con Estados Unidos* (1947) are good examples of nationalistic histories. Emphasizing a sense of nationhood, Mexican historiography saw the war as the result of a perfidious individual's opportunism. The individual in question was Antonio López de Santa Anna who became the most notorious villain in Mexico's history, the traitor who "sold" a portion of the national territory to the United States. There were martyrs too. The *niños heroes,* "defenders" of Chapultepec's military academy, were regarded as the most salient example of the true Mexican spirit during the war for their eagerness to die in defense of the *patria*.[7]

As early as 1947 Mexican anthropologist Gilberto López y Rivas made an attempt to explore the social dimensions of the war. Although his analysis of Mexican popular resistance during the U.S. occupation oversimplified complex and even contradictory reactions to the war, López made an essential contribution by spotlighting popular participation during the conflict. However, it was not until the 1960s and 1970s that revisionism significantly changed the traditional view of the war. New studies examined previously understudied aspects of the war and used overlooked historical sources such as travel books, letters, and diaries. Focusing on the

[7] The cadets that are said to have defended the castle of Chapultepec from U.S. invasion on September 13, 1847 are officially remembered as "*niños héroes*" or "boy heroes."

human dimension of the war these studies presented a more complex picture of the situation, one that made it more difficult to tell the patriots from the traitors, the perpetrators from the victims.[8]

Since the 1990s, the literature on the war has focused on internal Mexican conditions at the time of the conflict. These studies have revealed that intense local and regional conflict prevented Mexico from confronting the United States in a unified manner. In part, the wide-ranging Mexican reaction to the United States invasion was a result of the acute political crisis that Mexico's central government was experiencing at the time. In line with the regionalism that characterized late colonial times, negotiations to share power between the central and provincial governments was a tense affair and secessionist movements in various provinces posed more than a mere threat.[9]

The incapacity of Mexico's army to effectively defend the national territory has been the subject of great debate since the time of the war. Today however, a consensus has emerged that, on the one hand, despite its numeric superiority, the Mexican army's armament and training were no match for the well-equipped and disciplined American counterpart. On the other hand, Mexico's severe internal divisions proved decisive in hindering the organization of the defense against the invaders.

The 150th anniversary of the Mexican American war in 1997, as well as the increasingly complex relationship between the United States and Mexico, revived interest in the war. The Mexican Spy Company, however, has attracted minimal attention from historians to date. The fact that the group was largely composed of former bandits has contributed to perpetuate its nefarious fame and firmly fix the notion that their mercenary work was well in line with their

[8] See George Winston Smith and Charles Judah, comps., *Chronicles of the Gringos: The U.S. Army in the Mexican War, 1846—1848—accounts of eyewitnesses & combatants* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1968.)

[9] Texas and Yucatán were the most serious secessionist possibilities, but also Sonora, Zacatecas, and Guadalajara.

criminal nature. This has had an important function in the historiography, especially on the Mexican side. Unaffected by the cycles of revisionism that have modified our understanding of various aspects of the war, the Spy Company continues to be the target of some of the frustration still attached to Mexico's defeat. Indeed, the sour memory of a war in which Mexico lost half of its territory has conventionally been soothed by various myths. One of the most powerful has been the myth of the popular defense of Mexico City only recently challenged and reinterpreted.[10] The image of a patriotic and heroic Mexican *pueblo* fighting with sticks and stones against a foreign army which was striking the final blow to the heart of the patria continues to have an important role in preserving a nationalistic memory of the war.[11] (See fig. 1) Forged during the liberal takeover of Mexican politics in the second half of the nineteenth century, the nationalistic view of the war became instrumental in the creation of a sense of nationhood. According to this view the culprits of Mexico's defeat were ambitious and unethical politicians, as well as the conservative corporations par excellence, the army and the Catholic Church, while the authentic sense of patriotic honor resided in Mexico's true soul, its *pueblo* (people.) Not surprisingly, instances of Mexican collaboration with the U.S. such as the case of Domínguez and company had no place in the official recollection of the war other than as the "bad guys."

Today, however, the findings regarding the importance of internal social divisions in connection with the outcome of the war invite a reexamination of the case of the Mexican Spy Company. The committed participation of Manuel Domínguez and his comrades as allies of the U.S. deserves a better explanation than the traditional characterization of their actions as mercenary and greedy. This explanation requires a new interpretation of the individuals and

[10] Granados, *Sueñan las piedras.*
[11] See for example the recent historical novel by Ignacio Solares, *La invasión* (Mexico: Alfaguara, 2005.)

facts involved in this story using both the scholarship on banditry and on popular politics as framework, two fields of study that have remained surprisingly disconnected despite the fact that the study of popular violence concerns both of them. While banditry scholars continue to debate whether brigandage and other forms of plebeian outlawry could be a form of political action, those who study popular politics often overlook popular mobilizations not tied to major political movements and figures. As a result, we continue to misunderstand phenomena that do not fit neatly into either area of study. We fail to notice case studies that can enhance our knowledge of how marginal groups and outcasts relate to power structures and to society. The contra-guerrilla poblana of Manuel Domínguez is a case in point. If we examine it exclusively through a banditry lens we are most likely to conclude that it was a case of opportunistic outlawry. Doing so, however, ignores evidence that there was more than economic incentive in their engagement in the war. Significantly, an interpretation of this evidence outside of the banditry framework necessarily steps into the realm of politics.

After the publication of Eric Hobsbawm's pioneering study *Primitive Rebels*, scholarship on banditry has centered on the split between what he called "social banditry" and the alternative model of individualistic banditry proposed by Anton Blok. According to Hobsbawm, the "social" aspect of banditry resided in that it was tolerated and even supported by bandits' social peers because its goal was collective relief.[12] Blok challenged this assertion pointing out the existence of crucial ties between bandits and elites and that most bandits ascend socially as individuals which severely undermines the possibility of class solidarity and precludes organized class struggle.[13] Because studies of banditry in Latin America have found little evidence of

[12] Eric J. Hobsbawm, *Primitive Rebels. Studies in Archaic Forms of Social Movement in the 19th and 20th Centuries* (Manchester University Press, 1959.)
[13] Anton Blok, 'The Peasant and the Brigand: Social Banditry Reconsidered', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 14, no. 4 (1972): 492-503.

social banditry, this scholarship has developed under the influence of Blok's argument. Latin American scholars' criticism of Hobsbawm's thesis has centered on his insistence on the importance of the connection between bandits and their peasant communities. Instead, studies of Latin American banditry find the ties between bandits and the wealthy and powerful more revealing of the nature of banditry. In truth, as has been pointed out by Gilbert Joseph in his synthesis of the problem, not only does Hobsbawm recognize the existence of links between brigands and elites but he also calls attention to the fact that by virtue of these ties, the bandit is always in an ambiguous social and political position: " 'one of us' who is constantly in the process of becoming associated with 'them'."[14]

In his study of nineteenth century Mexican banditry, Paul Vanderwood asserts that bandits' interests often did not constitute a social cause. He argues that self-interest, particularly immediate economic gain, was the chief motive of Mexican bandits. A testament to their opportunism, Vanderwood asserts, is that the loyalties of Mexican bandits tended to be on the side that promised the most profit.[15] Apparently, what lies at the core of the divide 'social / individualistic' banditry is whether we can attribute to it a *cause* other than mere material gain. While Hobsbawm termed social banditry a "pre-political" movement mainly because it did not intend to subvert social order, but rather to "right individual wrongs" and restore "traditional" power relations such as the paternalistic relationship between monarchs and peasants, the key to social banditry is that it had a cause larger than the enrichment of one individual or group of individuals. In contrast, historians who study banditry in Latin America have found that banditry

[14] Gilbert M. Joseph, "On the Trail of Latin American Bandits: A Reexamination of Peasant Resistance," in *Latin American Research Review*, 3, vol. 25, (1990): 7-53, 13.
[15] Paul J. Vanderwood, *Disorder and Progress. Bandits, Police, and Mexican Development*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1981); and Vanderwood, P. J., 'Nineteenth-Century Mexico's Profiteering Bandits', in *Bandidos. The Varieties of Latin American Banditry*, ed. Richard Slatta (New York: Greenwood Press, 1987), 11-31.

can be and has been political in the region. However, scholars either fall into characterizing bandits' political engagement as a pretense, a justification for their use of violence, or limit "political banditry" to outlawry in strict connection to party politics.[16]

There is a consensus in the literature that the early nineteenth century was a period of unprecedented popular political participation. The majority of the studies that have contributed to this finding, however, focus on peasant protest/resistance. We know little about popular political mobilization in urban milieus. Even more problematic, the literature seems to recognize as political only mobilizations manipulated from above, that is, directed by a politician or political party.[17] Logically, these studies mostly deal with popular engagement in standard political phenomena such as riots, rebellion, political campaigns, electoral mobilizations and the like.

Thus, studies of banditry and of popular politics continue to advance in parallel lanes resulting in the failure to make better inroads regarding a question posed, in one way or another, by various historians: what role should we attribute to banditry, a permanent feature of life in nineteenth century Latin America?[18] The conceptual gap that originates from keeping banditry

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[16] Christon I. Archer, 'Banditry and Revolution in New Spain, 1790—1821', in *Bibliotheca Americana*, 1, no. 2 (1982): 59-89; Richard Slatta, "Bandits and Rural History: A Comment on Joseph," *Latin American Research Review* 26, no. 1 (1991): 154-148; and Carlos Sánchez and Donny Meertens. *Bandits, Peasants, and Politics: The Case of 'La Violencia' in Colombia,* translated by Alan Hynds (Austin: University of Texas Press and Institute for Latin American Studies, 2001).

[17] See for example Torcuato Di Tella, *National Popular Politics in Early Independent Mexico, 1820—1847* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1996); Silvia Arrom, "Popular Politics in Mexico City: The Parian Riot, 1828," *The Hispanic American Historical Review* 68, no. 2 (1988): 245-268; and Luis Fernando Granados, *Sueñan las piedras. Alzamiento ocurrido en la ciudad de México, 14, 15 y 16 de septiembre de 1847* (Mexico: Era-Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes-Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, 2003).

[18] Friedrich Katz, quoted in Gil Joseph, "On the trail…,"; Alan Knight, *The Mexican Revolution*, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986); William Taylor, "Banditry and Insurrection: Rural Unrest in Central Jalisco." In *Riot, Rebellion and Revolution: Rural Social Conflict in Mexico*, ed. Friedrich Katz, 205-246 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988); "Patterns of Rural Rebellion in Latin America: Mexico in Comparative Perspective." In *Riot, Rebellion and Revolution: Rural Social Conflict in Mexico*, ed. Friedrich Katz, 21-62 (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1988); Will Fowler, "Civil Conflict in Independent Mexico, 1821—1857: An Overview." In *Rumors of Wars:*

and popular politics as separate phenomena, however, is bridged by Charles Tilly's theory of collective violence, which he defines as a social interaction that involves at least two persons, immediately inflicts physical damage on people and objects and results from some degree of coordination among the perpetrators.[19] According to his definition, so long as it involves public claim-making that affects the interests of others, collective violence counts as contentious politics. Tilly defines claims as "commands, demands, requests, petitions, invitations, applications, and supplications . . . [ranging] from humble expressions of support for one part or another to revolutionary seizures of power."[20] The political character of collective violence stems from the fact that "the relations of participants to governments are always at stake."[21] Importantly, Tilly advises against spending too much time trying to elucidate and emit an opinion (which commonly comes down to a moral judgment) regarding the motives of the participants in collective violence. In doing so, his theory overcomes a major obstacle that has hindered the conceptualization of banditry as political and has perpetuated the debate concerning the split between "social" versus "individualistic" banditry. Tilly shows that different motives "neither define nor explain differences among types of collective violence."[22] In this sense greed, as he suggests, does not result in any more vicious or any less legitimate violence than anger or frustration. Thus, Tilly's theory on collective violence lays the groundwork that makes possible an analysis of phenomena like the Mexican Spy Company, which has defied a straightforward categorization.

Civil Conflict in Nineteenth-Century Latin America, ed. Rebecca Earle, 49-86 (London: Institute of Latin American Studies, 2000.)

[19] Tilly, *The Politics of Collective Violence*, 3.

[20] Charles Tilly, "Conclusion: Contention and the Urban Poor in Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century Latin America." In *Riots in the Cities: Popular Politics and the Urban Poor in Latin America, 1765—1910*, ed. Silvia Arrom and Servando Ortoll, 225-242 (Wilmington, Delaware: Scholarly Resources, 1996), 228.

[21] Ibid., 26.

[22] Ibid., 16.

The examination of the Mexican Spy Company under a new light contributes to the study of the development of nation-making in Mexico. Whether we consider the path-breaking study of Silvia Arrom on popular politics in early nineteenth century Mexico City, the influential works of Florencia Mallon on Mexican and Peruvian peasants' claim to the nation, or the more recent study of Luis Fernando Granados on the popular revolt on the eve of the U.S. occupation of Mexico City, studies of popular political action have established the notion that it featured an important element of xenophobia, proto-nationalism or popular patriotism. This is a fundamental ingredient in the main contribution of the above mentioned scholarship to the study of the development of nationalism as part of the process of state formation, namely, that the nation and the state are constructed "from below." But the contra-guerrilla offers an important counterpoint. The participation of Domínguez and company as collaborators of the United States in the war attests to the existence of anti-nationalistic forces among non-elite sectors of the population. It is clear that the members of the group did not conceive of Mexico as their *patria*, and consequently they had no loyalty toward it. Moreover, the case at hand highlights the importance of regionalism in hindering a sense of nationhood in an untraditional way. It suggests that national disloyalty was not exclusive to peripheral regions (e.g. Texas which seceded or Yucatán which threatened to secede from Mexico) that had remote and sporadic contact with central government. The city of Puebla, cradle of the group that was arguably the boldest war collaborationist, was part of the political, economic and cultural core of Mexico since colonial times.

Overview

In past examinations of the case of the Mexican Spy Company, attention has focused on the economic opportunism of its participants. While the present study acknowledges that material gain was an important incentive for Manuel Domínguez and its comrades to become contra-guerrilleros, it argues that the Mexican Spy Company can be regarded as an instance of popular political action. The evidence about its origins, use of violence and pursuits makes this case comparable with other instances of post-Independent popular political mobilizations that defy a categorical distinction between banditry and popular political violence. To do this, the analysis of this study moves from general settings that propitiated the formation of the Mexican Spy Company to the examination of specific elements such as the actions of the contra-guerrilleros, and their personal stories. Thus, the study begins by looking at the socio-economic and political context of the province of Puebla from late colonial times to post-independence and ends with a detailed analysis of the socio-judicial background of three contra-guerrilleros.

Chapter one offers a historical overview of the province of Puebla, briefly describes its participation in the wars of Independence and delves into the social and political changes of the late 1820s and 1830s that reflected a climate of social unrest. The chapter also underscores the often conflictive relation between Mexico City and the city of Puebla. Historically, the latter strove to keep a healthy distance from the capital when it came to government. Like other local governments, Puebla's resented that the central government in Mexico City demanded so much of the local resources. The level of national disintegration and competition between national and local interests, in particular the long history of rivalry between Mexico City and Puebla, may have contributed to Domínguez's alliance with the U.S army. In the 1840s, most Mexicans were reluctant to embrace a centralized notion of nationhood. Chapter one ends with a discussion of

banditry in Mexico and draws the conclusion that the incorporation of large bands of brigands to the insurgency led to the conflation between political violence and outlawry to the extent that it became rather difficult to neatly distinguish between bandits and rebels.

Chapter two deals with the U.S. occupation of the city of Puebla. It revises the dominant interpretation of Puebla's role in the war, that it was the heavy financial burden that the war posed for Puebla's citizens and the abandonment in which the federal government left the city what forced the Ayuntamiento to arrange a peaceful occupation.[23] Instead of focusing solely on political events in 1846 and 1847 to explain Puebla's decision not to resist the U.S. occupation, the chapter brings to the fore both the long-term conflicts between the federal government and Puebla's government, as well as Puebla's internal social and political relationships as reflected in the discourse about public order. The chapter suggests that suspicion of the central authority, the desire to protect interests of economic and political local elites, and fear of sparking social conflict were decisive in Puebla's voluntary surrender to the U.S. army. The evidence presented in the chapter indicates that on the eve of and during the U.S. occupation, popular sectors in the city of Puebla were restless. Some resented the authorities' decision to surrender to the U.S. army and were determined to show their anger. Others like Domínguez and his comrades, as examined in detail in Chapter three, regarded the U.S. occupation as an opportunity to satisfy their ambition for a share of power, revenge, and material gain.

On the basis of new information gathered in Mexican as well as U.S. archives, Chapter three examines the undertakings of the contra-guerrilla from its formation in June 1847 through its dissolution in July of 1848. In so doing, it significantly expands the current knowledge of the Mexican Spy Company and shows that Domínguez and his men, beyond being mercenaries,

[23] Alicia Tecuanhuey, "Puebla durante la invasión norteamericana," in *México al tiempo de su guerra con Estados Unidos (1846—1848)*, coord. Josefina Zoraida Vázquez (Mexico: Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores-El Colegio de México-Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1997), 398-399.

actively sought to challenge and scorn Mexican authority, and they did it with gusto. Drawing on Charles Tilly's theory of collective violence as a form of contentious politics, the chapter makes the point that the Mexican Spy Company shared some elements of the "contentious repertoire" of other popular political mobilizations of the 19th century both rural and urban.

Lastly, Chapter four deals with the individual stories of three contra-guerrilleros: Manuel Domínguez, Roque Miranda and Nicanor Martínez. It focuses on the social and judicial background of these men and underlines the kinds of conflicts that made them outlaws and, in due course, contributed to their participation in the Mexican Spy Company. The chapter evaluates the conceptual split between the "social bandit" and the "profit-driven brigand" and finds that the contra-guerrilleros do not fit either model neatly. Domínguez and company were no Mexican Robin Hoods; however, their rise as a consequence of political disenfranchisement, rigid social hierarchies, corruption, and finally, the crisis of authority brought about by the war with the U.S. make it difficult to clearly distinguish between "socially motivated" and "profit-driven" banditry.

On Sources

Although the literature on the Mexican American war is of significant volume, few authors make use of sources from both sides of the border. This study has attempted to achieve a more balanced use or sources.

The main source of information on the social context of Puebla and the role of its authorities during the war was the Archivo General del Ayuntamiento de Puebla, especially its collection of laws and decrees of the municipal governing council. Seeking to study the problem of the Spy Company from various angles, I have gathered information from official war records,

judicial records, and non-governmental sources such as chronicles of the war, personal memoirs, war's songs, and Mexican as well as United States newspapers. The search for the personal stories of Manuel Domínguez and his comrades took me to various locations: the judicial archive of Puebla (Archivo Histórico Judicial), where I gathered information about the bandit well before his involvement in the Spy Company; the Archivo General de la Nación, where I traced the file of Roque Miranda; the Hemeroteca Nacional where I followed the controversy about his case in Mexican newspapers; Yale University, which has a judicial collection on Puebla; and, finally, the archives of the Suprema Corte de Justicia.

In documenting the formation and operations of the Mexican Spy Company various archives were instrumental. In Mexico, I examined the military archive (Archivo de la Secretaria de la Defensa Nacional), the historical judicial archive of Puebla, and the historical archive of Mexico City (Archivo Histórico del Distrito Federal.) In the United States, the military papers of the Mexican American war in the National Archives proved useful to document the story of the Mexican Spy Company and how U.S. military officials felt about it.

Chapter 1: The Province and City of Puebla (1810—1847)

The city of Puebla was founded in 1531 and planned from the very beginning as a Spanish *urbe* that would be a residence for Spaniards willing to work the land "the way it was done in Spain."[1] Puebla thus differed from the origins of New Spain's other early urban colonial settlements with a long pre-Hispanic indigenous past. It was Hernando Saavedra, Hernán Cortés' cousin, who was entrusted with the mission of finding a suitable place for the establishment of this Spanish city. Saavedra chose a temperate region amongst several antagonistic indigenous *señoríos* (chiefdoms).[2] The valley was a natural choice given the abundance of resources and the fertile lands that surrounded it, but also because of its ideal position as a transit point between the two most important centers in early colonial life: Mexico City, the seat of New Spain's government, and the port of Veracruz on the Gulf of Mexico, which at the time was the sole entry and departure point for communications and commerce with Spain.

The city of Puebla, also known as the City of the Angels, became the capital of the province of the same name.[3] The province stretched from the Gulf of Mexico to the Pacific Ocean including the area of today's Puebla and Tlaxcala, a large portion of Veracruz and a part of Guerrero, (see maps 3.1 and 3.2) all of which were areas with vast resources and dense indigenous populations. Thus, the province of Puebla was not only blessed with a geography that

[1] The Franciscan missionary Fray Toribio de Benavente, Motolinía, writes in his chronicle on the foundation of Puebla that the city should be residence of Spaniards who wanted to cultivate the land on their own, without expecting a *repartimiento de indios* (indigenous labor allotment) but rather employing themselves in the creation of their *haciendas*. See Motolinia, *Historia de los indios de la Nueva España* (Mexico City: Porrúa, 1973), 187.

[2] Leonardo Lomelí Vanegas, *Breve historia de Puebla* (Mexico City: El Colegio de México / Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2001), 69.

[3] According to a legend, the site where Puebla should be founded was revealed to Tlaxcala's bishop in a dream in which the archangels descended over a magnificent valley and began the planning of the new city.

allowed for varied agricultural production, but also with an available labor force from the outset. Communications and transportation were better in Puebla than in most other parts of New Spain because the colonial province comprised various towns that had been important commercial or religious destinations since pre-Hispanic times. Existing roads were utilized and expanded so that goods could be easily distributed to areas adjacent to the city of Puebla, such as Tlaxcala, Cholula, Huejotzingo, Tepeaca and Atlixco.

The territories that surrounded the city of Puebla were, demographically, the densest regions within the province. Although the city started as a magnet for Spaniards, over time--once the indigenous population began to grow towards the mid-seventeenth century after a precipitous decline following the Europeans' arrival--an intense process of *mestizaje* or miscegenation of Spaniards and Indians took place. The growth of the *castas* (mixed raced population) contributed to Puebla's racial diversity. Largely similar to the demographic trends in other cities of the viceroyalty such as Mexico City or Veracruz, by the end of the colonial period, about half of the population of Puebla was composed of *mestizos* and other mixed-race individuals, close to a third of the population was Spanish (whether peninsular or creole) and about a fifth of the population was Indian.[4]

As in the rest of New Spain, the urban elite of Puebla was composed of wealthy landholding Spanish families who dominated the city's political and economic life. Throughout the colonial period, the elite controlled the civil government by means of permanently holding posts within the *Ayuntamiento* (the city's governing council) and also occupied the most important positions within ecclesiastical institutions. What distinguished Puebla's oligarchy

[4] Reinhard Liehr, "La oligarquía terrateniente de la ciudad de Puebla a finales de la época colonial, 1786—1810," *in Las dimensiones sociales del espacio en la historia de Puebla (XVII-XIX)*, ed. Francisco Javier Cervantes Bello (Puebla: Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla-Dirección General de Fomento Editorial, 2001), 117.

from the rest of the population was its privileged connection to the market. The elite's *haciendas* and *ranchos* produced a great deal of agricultural products and they also invested in the transformation of various products into more expensive goods (for example, in wheat mills) and the retailing of such goods. Large-scale import and export operations, as well as the sale of imported goods were also dominated by Puebla's oligarchy.[5]

Far from being a polarized society composed merely of a wealthy minority and an impoverished mass, the city of Puebla had a multi-class society with a sizable middle sector engaged in artisanal manufactures, retailing of native products and trades such as ironworks, passementerie works and glass and pottery making. However, little is known about the middle sectors' ethnic composition, occupational characteristics and economic power. What is known is that this group was composed of socioeconomically modest Spaniards, creoles, *mestizos* and what remained of the pre-colonial indigenous nobility employed in a variety of activities including the bureaucracy, clerical jobs, management of artisanal production and rural estates, baking and shop-keeping.[6] It was not uncommon for heads of households to own a business (such as butcher's shops, bakeries and clothing stores), but only rarely did they own more than one, and for the most part depended on the elite for credit.[7] What defined the middle sector was not misery, but economic insecurity, especially at the end of the colonial period and during the first half of the nineteenth century.[8]

The lower class was composed in large part of *castas* and indigenous peoples. They were employed in low-skilled labor, as employees in small shops, or self-employed as food vendors or

[5] Reinhard, Liehr, "La oligarquía terrateniente de la ciudad de Puebla," 113 and 120.
[6] Guy Thomson, *Puebla de los Ángeles. Industry and Society in a Mexican City, 1700—1850*, Dellplain Latin American Studies, no. 25 (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1989), 82-87.
[7] Guy Thomson, *Puebla de los Ángeles*, 82-87.
[8] Torcuato Di Tella, "The Dangerous Classes in Early Nineteenth Century Mexico," *Journal of Latin American Studies* 5, no. 1 (1973): 104.

street merchants of locally produced goods. Many were employed as house servants or as assistants in artisanal production. The lowest group on the social scale were the famous *léperos* (rough and extremely poor people), a group that included the disabled who had to rely on begging and on convents' charity to survive, as well as prostitutes, vagrants and petty thieves.

The agricultural fertility of the province and its privileged position as an intermediary along New Spain's most important commercial corridor, made it possible for the city of Puebla to thrive soon after its foundation. The region became a leading producer of grain and its manufactures, especially textiles, soap, leather works, earthenware and iron works reached distant markets within New Spain. In addition, a significant number of merchants who bought imported goods for local consumption, as well as redistribution to other territories of the colony were concentrated in the city of Puebla. Agriculture, commerce and manufactured goods contributed to Puebla's prosperity and made the City of the Angels an attractive destination not only for new immigrants from Spain, but also from the provinces. By the end of the sixteenth century, Puebla was the second city of New Spain in size and wealth. Puebla's splendor reached its peak in the mid seventeenth century when the diocese's bishop, the legendary Juan de Palafox y Mendoza, was recognized as one of the most powerful men in New Spain. The magnificence of governmental and religious buildings, the orderly atmosphere prevailing in its streets and the luxury of its residences reflected Puebla's prosperity.[9]

According to the accounts of many visitors, Puebla's natural and man-made riches rivaled those of Mexico City. At one point Puebla was considered a clear candidate to become the capital of the viceroyalty. It was better organized than Mexico City and enjoyed better sanitary conditions since it did not suffer constant flooding. Travelers described the beauty of

[9] See Ignacio Ibarra Mazari, comp. *Crónicas de Puebla de los Ángeles. Según testimonios de algunos viajeros que la visitaron entre los años 1540-1960* (Puebla: Gobierno del Estado de Puebla, 1992.)

Puebla's buildings and the abundance of products in its markets and luxury stores. What most impressed visitors, however, was the opulence of the Catholic Church. "From the great number of convents so well disposed and rich," noted one traveler, "the reader can easily infer the greatness, magnificence and wealth of the city."[10] Another visitor described the Cathedral as having "many earnings and jewels of great value" and he noted a silver chandelier and the case guarding the *Santísimo*, which was worth 200,000 pesos.[11]

Puebla's economy began to slow down in the eighteenth century, partly because of new economic policies imposed by the Bourbons. The province's textiles lost a very important market when the Spanish crown banned commerce with Peru and sought to reinforce mercantilism. The situation worsened as other cities in New Spain started to rival Puebla as a textile producer. Puebla also lost its preeminence as a grain and flour producer with the growth of other regions such as the Bajío which, unlike Puebla, was directly linked to the expanding mining economy of the north.[12] Some historians have also attributed the economic decline of Puebla to a commercial innovation during Bourbon times, namely, the establishment of the "*feria de Jalapa*" (Jalapa's commercial fair) in the city of Jalapa, Veracruz, in 1722. Thereafter, all the merchandise that arrived in the fleets from Spain was brought to Jalapa where commercial transactions were to take place. It has been argued that the fair significantly curtailed the direct participation of *poblano* merchants in foreign trade, thereby displacing Puebla's role as a

[10] Fragment from the chronicle by Giovanni Francesco Gamelli Careri in Ignacio Ibarra Mazari, comp., *Crónica de la Puebla de los Ángeles según testimonios de algunos viajeros que la visitaron entre los años 1540 a 1960* (Puebla: Gobierno del Estado de Puebla, 1992), 45-46.
[11] Fragment from the chronicle by Pedro Alonso O'Crouley, in Ibarra Mazari, *Crónica de la Puebla de los Ángeles*, 51.
[12] Juan Carlos Garaviglia and Juan Carlos Grosso, "La región de Puebla-Tlaxcala y la economía novohispana, 1680—1810," in *Puebla de la colonia a la revolución. Estudios de historia regional* (Puebla: Centro de Investigaciones Históricas y Sociales-Instituto de Ciencias de la Universidad Autónoma de Puebla, 1987), 124.

commercial hub for imported goods.[13] Recent research, however, indicates that the establishment of the commercial fair at Jalapa was a very unsuccessful enterprise and was never repeated after 1722.[14] If that was the case, it is clear that the fair could not have played a major role in diminishing the preeminence of Puebla's merchants and of the city itself.

At any rate, Puebla's severely reduced economic capacity from the mid-eighteenth century on contributed to both the sustained decline of the population and increased migration to Mexico City and other parts of New Spain up until the beginning of the nineteenth century. The wars of independence accentuated Puebla's demographic decline, especially during 1812 and 1813 when the long-lasting war combined with a cholera epidemic to take the lives of thousands.[15]

Puebla and the Wars of Independence

The French invasion of Spain in 1808 precipitated a political crisis in New Spain, as well as challenged Puebla's allegiance to the Spanish monarch. Puebla's *intendente* (provincial governor) Manuel de Flon and the city's Ayuntamiento rejected an autonomist coup instigated by the Chamber of Commerce and the *Audiencia* (judicial court) in Mexico City which stripped the Ayuntamiento of political power, imprisoned the legitimate viceroy and appointed a new viceroy. Puebla refused to recognize the authority of the usurpers and instead continued to pledge its loyalty to Fernando VII of Spain. By 1810, the political crisis was no longer restricted

[13] Manuel Carrera Stampa, "Las ferias novohispanas," in *Las ferias comerciales de Nueva España*, ed. José Joaquín Real Díaz (Mexico: Instituto Mexicano de Comercio Exterior, 1975) and Garaviglia and Grosso, "La región de Puebla-Tlaxcala," 115.
[14] Guillermina del Valle Pavón, "La lucha por el control de los precios entre los consulados de México y Andalucía," 2006; article online http://revistas.ucm.es/ghi/11328312/articulos/RCHA0606110041A.PDF, (accessed March 10, 2010.)
[15] See the studies by Miguel Ángel Cuenya; Juan Carlos Garaviglia and Juan Carlos Grosso; and Carlos Contreras Cruz in *Puebla de la colonia a la revolución. Estudios de historia regional* (Puebla: Centro de Investigaciones Históricas y Sociales-Instituto de Ciencias de la Universidad Autónoma de Puebla, 1987.)

to the political and economic elites of New Spain, but contributed to a popular uprising led by Father Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla. When the rebels attempted to attack Mexico City, Puebla's provincial governor, Manuel de Flon, and his forces, joined the royalist army to repel the insurgents.

Puebla's response to the independence movement was markedly different in the city than in the rural areas. While the city remained a beacon of pro-monarchical and pro-colonial sentiments until 1820, the insurgency gained momentum from 1811 on in rural areas throughout the province. The first region to become engaged in the insurgency was the north of the province, the region close to the Bajío, where Hidalgo's movement had begun. Soon two other territories, the region surrounding Izúcar and the valley of Tehuacán, to the southeast of Puebla became major rebel strongholds within Puebla. During the years 1812 and 1813 the city of Puebla lived in permanent fear of an insurgent attack, but successfully repelled rebel advances.

Contrary to what the loyalists expected, the insurgent movement reorganized and gained momentum after the death of Hidalgo. Its principal leaders were Ignacio López Rayón in the north and José María Morelos in the south. Civil and ecclesiastical authorities in Puebla were persuaded that an attack by the insurgent troops of Morelos was imminent in 1813. Consequently, they prepared for the defense of the city and reluctantly accepted the Cadiz' constitution of 1812, hoping that it would discourage the insurgents from invading the city. Morelos did not attempt to take the city of Puebla. He directed his efforts to the south and west of the country, as well as to establishing a Congress in the town of Chilpancingo that would draft the constitution of the new independent country he imagined. During 1812 and 1813, the insurgents successfully combated the loyalist forces. However, after the first military defeat of Morelos in Valladolid (today's state of Michoacán) on December 1813, the insurgency began to

unravel because of emerging rivalries among the leaders of the movement. Besides internal divisions among the insurgents, the return of King Fernando VII to the throne of Spain in 1813 contributed significantly to the vulnerability of the movement. The monarchy's comeback meant an attempted return to absolutism and thus an ideological blow to the insurgency. In addition, King Fernando sent troops to fight the fast spreading rebellion. The insurgent Congress established in Chilpancingo had to leave town when in face of the advance of the loyalist forces; by then it was too late for the newly decreed constitution in 1814 to infuse new strength in the movement. The capture of Morelos soon after further threatened the stability of the insurgency. Once the members of Congress arrived in Tehuacán, Puebla, where according to Morelos the congress was to be established, Manuel Mier y Terán, the insurgent leader in Tehuacán, refused to recognize the assembly and arranged its dissolution. Mier y Terán tried to reorganize the insurgency, but other leaders in the province of Puebla would not recognize his authority. By 1816, the insurgency had transformed into a guerrilla war that posed no major threat to the still strong royalist army. Puebla's provincial governor Ciriaco del Llano confidently informed the Viceroy Juan Ruíz de Apodaca in early 1816 that the province was almost entirely pacified.[16] The city of Puebla could congratulate itself; the independence movement had been virtually eradicated and monarchical authority remained intact due in part to the efforts of Puebla's royalist sympathizers.

The rise of a liberal movement in Spain in 1820, which favored King Fernando VII to accept a constitution, was a turn of events that many royalists in the colony had not anticipated and it brought about some conflict between local and provincial interests. Puebla's urban elites were wary of liberalism inasmuch as it threatened traditional privileges, but it was also appealing because the new constitution allowed for greater local autonomy. Adopted in New Spain in May

[16] Lomelí, *Breve historia de Puebla*, 148.

1820, the constitution mandated the election of provincial deputations and the Ayuntamiento of Puebla saw in this an opportunity to be recognized as a separate province for the purpose of representation. Up to this time, Puebla had been counted within the provincial deputation of the *intendencia* (province) of Mexico. Overcoming the opposition of Puebla's intendente, at last Puebla was granted its own provincial deputation and thus acquired administrative autonomy. The intendente de Llano soundly rejected another of the Ayuntamiento's petitions that involved even greater autonomy and decentralization, namely, the formation of a commercial chamber. The formation of such an institution was of primary importance to *poblanos* (citizens of Puebla) as it would grant them their long desired independence from the commercial chambers of both Veracruz and Mexico City. With the establishment of a commercial chamber in Puebla, its merchants would no longer be required to pay the *derecho de avería*, a special commercial tax, to the chambers of Veracruz or Mexico. Instead, Puebla's chamber could begin collecting this tax to invest in road construction and to stimulate its own commercial enterprises. In addition to its role as promoter of the province's trade and economy, the functions of the chamber included the administration of justice regarding commercial matters.[17] Despite the fact that Puebla's urban elites had initially embraced constitutionalism as means to deter the advance of insurgency, conflicting interests with Puebla's intendente made the elites better disposed to consider the benefits of separating from the metropolis. In fact, Puebla's civil and ecclesiastical elites continued to perceive Spanish liberalism as a threat to their privileges.

Among those most concerned about the triumph of the liberals in Spain and the possible repercussions in New Spain was Puebla's bishop Joaquín Antonio Pérez. Pérez was a creole

[17] Oscar Cruz Barney, *El consulado de comercio de Puebla. Régimen jurídico, historia y documentos, 1821—1824* (Mexico: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México-Instituto de Investigaciones Jurídicas, 2006), 79-80, article online, http://www.bibliojuridica.org/libros/libro.htm?l=2245, (accessed April 12, 2010.)

born to a wealthy family and he had an active career within the hierarchy of Puebla. In 1814, Pérez was appointed delegate to the *Cortes* (Legislative Assembly) in Cadiz where he played a major role advocating absolutism and the dissolution of the Cortes, thereby opposing the liberals' program at the time. Pérez's work in favor of the crown was soon rewarded. In 1815, he became Puebla's bishop. Thus, when in 1820 rumors spread of liberal plans to judge the detractors of the constitution and the Cortes, Bishop Pérez had good reason to worry. When the order for his detention arrived in New Spain, he had no option but to ask for protection of his congregation and the viceroy from persecution by Spanish liberals.[18] Given the state of affairs in Spain, Bishop Pérez was more attracted to the idea of Mexican independence when it resurfaced with the plan of Agustín de Iturbide and his supporters in 1821.

In February 1821, Iturbide announced his plan (*Plan de Iguala*) which offered three guarantees: separation from Spain, union and equality between peninsulars and creoles, and Catholicism as the only accepted religion. Elites throughout the Mexican territory quickly endorsed Iturbide's plan because of its conservatism and Puebla was no exception. It was clear that Iturbide's movement was in no way similar to the insurgency led by Hidalgo and Morelos. Both the Ayuntamiento of the city of Puebla and its Bishop readily supported the Plan de Iguala, but Puebla's intendente Ciriaco del Llano did not. He refused to adhere to Iturbide's plan and resisted until political as well as military pressure from the *independentistas* made him capitulate and withdraw the remaining royalist forces from Puebla. Soon after the victory of Iturbide, Puebla's authorities obtained from him the confirmation of Puebla's right to its own provincial *diputación* (deputation or governing committee) and approval for the formation of the long desired commercial chamber.[19]

[18] Lomelí, *Breve historia de Puebla*, 151.
[19] Lomelí, *Breve historia de Puebla*, 154 and 157.

Despite the expectations and hopes it had raised, Iturbide's newly independent regime lasted only briefly. Growing difficulties between Emperor Iturbide, acting as a constitutional sovereign, and Congress led to Iturbide's decision to dissolve the congressional assembly in October 1822. It was a serious mistake. Even those who had supported Iturbide deemed the closure of Congress unacceptable. They considered Iturbide's absolutism a betrayal of the tide that had brought him to power. Soon, an *anti-iturbidista* movement was in full swing. In Veracruz, the province's military commander, Antonio López de Santa Anna, openly declared himself against the emperor. General Echávarri, a former Iturbide supporter, drafted a new political plan (the Plan of Casa Mata) demanding the immediate establishment of a new Congress with authority to determine the fate of the fallen emperor and to reorganize the country's political structure. Crucially, the plan of Casa Mata stipulated that until a response was received from the supreme government, provincial deputations would assume responsibility for the administration of the provinces. Not surprisingly provincial deputations throughout the country endorsed the plan as it gave them their much-desired autonomy.[20] Thus, in February 1823 Puebla's provincial deputation constituted itself in a provisional independent government with jurisdiction over Puebla's province.[21]

Extensive support for the plan of Casa Mata consolidated the anti-iturbidista movement and the emperor abdicated in March 1823. The plan summoned a Constitutional Congress, whose task was to draft a constitution for the country. Thus started the long debates about what would be the most suitable form of government for Mexico, whether a centralist or a federalist republic. Impatient with Congress for not resolving these constitutional issues by the year's end, Puebla's political elite declared an autonomous government with authority over the territories of

[20] Nettie Lee Benson, "The Plan of Casa Mata," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 25, no. 1 (1945): 50-51.
[21] Lomelí, *Breve Historia de Puebla*, 160.

the old intendencia. However, Congress sent two generals to force Puebla's authorities to back down. Finally, and to the satisfaction of the provinces, the *Acta Constitutiva* of 1824 established a popular representative federal republic, and Guadalupe Victoria became the first president of republican Mexico.

Puebla's Politics after Independence

Approved in October 1824 by the Mexican Congress, the federal constitution pleased the governments of the majority of Mexico's states, including Puebla's, which had always taken prided in zealously guarding local autonomy from the capital. But the next obstacle on the road to an orderly national government was just around the corner. The expulsion of Spaniards from Mexico turned into a thorny issue for President Guadalupe Victoria's government. Many federalists were persuaded that expelling Spaniards was the most effective way to undercut political opposition, and they desired to get them out as soon as possible. However, far from resolving the problem, the expulsion of Spanish citizens contributed greatly to exacerbating the political climate. It directly affected the tone of the presidential electoral campaign of 1828, which by all accounts was particularly contentious and polarized. Not surprisingly, Victoria's succession did not go smoothly. Victory seemed to belong to the moderate Manuel Gómez Pedraza. Yet sympathizers of the more radical Vicente Guerrero challenged the electoral results by taking their protest to the streets and eventually succeeded in snatching the presidency from the moderate candidate.[22] Guerrero's regime, however, was doomed almost from the beginning. The administration never managed to purge itself of its aura of illegitimacy, and its tax policies

[22] The famous riot of the Parián market in the center of Mexico City along with the attack to the National Palace were part of the violent acts of protest against the electoral victory of Manuel Gómez Pedraza. See Silvia Arrom, "Popular Politics in Mexico City: The Parian Riot, 1828," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 68, no. 2 (1988): 245-268.

and "populism" were disliked especially among the propertied classes. Largely due to the disturbances caused by the popular masses in Mexico City during the presidential succession of 1829, federalism became increasingly associated with out-of-control lower class' violence.[23] Nevertheless, propertied *poblanos* did not support rule by strong central authorities; as much as they feared democracy and republicanism, *poblanos* detested the alternative of subordination to the authorities in the capital of Mexico.

In 1829, when Anastasio Bustamante, the vice-president in Guerrero's regime, pronounced himself against the government, Puebla–on the initiative of its governor, Patricio Furlong—supported the besieged president and defended federalism by rejecting Bustamante's initiative. Even if Guerrero was deemed a bit too radical in his political ideas, Puebla's authorities considered that federalism was the only way to conserve a healthy distance from Mexico City, the high-maintenance capital of the country. However, Bustamante was able to seize the presidency and proceeded to muffle dissident voices by means of a cruel persecution led, in the case of Puebla, by Juan José Andrade, the new provincial governor appointed by Bustamante to replace Patricio Furlong.

The triumph of the conservatives in Puebla did not last long. As the Bustamante regime unleashed its iron fist against the opposition in Mexico City, in Puebla Governor Andrade initiated a veritable "reign of terror" against political opponents and against delinquency. Far from appeasing Puebla's elites, Andrade's draconian measures left them disgruntled while breeding considerable resentment among the lower classes. Other unpopular conservative policies included the raising of the voting age from 18 to 25, new property eligibility

[23] Pedro Santoni, *Mexicans at Arms: Puro Federalists and the Politics of War, 1845—1848* (Fort Worth: Texas Christian University Press, 1996), 17.

requirements for public office and higher taxes.[24] The discontent with Andrade's regime in Puebla, as well as the generalized concern about President Bustamante's authoritarianism sparked a new political mobilization. In 1832, *poblanos*, including former Governor Furlong joined forces with General Antonio López de Santa Anna's troops to combat Bustamante.[25] The rebel movement succeeded. By means of an agreement reached between Santa Anna, Manuel Gómez Pedraza and the defeated Bustamante (known as the *Convenio de Zavaleta*), the presidency was granted to Gómez Pedraza, whose electoral triumph had been challenged by Vicente Guerrero and his followers back in 1828. In Puebla, the victory over Bustamante and Andrade meant the immediate return of Patricio Furlong to the governorship of the state until his premature death during the cholera epidemic of 1833.[26]

The defeat of the Bustamante administration implied the reassertion of federalism. Although *poblanos* embraced it as the more desirable form of government for a short time, they soon had a powerful reason to change allegiance. In part due to his fame as one of the main leaders of the movement against the tyrannical regime of Bustamante, Santa Anna was elected president in 1833. His vice-president was Valentín Gómez Farías, a politician from the state of Jalisco who had held different posts in government and was a well-known liberal with radically minded collaborators. As a *puro* (radical federalist), Gómez Farías believed that Mexico's problems would not cease until the country shook off the vestiges of its colonial legacy. He

[24] Guy Thomson, *Puebla de los Ángeles*, 210.
[25] A subject of debate is whether Santa Anna orchestrated the *pronunciamiento* against Bustamante. While most classical studies agree on the subject, historian Jaime E. Rodríguez O. insists that other military men in the states played important roles in the movement, and that civilians organized in a secret group were instrumental to overthrowing A. Bustamante in 1832. Scholarship agrees entirely, however, that it was Santa Anna who ultimately became the main beneficiary of Bustamante's downfall given that he was elected president of Mexico in 1833. See, Jaime E. Rodríguez O., "Origins of the 1832 rebellion," in *Patterns of Contention in Mexican History,* ed., Jaime E. Rodríguez (Wilmington, Delaware: Scholarly Resources Inc. 1992.)
[26] Thomson, *Puebla de los Ángeles*, 77 and 210.

especially wished to do away with the preeminence of the Catholic Church and to embrace republican federalism, which entailed a wide political enfranchisement of groups previously relegated to the margins of national political decision-making. Gómez Farías considered that the best way to infuse capital into the exhausted national treasury was to expropriate Church property, an action which would also serve the purpose of limiting that institution's power. Gómez Farías was not the only politician who advocated limiting the power of the Church by appropriating part of its immense wealth.[27] It was obvious that the Church was the only institution with sufficient capital at the time. However, meddling with the Catholic Church was a daunting task and it is not surprising that the cautious and ambitious Santa Anna would try to avoid dealing with the issue. Thus, it was Gómez Farías who took the lead and proposed a series of reforms that directly affected the interests and property of the Catholic Church.

In Puebla, the state's legislature decreed on December 22, 1833 the occupation of Church property.[28] Francisco Pablo Vázquez, Bishop of Puebla, protested loudly, but he failed to intimidate the government, which reacted even more aggressively by giving the Church forty-eight hours to obey.[29] The government's ultimatum failed in the face of the rise of a conservative movement to oust Gómez Farías and defend the Church and the army's privileges.

Gomez Farías' attempted reformism had a long lasting impact on the future political positioning of Puebla. If Puebla's elite had never been particularly fond of the style and political

[27] Both groups of liberal politicians, *puros* and *moderados,* agreed on curtailing the power of the Church and the regular army. See, Santoni, *Mexicans at Arms,* 3; and Michael Costeloe, *The Central Republic in Mexico, 1835—1846*: *Hombres de bien in the Age of Santa Anna*, Cambridge Latin American Studies, no. 73 (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 34.
[28] In spite of the fact that the reforms of 1833 did not have a national effect, Puebla's legislature decided to comply with the government's orders. Marta Eugenia Ugarte, "La jerarquía católica y los gobiernos mexicanos, 1830—1840," in *Clérigos, políticos y política. Las relaciones iglesia estado en Puebla siglos XIX y XX*, coord. Alicia Tecuanhuey Sandoval (Puebla: Instituto de Ciencias Sociales y Humanidades-Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla, 2002), 77.
[29] Ugarte, "La jerarquía católica," 78.

convictions of the *puros*, Gómez Farías' attack on the Catholic Church deepened their dislike for radical liberalism. The attempt to curtail the power of the Church not only alienated propertied *poblanos,* but also offended the middle sectors and the poor of Puebla who defended the Church's position. In fact, the project of the federalists unintentionally caused the coming together of *poblanos* across socioeconomic strata against the reforms and particularly against Gómez Farías. After 1833, Puebla's elites would deny support to federalism or the liberals and, more importantly, would do anything to get Gómez Farías out of the picture. This had grave consequences for the war between Mexico and the United States; poblano hatred of Gómez Farías seriously hindered Puebla's effective collaboration in national defense.

A plan declared on June 8, 1833, in Huejotzingo, Puebla, halted the reformist program. In the plan, the "officers and chiefs of the army protecting religion and privileges," proclaimed themselves against federalism, which was—according to them—in conflict with "the customs, education and circumstances of the nation."[30] The plan protected Catholic Church property and privileges, granted the army retention of its privileges, and named Santa Anna the "supreme dictator" who would put an end to the nation's ills. Santa Anna swiftly joined the cry for "*Religión y Fueros*" ("Religion and Privileges,") and, because the *plan* was widely supported, became the head of a newly installed centralist republic.[31] By 1835 the federalist constitution had been replaced with conservative legislation known as the *Siete Leyes*, which, among other measures, restricted citizenship to literate individuals with an annual income of over a hundred pesos, and established the *Supremo Poder Conservador*, a kind of executive committee

[30] Plan de Huejotzingo, Puebla 8 June 1833, document online, http://www.biblioteca.tv/artman2/publish/1833_132/Plan_de_Huejotzingo_1578.shtml, (accessed October 3, 2009).
[31] Thomson, *Puebla de los Ángeles*, 212. However, there was significant liberal protest in the city of Puebla in connection to Santa Anna's dismantling of the federalist system. See Costeloe, *The Central Republic*, 37.

consisting of five leading politicians invested with the power to suppress Congress and the Supreme Court if they deemed it necessary.

The conservative movement was loudly supported in Puebla, where key economic and political actors agreed on the urgency of halting federalist radicalism. Aside from a determined rejection of anti-clericalism, *poblanos* united behind the protectionist turn favored by the new administration. Since the 1820s, *poblanos* had consistently petitioned for protectionist policies especially in regards to cotton, but all federalist administrations had turned a blind eye because of the significant income that cotton and other imports meant for the national treasury. Thus, although Puebla elites had traditionally feared and rejected centralism, they willingly accepted the new political agreement in exchange for economic support.[32]

Unfortunately for Santa Anna, his regime was marked by the loss of Texas, which had declared its independence from Mexico in 1835, and his defeat in the campaign that was supposed to curb the separatists. With Santa Anna gone into exile first and later into temporary retirement, Anastasio Bustamante seized the opportunity to return to power in 1837.

The relative success of his administration was mainly due to the able guidance of Bustamante's closest aide, Lucas Alamán. In line with a nationalist economic project he had started in the early 1830s during the first Bustamante administration, Alamán continued to design and implement policies to stimulate domestic industry. Alamán's most famous initiative was the

[32] Thomson considers that the "narrowness of the economic options open to poblanos" became the basis of a consensus about the benefits of protectionism that did not exist in other parts of Mexico. See, Thomson, *Puebla de los Ángeles*, 189-190. About the economic advantages of centralism for the provincial economies Robert A. Potash says: "The transition from a federal to a central form of government enabled the national legislature to make the exemptions [of duties for domestic products] nationwide in scope. In the past, to be sure, individual states had also waived the collection duties on domestic products, but it had been done on a discriminatory basis, to favor the artisans and raw-material producers located within their respective boundaries." See Robert A. Potash, *Mexican Government and Industrial Development in the Early Republic. The Banco de Avío* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1983), 126.

creation of a proto national bank in 1831 (*Banco Nacional de Avío*) to provide credit to domestic commercial and industrial enterprises. [33]

The city of Puebla benefited extensively from the second centralist administration. The single most important recipient of credit from the *Banco de Avío* was Puebla's entrepreneur Estevan de Antuñano.[34] He erected the first textile factory, the "*Constancia Mexicana*" in 1835 and continued to expand his business, inspiring other *poblanos* to invest in modern textile machinery. Between 1835 and 1841, Puebla entered a period of modest economic recovery and modernization. Textiles, especially cotton textiles, became one of the pillars of Puebla's growth and, according to available sources, the period was also one of relative calm in the city. By 1837, previous skepticism about the introduction of machinery was waned, in part thanks to the perseverance of Antuñano. Hundreds of men and women began to work in the new factories, and, in general, a new "wave of business optimism" filled the air.[35] A Mexican who visited the "Constancia Mexicana" in 1841 boasted, albeit prematurely, about the socioeconomic and political accomplishments of the textile industry:

> Puebla, that used to be divided in factions, where people were always willing to participate in rebellions and whose settlers are naturally belligerent and prone to engage in wars, today, offers to the visitor's gaze a view of a pacific population devoted to work, united by the same interests and opposed to anything that may alter in some manner the true happiness that it enjoys. It is to *Señor* Antuñano that all these benefits are due….[36]

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[33] The *Banco* got its capital by receiving "one-fifth of the revenue from import duties on crude cotton cloth […] until an investment fund of one million pesos could be accumulated." Hale, *Mexican Liberalism*, 268. According to Alamán's plan, after securing the initial capital, most cotton imports should be forbidden so that Mexican cotton products would have a guaranteed market.

[34] Antuñano received a total of 183,916 pesos in loans and machinery from the *Banco Nacional de Avío*. See Robert Potash, *Mexican Government*, 124.

[35] Thomson, *Puebla de los Ángeles*, 213.

[36] Anonymous, *Fábrica de hilados de algodón en Puebla, titulada: La Constancia Megicana, primera que hubo en la República, establecida por el Sr. D. Esteban Antuñano* (México: Imprenta de Vicente García Torres, [1842]), 64.

Unfortunately, the shortage of raw cotton and limited demand for domestically produced textiles soon made it evident that Puebla was not going to weave or spin its way out of economic stagnation.[37] In fact, the incipient industry of Puebla failed to alleviate the high rate of unemployment; only 1.7 percent of the population was employed in textile factories by 1854.[38]

In 1841, the administration of President Bustamante had begun to show signs of decay. Centralism continued to have strong opponents. The *puros* headed by their former leader, Gómez Farías, were just as fierce in their fight to take control as they had been in 1828 or 1833. An array of problems, including the secession of Texas, a French invasion in 1838, and several anti-Bustamante rebellions throughout Mexico contributed to both the ruin of his government and a renewed climate of political uncertainty and agitation at the national level.

With the support of the moderates, who were as wary as ever of a radical turn, Santa Anna became president again in 1842. He was supposed to be an interim president for, in theory, a newly formed congress would arrange an election. The country was immersed again in political contention regarding the most suitable and desirable form of government. While the clamor in favor of a return to federalism continued in various parts of the Mexican territory, in Mexico City an important conservative conspiracy to offer the government of Mexico to a European monarch was lurking.[39] In Puebla a conservative movement, in which Santa Anna was

[37] Thomson, *Puebla de los Ángeles*, 247.
[38] Thomson, *Puebla de los Ángeles*, 330. In 1854 there were more factories than in the 1840s; therefore, the percentage of the population employed for that decade must have been smaller than 1.7 percent.
[39] Valentín Gómez Farías, who had recently come back from exile in New Orleans, attempted a coup d'etat in July 1840. According to Santoni this attempt "turned Mexico City into a caldron of violence, and thieves and other criminals committed numerous acts of vandalism […] Gomez Farías' brand of federalism came to be considered a potential element of subversion, a challenge to the established order." See, Santoni, *Mexican at Arms*, 21. The main authors of the monarchic conspiracy were Lucas Alamán, the right hand of Bustamante's regime, and minister Bermudez de Castro. The plan of implanting a monarchy in Mexico was conceived by Ángel Calderón de la Barca, the first Spanish minister in Mexico since independence. See, Miguel Soto Estrada, *La conspiración monárquica en México, 1845—1846* (Mexico: Offset, 1988).

involved, emerged in the town of Huejotzingo in 1842.[40] Very likely sponsored by the Catholic Church, the Huejotzingo "rebellion" reflected profound distrust for some of the candidates for the next congress and called instead for the appointment of a *Junta de Notables* (a Committee of Notables) who would be in charge of drafting a new constitution.[41] Backed by other provinces and eventually by Mexico City's garrison, the Huejotzingo rebels succeeded in dissolving Congress and Santa Anna's power became absolute. However, Santa Anna's administration faced a depleted treasury. In a desperate search for resources, he increased taxes, established new ones and even resorted to the disentailment of Church property. Needless to say, these measures angered conservatives and moderates alike, while it was clear that Santa Anna enjoyed no sympathy among the *puros* either. By 1844, Santa Anna had upset to some degree every political faction for different reasons, not the least of which was his tyrannical demeanor.

Mariano Paredes y Arrillaga, an ambitious general, who had been flirting with all the parties that could help his chances to assume the presidency (including the monarchists *and* the defenders of the republic), launched a campaign against Santa Anna in November 1844. Various military leaders supported Paredes' movement and Santa Anna considered it imperative to suppress the rebels assuming the leadership of the army. However, Santa Anna's move violated the *Bases Orgánicas*, the new centralist constitution that stipulated that the president could not assume the leadership of the army without Congress' approval. Very few deemed it convenient to put up with Santa Anna's disdain for the law, especially given the rumors that he was seeking to become dictator.

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[40] According to Santoni, this was part of a series of military rebellions orchestrated by Santa Anna and his friends to dissolve congress and then, via the *Junta de Notables*, have the opportunity to draft a new constitution, namely, the *Bases Orgánicas* of 1843. Santoni*, Mexicans at Arms,* 21.

[41] Hubert Bancroft, *The Works of Hubert Bancroft. History of Mexico,* vol. 5 (San Francisco: A.L. Bancroft, 1883—1890), 255.

Disregarding strong opposition, Santa Anna set out to defeat Paredes. The size of his army, however, was fast diminishing (mostly due to desertion) while the rebels increased in number and strength. Unable to return to Mexico City to secure his position, Santa Anna went to Puebla, which had previously supported him. On this occasion, however, General Santa Anna could not lure the *poblanos* to his side voluntarily so he decided to attack the city of Puebla in January 1845. This was a turning point. About 8,000 *poblanos* resisted the attack with such determination that Santa Anna had to flee. The triumph of the *anti-santannista* movement meant that the defeated General had to postpone his political aspirations and go into exile.

What does this suggest about Puebla's role in the arena of national politics? First, Puebla weighed heavily in national political calculations. Secondly, Puebla's elites were was willing to put up with centralism as long as it translated into some tangible benefit, as when Bustamante's administration adopted economic policies that promoted textile production, one of Puebla's most profitable enterprises. But Puebla would not tolerate the tyrannical style of Santa Anna if he offered no concrete advantages to the state. The anti-santannista mood also underscored that Puebla's endorsement of certain political figures or groups did not necessarily imply a commitment to any one political cause, particularly at the national level. Rather, what dictated Puebla's adhesion to or rejection of politicians, ideologies, or factions was the degree to which they promoted its political and economic interests. These included respect for Catholic Church property and power, economic stimulus, and the preservation of public order. The proverbial shifting nature of political alliances in nineteenth-century Mexico, however, did not mean that political beliefs were ephemeral. On the contrary, at least in the case of Puebla, it was precisely the protection and promotion of a fixed set of political, social, religious and economic interests that made *poblanos* "change sides."

Historian Guy Thomson has suggested that between 1835 and 1845 a "new consensus" of "industrial progress," owing to the short-lived economic recovery tied to the establishment of textile factories, eclipsed political concerns among Puebla's urban elite.[42] However, the evidence suggests that political concerns were quite palpable. Certainly, the political concerns of Puebla's elites during this period were not centered on influencing the national government in Mexico City to act in their favor. Conservatism had served well the interest of Puebla's elites and as a result they needed not to press for change. Rather, the political concerns of Puebla's urban elites were directed inward and concentrated on the maintenance of public order, with special emphasis on the eradication of vagrancy and banditry, which were considered the breeding ground of revolutions.

Banditry in Mexico

To this day, no clear picture about the nature and origins of outlawry during colonial times has emerged. There are still only a few studies on the topic and most of them concentrate on the later colonial period.[43] The studies that exist find the causes of criminality in colonial Mexico largely in socio-economic factors. Throughout the colonial period, sources of employment were insufficient to permanently occupy an increasing population. Even in cases where jobs were available, unskilled work was insufficiently remunerated. As a result, a considerable proportion

[42] Thomson, *Puebla de los Ángeles*, 213.
[43] Colin M. MacLachlan. *Criminal Justice in Eighteenth Century Mexico. A Study of the Tribunal of the Acordada* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1974); William B. Taylor, "Bandit Gangs in Late Colonial Times: Rural Jalisco, Mexico, 1794—1821," in *Bibliotheca Americana*, 1, no. 2 (Nov. 1982): 29-57; William B. Taylor, "Banditry and Insurrection: Rural Unrest in Central Jalisco," in *Riot, Rebellion and Revolution. Rural Social Conflict in Mexico*, ed. Friedrich Katz (Princeton University Press, 1988); Eric Van Young, "Agustín Marroquín: The Sociopath as Rebel," in *The Human Tradition in Latin America. The Nineteenth Century*, eds. Judith Ewell and William H. Beezley (Wilmington, Delaware: Scholarly Resources, 1989); and Gabriel Haslip-Viera, *Crime and Punishment in Late Colonial Mexico City, 1692—1810* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1999).

of the population, even in colonial Mexico City, did not receive sufficient income to pay for the most basic items such as food, water and clothing. The poor had to look for alternative sources of income to make ends meet on a daily basis. They often resorted to vending cheap goods in the streets, running errands, begging at church entrances and, on occasion, to crime. However, while economic need was certainly a major factor driving people to resort to delinquency, historian Gabriel Haslip-Viera contends that other factors such as "psychological frustration" and a "sense of alienation from colonial society" were also "root causes of crime and social disorder" in Mexico City during late colonial times. [44]

Indeed, an abysmal distribution of wealth was the foremost characteristic of urban life during the colonial and early independence periods, which caused resentment among the less privileged members of society. Haslip-Viera reminds us that robbery was also committed by the "non-destitute" out of anxiety about loss of social standing. [45] Envy or ambition, feelings that are exacerbated in highly unequal and rigidly stratified societies, might have also moved the "non-destitute" to rob.

Our view of urban criminality during colonial times is dominated by the picture of seventeenth and eighteenth century cities plagued with delinquency. This notion has been based, to a large extent, on travelers' accounts, as well as governmental records that agree in portraying vagrancy, robbery, drunkenness and other forms of criminality as pervasive features of colonial urban life. Some historians, however, have rightly pointed out that both foreigners and elites had explicit interest in portraying colonial Mexican society in a particular light. By focusing on delinquency and the authorities' inefficiency in curbing it, European and American travelers

[44] Haslip-Viera, *Crime and Punishment*, 134.
[45][45] Ibid., 74.

could easily assert their own sense of superiority.[46] Similarly, an exaggerated portrayal of the incidence and scope of crime allowed colonial elites and members of the government to justify their distrust and disgust of the masses. More importantly, as noted by William Taylor, authorities' claims about rampant banditry often masked deeper concerns about administrative independence, colonial security, and law enforcement.[47] Last but not least, exaggerating the specter of banditry had the potential to turn law enforcement authorities into heroes. Indeed, it is difficult to establish the accuracy of the impressions of both foreign travelers and members of government officials in regard to the prevalence of delinquency in Mexico City. While in the past historians have often accepted the view that criminality was almost out of control and that fighting it was the main occupation of the authorities, more recent studies suggest that colonial authorities were actually quite successful in maintaining delinquency within tolerable levels.[48] There is no historical evidence to suggest that delinquency represented sufficient a menace to imperil the stability of colonial society.[49]

Contrary to the situation in the cities where the incidence of banditry and other forms of criminality seems to have remained relatively stable throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, rural banditry increased significantly throughout the eighteenth century. Rural areas were subject to similar demographic pressures as cities. Haciendas, ranches and mines did not have the capacity to absorb the increasing population. In fact, lack of employment opportunities in the countryside resulted in intense migration to urban centers. At the same time, the late colonial period was one of economic expansion, especially in the mining sector. Silver together with other valuable commodities continued to make their way along the roads that connected

[46] See Chris Frazer, *Bandit Nation: A History of Outlaws and Cultural Struggle in Mexico, 1810—1920* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2006), 7-8.
[47] Taylor, "Bandit Gangs," 30-31.
[48] This contrast is evident in the comparison of MacLachlan's view against that of Gabriel Haslip-Viera.
[49] Haslip-Viera, *Crime and Punishment*, 133.

cities, villages, mining zones, and towns in New Spain. The intense traffic of goods and people became a source of revenue for those who ventured into banditry. According to William Taylor, these individuals were, typically, young males in their twenties or early thirties, illiterate, long uprooted from peasant communities, and unskilled.[50] Taylor implicitly argues that rural banditry was motivated primarily by poverty. Other historians, however, have found evidence that not only the very poor enlisted in bandit gangs; they argue for different and less economically deterministic explanations of banditry and rural violence.[51]

Rural delinquency in general and highway robbery in particular, became a major feature of rural life in the last decades of the eighteenth and the first decades of the nineteenth centuries. The notion that the activities of the dreaded *salteadores de caminos* (highwaymen) made the cities "islands in the midst of a sea of banditry"[52] is a bit exaggerated, but not without some basis. There seems to be no question that highway robbery did pose an important threat to commerce and communications within the viceroyalty.

The creation in 1722 of a new judicial institution, the *Tribunal de la Acordada*, attests to the sense of urgency felt by the colonial government to address the problem of insecurity on the roads. Centralized judicial authority was inefficient and ineffective in imposing compliance with the law in distant regions.[53] In addition, corruption often interfered with the administration of justice. The creation of the *Acordada* granted a captain permission to pursue malefactors, dictate

[50] Taylor, "Banditry and Insurrection," 207.
[51] See Eric Van Young, "Agustín Marroquín," 23; Torcuato S. Di Tella, *National Popular Politics in Early Independent Mexico, 1820—1847* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1996), 4; and Silvia Arrom and Servando Ortoll, eds., *Riots in the Cities: Popular Politics and the Urban Poor in Latin America, 1765-1910* (Wilmington, Delaware: Scholarly Resources, 1996), 5.
[52] MacLahlan, *Criminal Justice*, 31, cfr. Taylor, "Bandit Gangs," 30-31.
[53] The name of "*Acordada*" comes from the Spanish word "*acuerdo*" (agreement), and refers to the agreement between the viceroy and the *Audiencia* (a governmental institution with executive, legislative and judicial functions) to approve that the decisions made by Miguel Velázquez de Lorea, the first captain of the *Acordada*, be final and not subject to revision by the judicial arm of the *Audiencia*. See MacLachlan, *Criminal Justice*, 33.

sentences and execute them autonomously, that is, without depending on approval from any higher authority. The Acordada's captain was compelled to report his decisions only and directly to the viceroy.[54] The virtually unlimited power of the *Acordada* was intended to remedy the pervasive problems in the administration of justice in areas where central jurisdiction had never effectively reached. The effectiveness of the *Acordada* in the prosecution of bandits was also due to its modus operandi. Although the tribunal had some paid employees in its headquarters located in the viceregal capital, as well as in important outposts in the provinces, it mostly used volunteers who had a stake in ridding nearby roads of bandits. For instance, *hacendados* and merchants provided some of their employees and dependents to help in the job of pursuing bandits. There was no limit to the number of volunteers allowed under the supervision of an *Acordada* representative.[55] Thus, places like the roads between Mexico City and Toluca or Mexico City and Puebla, where the need for a large protective force against bandits was more acute, were never lacking men. Such coverage would have been hardly possible if the tribunal had to pay for that work.[56]

Although initially conceived as a judicial institution that would solely deal with rural delinquency, in 1756, the viceroy granted it jurisdiction over urban areas including Mexico City.[57] The *Acordada* became a dreaded institution even though it sentenced to death only a minority of its detainees. It continued to operate until the beginning of the nineteenth century when its agents played an important role in trying to subdue the violence unleashed by the wars of independence. It was the short-lived constitutional intercession in Spain in 1812 that brought

[54] The sentences of the Acordada need not to be reviewed in the Audiencia's *sala del crimen* (the crime room,) the older colonial judicial institution that continued to operate until the collapse of the colonial government. See MacLachlan, *Criminal Justice*, 35.
[55] MacLachlan, *Criminal Justice*, 124-125.
[56] Ibid., 67.
[57] Ibid., 35.

the activities of the tribunal to an end.[58] By this time, the violence of the first wars of independence had spread widely and it is very unlikely that the *Acordada* alone would have been able to maintain order. In fact, the new context of warfare made it possible for bandit gangs to become even more prominent and destructive. Whether assisting the guerrillas of insurgent forces, or as autonomous rampaging squads, after 1810 bandits contributed to the collapse of the colonial order.

The beginning of the wars of independence in 1810 seems to have been a turning point for banditry in Mexico. Although there is a thorough lack of consensus about whether the brigands' involvement in the struggle for independence reflected a genuine commitment to a political cause, it is clear that banditry ceased to be seen as plain outlawry. While William Taylor considers it possible that after 1810, "more gangs transcended ordinary criminal activity to avenge wrongs, if not to serve a studied political cause,"[59] Paul Vanderwood insists that bandits' affiliation with any political cause was a simple matter of maximizing their opportunities of survival and enrichment. He stresses that bandits had no compunction in changing sides when the occasion demanded it, thereby making the point that self-interest rather than political conviction made brigands fight shoulder to shoulder with insurgent or loyalist forces.[60]

Regardless of whether insurgent troops in need of extra men sought brigands already trained in the arts of combat and pillage, or the brigands themselves procured their connection to the military and political leaders of the independence wars, there is no doubt that after 1810 banditry was incorporated into the world of political struggle with an intensity that had no

[58] MacLachlan, *Criminal Justice*, 106.
[59] Taylor, "Banditry and Insurrection," 215.
[60] Paul J. Vanderwood, *Disorder and Progress: Bandits, Police, and Mexican Development* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1981), 31.

precedent. This was part of the "new kind of democratic politics"[61] set in motion by the wars of independence and which, in stark contrast with politics during the colonial period, relied to a large extent on the mobilization of popular sectors. Outlawry and political violence merged to the extent that, as historians have pointed out numerous times, the line between bandit and soldier, insurgent or guerrilla became blurred.[62] This overlapping of categories was no fleeting trend; throughout the nineteenth century, political adversaries were commonly called bandits, hinting at a conflation between banditry and political violence. Moreover, banditry's connection to political violence did not stop in 1821 with the end of the wars of independence, but continued throughout the century.[63]

Based on the existing literature, there appear to be two mechanisms through which banditry and political violence became blended. First, *bandoleros* were invited/hired/employed by political leaders to participate in their movements. In the second case, banditry was part of political protest, but the participants were not "professional" *bandoleros*. In either case, however, robbery and pillage were an integral part of political mobilization. The integration of *bandoleros* into insurgent or loyalist troops during the wars for independence from 1810 to 1821 is an example of the incorporation of former bandits into political struggles. In Jalisco, for example, six bandit gangs fought under the insurgent banner.[64] Later, in the 1840s a *pronunciamiento* (political proclamation) by General Mariano Paredes y Arrillaga explicitly

[61] Silvia Arrom, "Popular Politics in Mexico City," 263.
[62] Taylor, "Banditry and Insurrection," 215, Christon I. Archer, "Banditry and Revolution in New Spain, 1790—1821," in *Bibliotheca Americana* 1, no. 2 (1982): 60-61, Rodríguez, "Introduction," in *Patterns of Contention in Mexican History*, ed. Jaime E. Rodríguez O. (Wilmington, Del.: Scholarly Resources, 1992), 7; and Laura Solares Robles, *Bandidos somos y en el camino andamos. Bandidaje, caminos y administración de justicia en el siglo XIX, 1821—1855. El caso de Michoacán* (Morelia, Michoacán: Instituto Michoacano de Cultura-Instituto de Investigaciones Dr. José María Luis Mora, 1999), 105.
[63] In contrast to this, historian Laura Solares Robles contends that "once the nation achieved some stability, the joining of *bandolero*s to political movements ceased and new bandit groups that broke the law only to survive emerged." See Laura Solares Robles, *Bandidos somos*, 189.
[64] Taylor, "Bandit Gangs in Late Colonial Times," 36.

stated that one of its supporters was "General" Eleuterio Quiroz, a well-known bandit of the Sierra Gorda, who had been pursued by the central government since 1847.[65] Even later, in the 1860s the presidency of Benito Juárez officially pardoned the *Plateados*, a famous gang of *bandolero*s and enlisted them in the fight against the conservatives.[66] Likewise, the rural police created during Juarez's government to reestablish order in the countryside after the French intervention (1861—1863), incorporated pardoned bandits.[67] Through the offering of official pardon, an *indulto*, the government incorporated bandits into its armed forces, thereby coopting opposition and subduing dissidence. Clearly, the indulto had a distinctive political purpose.[68]

The 1840s peasant movement led by Juan Álvarez in the southern territories of Mexico is a good example of the second type: political mobilization that included a clear component of banditry. Disgruntled peasants stole the property of landlords and gave some of it back to the peasant communities.[69] The most salient example of a political movement that featured an important component of banditry is the Parián riot of 1828 in Mexico City. After a very contentious political campaign in the presidential election of 1828, Vicente Guerrero, the candidate of the liberals, was defeated despite his broad appeal among the masses. Alleging reasons to declare the election invalid, on November 30 the liberals gathered in the building of the extinct *Acordada* tribunal and issued their *pronunciamiento* refusing to recognize the victory

[65] Leticia Reina, "The Sierra Gorda Peasant Rebellion, 1847—1850," in *Riot, Rebellion and Revolution: Rural Social Conflict in Mexico*, ed. Friedrich Katz (Princeton: Princeton University Press), 287.
[66] Paul J. Vanderwood, *Disorder and Progress: Bandits, Police, and Mexican Development* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1981), 11.
[67] Chris Frazer, *Bandit Nation*, 52.
[68] Eric Van Young, *The Other Rebellion: Popular Violence, Ideology, and the Mexican Struggle for Independence, 1810—1821* (Stanford University Press, 2001), 118.
[69] John M. Hart, "The 1840's Southwestern Mexico Peasants," in *Riot, Rebellion and Revolution: Rural Social Conflict in Mexico*, ed. Friedrich Katz (Princeton: Princeton University Press), 262.

of Manuel Gómez Pedraza and calling for an armed response to the electoral outcome.[70] Soon the protesters included the masses of Mexico City, who found an outlet for their anger by attacking the National Palace and looting an emblem of the oligarchy, the Parián market in the center of the city.

The Parian riot is a key event because it underscores the conflation between political mobilization and banditry. In his memoirs, Guillermo Prieto, one of the most prominent men of letters and a political figure of the nineteenth century, wrote that a cannon's detonation interrupted the tranquility of the city as news about the *pronunciamiento* of the *Acordada* traveled from mouth to mouth. "It is well known," he continued, "that the scandal of the *Acordada* came to an end solemnizing its triumph with the looting of the Parián."[71] Clearly, the call of the *pronunciados* and the ransacking of the Parián were part of the same political action. In fact, Prieto confirms that this conflation existed in the minds of both the elite and the crowd that participated in the riot when he notes that his "first notions about politics were acquired via these fatal impressions," and he records that the plunder of the Parián "summarized the democratic program [of the *pronunciamiento*] by saying":

> *'Vivan Guerrero y Lobato*
> *Y viva lo que arrebato'*[72]
>
> ['*Vivan* Guerrero and Lobato
> *Viva* what can be snatched.']

Although many contemporaries insisted that the rioters had no genuine interest in political struggle, but were merely interested in theft, Prieto's recollections attest to the fact that

[70] At this time the Acordada building that had served as prison and residence of its judge and captain until 1812, was occupied as quarters for some sections of the army.
[71] Guillermo Prieto, *Memorias de mis tiempos, 1828 a 1853* (Puebla: Editorial J. M. Cajica Jr., 1970), 69.
[72] Prieto, *Memorias de mis tiempos*, 72. The motto hailed Vicente Guerrero, the liberals' presidential candidate, and José María Lobato, a general who had been instrumental in the uprising.

in the minds of the rioters supporting Vicente Guerrero and attacking the property of the oligarchy were part of the same fight. As Silvia Arrom has argued, the rioters of 1828 were familiar with the political struggle of the time, which included "enthusiasm for Guerrero and his party, a desire for protection of the domestic industry, and hostility towards Spaniards."[73] Not surprisingly the riot became a watershed for Mexican politicians and the elites who were now alerted, more than ever before, about the perils of letting the liberals advance. The sacking of the Parián provided the propertied minority a justification for the installation of a conservative oligarchic regime in 1830.[74]

Perhaps nothing attests to the conflation between political violence and banditry during the first half of the nineteenth century more than the fact that this period has been traditionally characterized as "*caudillista*." Prior to the wars of independence the term 'caudillo' did not convey the military and political significance that it acquired in the nineteenth century. A caudillo was a leader, but his attributes were only vaguely defined. In contrast, a 'bandit' was more specifically defined as a transgressor of the law, a criminal. After 1810, when warfare spread throughout the country the term caudillo gained currency and became inextricably linked with political strife and popular mobilization. At this point, the term caudillo seems to have become more fluid in its connotation. Depending on whose side a caudillo was fighting, he became a hero or a villain. Significantly, throughout the first half of the nineteenth century, when the country was constantly submerged in conflict, the terms 'caudillo' and 'bandido' were often used interchangeably.

Indeed, caudillos and *bandoleros* were not so different from one another. Just like the bandoleros-turned-rebels, caudillos were men who had the capacity to levy their own "armies" to

[73] Arrom, "Popular Politics in Mexico City," 261-262.
[74] Ibid., 268.

join one of the factions competing for power at a certain time or to compete for power for themselves. The practices of bandits and caudillos were somewhat indistinguishable and often involved assaults on people and property. Contemporary sources often portrayed caudillos as savage opportunists, as a plague, and in many cases as thieves. They were considered enemies of society and agents of disorder and lawlessness just like bandits. In his detailed account of the wars of independence, Lucas Alamán branded the operations of minor, but famous, independence leaders such as Antonio Marroquín and Albino García, as mere banditry and abuse of force.[75] Even Hidalgo earned Alamán's scorn: "From the balcony at Landeta's house, Hidalgo himself threw sacks of money to the crowd shouting 'take it, my children, it is all yours'."[76] Thus, Alamán intentionally ignored that Hidalgo's actions were, at least in part, an attempt to redress socioeconomic exploitation and focused instead on recalling the event as plain spoliation.

The similarities between caudillos and bandits notwithstanding, few dispute the caudillos' role as political actors, while scholars still debate whether bandits' engagement in political violence during the early nineteenth century can be considered political.[77] Insisting that caudillos and bandits are two different species, John Lynch has argued that "[t]o acquire a political role and a caudillo's status a bandit chief would need to expand his horizons."[78] It seems, however, that what has prompted this kind of thinking is Lynch's focus on famous

[75] Lucas Alamán, *Historia de Mejico*, 2 vols. (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1985), II, 103, 249.
[76] Ibid., I, 382.
[77] Contrary to the vast majority of historians who have studied *caudillismo*, Donald Fithian Stevens maintains "social scientists have developed a series of hypotheses to explain the contrast between the immediately apparent struggles for power and the more intangible foundations of political conflict. The caudillo thesis discounts political motivations and regards caudillos as unprincipled opportunists who mimicked political discourse to hide personal ambitions." See Donald Fithian Stevens, *Origins of Instability in Early Republican Mexico* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1991), 2.
[78] John Lynch, *Caudillos in Spanish America1800—1850* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 29.

caudillos, those exceptional cases like Santa Anna in Mexico or Juan Manuel de Rosas in Argentina who were able to attain national political power. But it is clear from Lynch's study that not all caudillos had the political ambition and leverage of Santa Anna or Rosas. Minor caudillos, men who never stood out as important political figures outside their regions, certainly fell into the category of caudillos by nineteenth century standards. In addition, Lynch's definition implies that bandits lacked "bigger ideas" or that their ambition was universally restricted to quick material gain; but some bandits certainly had bigger ambitions. That was the case of Manuel Domínguez, the former highwayman from Puebla who became the leader of the counter-guerrilla in the service of the United States army in the war with Mexico. He, for example, co-authored a plan of independence for the "Republic of the Sierra Madre" in 1849.[79] Moreover, the idea that bandits' engagement in politics was solely opportunistic is problematic. It has been shown that nineteenth century elites purposefully labeled any type of popular political activity as "banditry" precisely to strip it of political content and appeal.[80] At best, plebeians who engaged in popular political action were seen as "*hombres sencillos*" (simple men) who were easily "seduced" by truly ill-intentioned agitators.[81] Since the time of independence and throughout the nineteenth century, elites accused common people of taking part in political agitation only for the promise of material gain, for example through looting. The elites insisted on identifying popular violence and banditry as a mere byproduct of political conflict, denying,

[79] According to the plan of independence announced in the summer of 1849, some northern Mexican territories, including the states of Tamaulipas and Monterrey, would secede from Mexico and become a new republic.

[80] Will Fowler, "Civil Conflict in Independent Mexico, 1821—1857: An Overview," in *Rumors of Wars: Civil Conflict in Nineteenth-Century Latin America,* ed. Rebecca Earle (London: Institute of Latin American Studies, 2000), 68. See also, Frazer, *Bandit Nation*, 21 and 49; and Vanderwood, *Disorder and Progress: Bandits, Police and Mexican Development*, revised and enlarged edition (Wilmington: Scholarly Resources, 1992), xxxii and xxxiv.

[81] Archivo Judicial de Puebla at the Biblioteca del Museo Nacional de Antropología e Historia, microfilm, roll 56, "El Gobernador del Estado a sus habitantes," Puebla, 7 December 1828; and *El Amigo de la Verdad*, Puebla, 22 December 1828, no. 48, 200.

thereby, any possible connection between disorder, outlawry and genuine popular political engagement. For example, the editors of the Pueblan newspaper *Abeja Poblana*, worriedly pointed out in 1841 that the political climate was turning turbulent again and "everybody knew" that it was during times of political unrest that wrongdoers ran amok making roads and towns insecure.[82]

Lastly, I want to draw attention to the fact that 'caudillo' and 'bandit' were not the only two labels available to designate military, political or popular leaders. Rather they were part of a continuum that also included terms such as '*cabecilla*,' '*guerrillero*,' and '*rebelde*,' all of which were employed with a great degree of fluidity particularly during the first half of the nineteenth century. The chief of a bandit gang could be called caudillo as was the case of the famous robber-turned-U.S. collaborator, Manuel Domínguez.[83] Although Domínguez could not be categorized as a caudillo in the same fashion as Antonio López de Santa Anna, the fact that the bandit was identified as such shows that the term caudillo was loosely applied to denote leadership, boldness, and ambition. Perhaps the single most significant conclusion that can be drawn concerning the connection between caudillismo and banditry is that during the early nineteenth century in Mexico, political legitimacy was clearly in the eye of the beholder.

In sum, since independence, insurgency and banditry were not easily dissociated. Although historians disagree on the level of political commitment that can be attributed to *bandoleros*-turned-rebels or to protesters who turned to banditry to make their point, there is evidence to suggest that perpetrators of banditry in the context of political struggles did not see themselves as "impostors", but rather considered banditry *as meaningfully intertwined with* (not as a secret agenda of) their participation in political violence.

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[82] Archivo General del Ayuntamiento de Puebla, Impresos Varios, 1840—1846, vol. 10 (Lomo negro), 9.
[83] See *El Monitor Republicano*, Mexico City, July 16 1849, no. 1525, 4. For other examples of bandit chiefs identified as caudillos see Taylor, "Bandit Gangs in Late Colonial Times," 36.

Banditry in Puebla

In the nineteenth century, Puebla and particularly the road network connecting the city of the Angels with Mexico City and Veracruz, were widely known as a "bandit nest." Rare is the author who skips a reference to banditry when talking about Puebla during this time. However, there are no historical studies on the matter. Thus, we continue to rely on travelers' accounts, governmental reports and the famous novel by Manuel Payno, *Los bandidos de Río Frío* as our main sources of information on Puebla's banditry. The picture presented here combines information uncovered by scholars who have studied banditry in other regions of Mexico and data gathered during my own archival research. This depiction of banditry in Puebla is far from complete or definitive, but it allows us to see the main elements of the phenomenon.

As previously stated, Puebla was situated along the most important colonial route, the one connecting the capital of the viceroyalty with its eastern port. Silver, the most valuable Mexican product, made its way via this route just as various coveted items from Spain entered the colony through it. The road between Veracruz and Mexico City was also an artery for domestic commerce. The importance of the route was not only economic, but also political since it was the main avenue of communication between royal representatives in Spain and Mexico City and local government. Not surprisingly, then, during the war of independence, control of the road was heavily contested between insurgent bandit-guerrilla gangs and loyalist forces.[84]

As happened throughout Mexico, bandits became a permanent feature of Puebla's roads after independence. Virtually every traveler mentions something in this regard. If lucky, visitors would escape a bandit assault, but hardly anyone escaped the terrifying tales that coachmen, guards and innkeepers told about the famous bandits. When reading travelers' accounts, one gets

[84] MacLachlan, *Criminal Justice*, 105; and Antonio Carrión, *Historia de la ciudad de Puebla de los Ángeles*, 2nd ed., vol. 2 (Puebla: Editorial J. M Cajica, 1970), 206.

the impression that banditry had become part of Puebla's reality, something of a morbid tourist attraction. For instance, Frances Calderón de la Barca, the wife of the first Spanish diplomat, comments that Don Miguel, her party's Mexican companion, gave the travelers a "succinct account" of a bandit's life at each of the white crosses they passed, which indicated a bandit's burial site or the place where a murder had been committed by a bandit.[85] As has been pointed out time and again in the literature, many foreigners looked forward to having a chilling face to face with the *bandoleros*, and some expressed disappointment if they did not meet the bandits.[86] In order to prevent the dreaded assaults of *bandoleros*, Mexican authorities provided escorts to accompany diplomats and other important figures on their journeys. To the annoyance of many travelers, the pace of the trip was frequently determined by whether the escorting party was ready and able to accompany the coach. Likewise, travelers were forced to make unplanned stops if there were rumors that such and such *bandolero* gang was roaming the area.

Bandits organized themselves in *cuadrillas* or *gavillas*, the difference being the number of men involved. A *cuadrilla* was often a group of two to four men, while a *gavilla* could number fifty members or more.[87] Often a bandit gang started with the initiative of one individual who recruited members from his closest social circle including family members and *compadres*.[88] These individuals, in turn, would invite their own relatives and *compadres* to join and so on.[89] Successful operations not only added to the reputation of the leader and the fame of

[85] Calderón de la Barca, Frances. *Life in Mexico: The letters of Fanny Calderón de la Barca with new material from the author's private journals*, ed. Howard T. and Marion Hall Fisher (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc. 1966), 80.
[86] Vanderwood, *Disorder and Progress*, revised and enlarged ed., xvii.
[87] Solares, *Bandidos somos*, 212.
[88] Taylor, "Banditry and Insurrection," 208. Although the term "*compadre*" can be used informally as a synonym of "friend," officially however, a "*compadre*" is the godfather of one's child.
[89] There is no evidence that bandit gangs included women among its ranks to any significant extent. This does not mean that women were not involved in banditry, but rather that their role was predominantly that of informants and abettors.

the band, but also helped recruit new members. When it came to planning their attacks, bandits left very little to chance. They gathered information in taverns, inns and *haciendas* and usually knew if an important and wealthy person was traveling. Once the leaders of the band had the necessary information about their victims, they proceeded to plan the attack. These occurred with such frequency that most everyone seemed to know what to expect in a bandit assault. Through the various travelogues and other available testimonies one can reconstruct a "typical" assault scene: Hiding in the dense woods bandits silently waited for their prey to approach a narrow spot in the road that would make escape difficult. Then, they quickly descended upon the coach interrupting its advance. While some members of the band kept an eye on the road to alert the rest of the group to the presence of authorities or other travelers, the rest of the gang searched the coach and its passengers, opened trunks and grabbed as many valuable objects as possible. In the event that the traveling party, which was often armed, resisted the assault, a skirmish would ensue. If the resistance was strong enough, the bandits would quickly abandon the site to avoid being caught or killed.

Allegedly, brigands had a well-established system of selling safe conducts to their victims so that other *salteadores* knew that the travelers in question had already been robbed and should be allowed to continue their journey unmolested.[90] Mexican bandits' gallantry and generosity were part of their legend and many travelers sincerely believed in it.[91] This view has oddly coexisted with the image of fierce and cruel robbers that prevails in governmental records

[90] Vanderwood, *Disorder and Progress*, revised and enlarged ed., 7.
[91] Frances Calderón de la Barca said that if they had to be robbed "let it be by a Mexican robber by all means." Quoted in Vanderwood, *Disorder and Progress*, revised and enlarged ed., 5. Similarly, in his chronicle Jean Jacques Ampère noticed that some bandits were courteous and even apologetic. See Margo Glantz, *Viajes en México. Crónicas extranjeras*, vol. 2 (Mexico: Secretaría de Educación Pública, 1982), 572.

of the time. While it is possible that the bandits were easier with cooperative victims, records show that they had no qualms about using violence if deemed necessary.[92]

Until further research expands our knowledge about banditry in Puebla during the early nineteenth century, we rely largely on the information that Puebla's authorities provided to the government of José J. de Herrera in 1845. Puebla's report was part of a national effort (begun in 1842 under Santa Anna's auspices) to gather as much information as possible about public administration. The document included a summary of the province's prisons that detailed the number of prisoners, the crime they were accused of, their civil status, occupation, age and level of literacy. The most common crimes in Puebla were *hurto ratero* (robbery without use of force), homicide, *robo* (robbery with assault), and bodily injury. One problem with these categories is that they often overlap. Homicide and injury were not necessarily separate from robbery or robbery attempts even if they were recorded as different types of crimes. Thus, it is possible that banditry had a greater incidence than has been registered.

Puebla's bandits seem to conform to the "typical" Mexican bandit of the nineteenth century: the majority were young males (between 20 and 40 years old) and illiterate.[93] According to the report of 1845, the vast majority of bandits across Mexican provinces were agrarian workers, whether *jornaleros* (day laborers) *gañanes* (field assistants) or *labradores* (tillers). Puebla's occupational breakdown is interesting in that the largest percentage (28 percent) falls into the "other" category. This means that 28 percent of Puebla's bandits were something other than agricultural workers, *arrieros* (muleteers), weavers, shoemakers, carpenters, merchants, or unemployed. Whether this information suggests something unique about Puebla's banditry in comparison with banditry in general must await further research. However, mirroring the

[92] Solares Robles, *Bandidos Somos*, 213.
[93] Ibid., 226-228.

situation in other provinces in terms of the proportion of *jornaleros* (16 percent), *gañanes* (16 percent), and *labradores* (14 percent), rural workers made up almost half of the bandits imprisoned in Puebla around the mid-nineteenth century.[94]

Since the late 1820s, the government and elite's concern about banditry was linked to anxieties about societal chaos. A riot in the city of Puebla in December 1827 seemed to have triggered alarm among the propertied groups and increased suspicions of the elites about popular gatherings and mobilization. Their concern redoubled with the attack on the National Palace and the Parián market in Mexico City a year later. In the context of the expulsion of Spaniards from Mexico –which was one of the most delicate issues in national politics at the time— a multitude crowded many of Puebla's streets on the night of December 12, 1827. The mob instilled terror among the "pacific citizens" with their "alarming and seditious" shouts and with the sacking of a number of houses.[95] "With good reason" concluded a court document, "such a scandalous event has been given the name of *asonada* (uprising)."[96]

Elites regarded banditry not as an isolated malady, but connected to other worrisome problems such as vagrancy, drunkenness and, worst of all, "revolution." Nowhere is this conclusion as explicit as in the writings of Estevan de Antuñano, one of Puebla's most successful textile entrepreneurs who was deeply concerned about deterring the cycle of revolts that further impoverished the country and threatened social havoc. Antuñano's writings cover more than a decade from 1833 to 1846 and speak to a variety of issues from the *Banco de Avío* to the perils of readopting federalism in 1846. With respect to banditry, Antuñano frequently gave voice to the opinion that the principal impediment to Mexico's advancement was revolution, and the best

[94] Solares, *Bandidos somos*, 228.
[95] Archivo Judicial de Puebla at the Biblioteca Nacional del Museo de Antropología e Historia, microfilm roll 2, Sublevaciones, Asonada ciudad de Puebla, 12 December 1827.
[96] Ibidem.

way to eradicate the destructive Mexican habit of rebellion was to provide "useful and honest occupation" for the mass of the population.[97] Antuñano characterized the idle poor as too fond of drinking, prone to disorder, and as obtuse followers of ill-intentioned men—"*hombres extraviados*" (men gone astray)— prone to lead the poor into armed rebellion for the sake of looting.[98] Antuñano argued that employment would make rebellion less likely because of the obvious time constraints it puts on people's lives and also because salaried workers were less likely to risk their lives and economic security by taking up arms or otherwise threatening the established order. Echoing Antuñano's opinion, in 1843 Manuel Payno, a writer and a politician, expressed his belief that protecting nascent industry in Puebla was paramount since "[Puebla's] people are vivacious, intelligent and of exalted passions," and it was necessary to "give the people bread to eat and work so that they are not idle."[99]

Indeed, vagrancy became the number one target of the authorities who believed it to be connected to more serious forms of crime. In the minds of authorities and elites, *holgazanes*, *vagos* and *malentretenidos* (idle people, vagrants and the "ill-occupied,") as the unemployed were commonly called, would surely become bandits, murderers or in some other way agents of disorder. Since employment insecurity characterized the plebeian sectors, large portions of the population, including anyone who could not prove to have permanent and honest employment, qualified as a *vago* and could be arrested on the spot. Although the evidence is fragmentary, the government seems to have stepped up initiatives to monitor and prosecute vagrancy from the late 1820s to the mid 1840s. One of the earliest post-independence records of the government of Puebla's campaign against vagrancy is a circular addressed to all the ayuntamientos of the

[97] Estevan de Antuñano, *Industria Fabril, el algodón pan de los pobres y origen de las virtudes de los Mexicanos* (Puebla: Oficina del Hospital de S. Pedro a cargo del C. Manuel Buen-Abad, 1833), 21.
[98] Antuñano, *Industria Fabril*, 35.
[99] Manuel Payno, "Viaje a Puebla en el invierno de 1843," in *El Museo Mexicano*, vol. III, 1843, 141 and 163. (My translation) Quoted in Thomson, *Puebla de los Ángeles*, 279.

province in November 1823. The document stated that the prosecution of *vagos* and *holgazanes* was a matter of public security. It, therefore, compelled the members of the ayuntamientos to find out whether the people living under their respective jurisdiction, especially newcomers, were settled or wandering and if they were employed in an honest trade. The authorities should proceed against any person who seemed "*vago*" and "*ocioso*" (vagrant and idle).[100] Authorities attempted to keep vagrancy under control by using the "*calificaciones de vagos*," which were customary at least since 1820. These records were basically lists of detainees that specified their civil status, age, alleged occupation and the testimony of people who knew them. Once someone was arrested under suspicion of vagrancy and appeared before a judge, it was the latter's task to gather information about the accused and proceed to categorize him or her. In 1841, the government of Puebla asked the authorities to remain in "perpetual vigilance" to detect vagrancy or wrongdoing among the inhabitants of the province. In 1845 the *Asamblea Departamental* of Puebla (the equivalent of a state legislature) mandated periodic visits by municipal authorities to private homes to verify tax registry information and "principally, to discover if among the residents there were deserters or individuals who should be regarded as vagrant or ill-entertained."[101]

Prosecuting *vagos* served multiple purposes. Not only was it deemed the most effective way to deter criminality, but it also provided the state with a generous pool of forced labor. *Vagos* were sent to work in *obrajes* (textile plants), public works or fortifications. *Vagos* also constituted the largest stock of recruits for the ever-depleted armed forces. In 1844, the central government required each province to contribute a certain number of men to be employed in the

[100] Centro de Estudios de Historia de México CARSO, Puebla Collection, Circular del Gobierno superior político. Puebla, 21 November 1823.
[101] Archivo General del Estado de Puebla, Leyes y Decretos 1845, document no. 58, Puebla, 7 November 1845.

military. Puebla's quota would be met first with volunteers, second with those legally selected by the judges to serve in the military, third with deserters, and finally with *vagos* and *malentretenidos*. In addition, all necessary substitutions were to be filled with *vagos* and *malentretenidos*. Puebla's government relied in part on its citizens to help with the recruitment process, for the plan also stipulated that anyone who denounced a deserter or a *vago calificado* would be exempt from military service for a time.[102]

Vagos calificados and former prisoners served in the Mexican army during the various conflicts that followed independence including the war with Texas in 1835, the French intervention of 1838, and the war with the United States in 1846—48. However, their participation was usually brief and often of little use since former vagrants tended to desert at the first opportunity. In fact, desertion was a chronic problem and one deeply related to the increase of banditry. Not only former vagrants and bandits, but also drafted peasants abandoned the armed forces as soon as they could. However these men could not simply return to their previous occupations because they were now deserters, thus increasing the chances that they would join a bandit gang and live as fugitives.[103]

The prevalence of banditry demanded new legislation to make the pursuit and prosecution of *bandoleros/salteadores* more effective. The first post-independence decree in this regard was issued in September 1823 and it allowed national, provincial and local militias to arrest and prosecute bandits. Prisoners were to be tried in court-martials set up in the nearest

[102] Archivo General del Estado de Puebla, Leyes y Decretos 1844, "Contingente de hombres pedido al Departamento de Puebla," Puebla, 5 August 1844.
[103] In 1845, a Congress document acknowledged: "the arms taken away from agriculture to the army, have neither returned to their primitive and innocent employment, nor served the army." Rather, the *leva* (military draft) had only increased the number of vagrants, deserters and bandits. AGN, Justicia, box 300, exp. 14, pp. 200-208. Document cited in Solares, *Bandidos somos*, 247. (My translation).

town and the sentences executed within three to six days at the latest.[104] The decree stipulated that it should be implemented within four months from the date of its publication and it continued in vigor until 1832.[105] In 1824, the government of Puebla put together a special armed force to guard the roads and a new police force in the city, where criminality was also a problem. Very tight budgets, however, were a constant challenge to authorities' efforts at such law enforcement.[106]

Lack of financial resources was not the only obstacle to the effective administration of justice. In the absence of a unified criminal code that guided the application of the law, judicial authorities frequently became entangled in the interpretation of the multiple laws inherited from colonial times, which ended up paralyzing investigations and trials.[107] In addition, foreign and national accounts agree that the preeminence of banditry was due, in part, to the fact that *salteadores* were seldom effectively prosecuted and punished for their actions. If caught and remitted to a judge, bandits would most likely be quickly released, sometimes because of lack of evidence against the accused and in other instances because of the judges' incompetence or negligence. Lastly, bribery or plain threats often eased a bandit's way out of prison.[108] Indeed, collaboration between law enforcement authorities and malefactors was not unheard of.[109] Travelers conveyed their impressions that some legal escorts and bandits worked in unison.

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[104] Centro de Estudios de Historia de México CARSO, Puebla Collection, "El ciudadano José María Morón y Molina, gefe superior político interino de esta provincia," Puebla 13 October 1823.
[105] Frazer, *Bandit Nation*, 32.
[106] Centro de Estudios de Historia de México CARSO, Puebla Collection, *Memoria presentada al Congreso Primero constitucional de Puebla de los Ángeles por el Secretario del despacho de Gobierno sobre el estado de la Administración Pública*. México: Imprenta de Martín Rivera, 1826.
[107] Solares, *Bandidos somos*, 106.
[108] *El Mosquito Mexicano*, Mexico City, 4 November 1836. Cited in Solares, *Bandidos somos*, 152.
[109] After being robbed in the road to Veracruz, the traveler J.C. Beltrami, noticed that the bandits who assaulted them were familiar with his cargo, but that he had only talked about it with the governor of the province of Tlaxcala. See, Margo Glantz, *Viajes en México. Crónicas extranjeras*, vol. 2 (Mexico: Secretaría de Educación Pública, 1982), 320-322.

Others suspected that escorts and bandits were the same, for how else could the disappearance of the guards at the trickiest parts of the road be explained?[110] The "cooperation" between authorities and bandits left *hacendados*, innkeepers, *arrieros* and merchants with no option, but to make a deal with the *bandoleros* in order to protect their lives and property, thereby perpetuating the problem. [111]

Some, like the editors of the newspaper *Abeja Poblana*, insisted that only harsher and more expeditious punishment would diminish banditry.[112] However, the call for tighter measures to punish bandits had little or no immediate effect. The organization of an effective police force constituted a major challenge since the government could not absorb the expense of a police force, even a modestly sized one.[113]

It was not until 1844 that the *Asamblea Departamental* of Puebla decreed the creation of a police force "which could number up to a hundred men if funds were available."[114] In 1845 the state government proposed the formation of special tribunals to try bandits without delay. The intention was to give these tribunals *carte blanche* to deal with bandits as the defunct *Acordada* tribunal had had. Puebla's initiative resonated throughout the entire country and on September 22, 1845 the proposal for the formation of these special tribunals was submitted to Congress for consideration. Despite its initial appeal, the idea never materialized due to the overthrow of President Herrera's government.[115]

By 1847, banditry was still unabated and Puebla continued to be an epicenter. The war with the United States, which began in 1846, contributed to the worsening of the situation for

[110] Frazer, *Bandit Nation*, 35.
[111] Varios Mexicanos, *Consideraciones sobre la situación política y social de la República Mexicana, en el año 1847* (México: Valdés y Redondas Impresores, 1848), 14.
[112] Archivo General del Ayuntamiento de Puebla, Impresos varios, 1840—1846, vol. 10 (Lomo negro), 9.
[113] Archivo General del Ayuntamiento de Puebla, Expedientes, Policía 1836-1867, vol. 195, 108-133r.
[114] Archivo General del Estado de Puebla, Leyes y Decretos, Documento no. 20, Puebla, 20 May 1844.
[115] Solares, *Bandidos somos*, 247-248.

two reasons. First, the unstoppable advance of the U.S. troops and the disastrous performance of Mexico's army made it evident that Mexico's political and military authorities were in crisis. The weakening of central authority encouraged the rise of outlawry in general. Second, many deserters from the Mexican army became involved in banditry most often by enrolling in a guerrilla. As had happened during the war for independence, outlawry and political violence became frequently intertwined. It was in Puebla that one of the most intriguing examples of this mix came to exist. Soon after the U.S. occupation of the city of Puebla, Manuel Domínguez, a former highwayman, and his band began to work for the U.S. army primarily as spies and couriers. Americans baptized the group the "Mexican Spy Company." Other names that this peculiar band received are significant as they highlight the degree to which banditry and political violence conflated. Although Domínguez's group was famously constituted by former bandits, Mexicans chose to refer to it, mostly, as "*contra-guerrilla*" (counter-guerrilla) giving the group a political, albeit elusive, character.

Conclusion

By focusing on the most significant aspects of Puebla's socio-economic history from independence through the eve of the U.S. occupation (1847—1848) this chapter showed that the province in general and the city of Puebla in particular played a very important political role in national affairs during the first half of the nineteenth century. Because Puebla's interests were, to a large extent, those of its land-holding elite and of the Catholic Church, the relationship between Puebla and the national government was particularly tense during federalist administrations because of their reformist agenda.

A key component of Puebla's conservatism was its preoccupation with deterring popular mobilization and protest. As the evidence demonstrates, the elites concurred that vagrants and bandits were potential protesters and perpetrators of violence, and that fighting banditry and vagrancy was therefore a priority for both Puebla's authorities and people with decisive economic influence like Estevan de Antuñano. In the chapter I discuss banditry in connection with the wars of independence and other political uprisings. I argue that the increased popular political participation during the early nineteenth century and the extensive incorporation of bandit gangs in the struggles for independence resulted in a conflation of banditry and popular political violence. By virtue of this conflation, it is impossible to draw a line that neatly distinguishes between mere "criminality" and violent forms of protest against an unsuccessful state, or between a bandit and a *guerrillero* or a caudillo. In this way, this chapter has laid the groundwork to analyze the role of Puebla during the war with the United States and the *contra-guerrilla* of Manuel Domínguez. The next chapter examines how the protection of local political interests, chiefly the avoidance of violence and public disorder, led Puebla's authorities to negotiate the surrender of the city to the U.S. army.

Chapter 2: Puebla and the U.S. Military Occupation

The occupation of the city of Puebla by the U.S. army on May 15, 1847, marked a critical moment for Mexico in its war with the United States. Due to its geographical proximity with Mexico City (the capital of the country), Puebla was considered a major route to the heart of the country. Once American troops arrived in Puebla, what was still a distant menace for many Mexicans became a tangible threat. Yet the military occupation of Puebla by the United States might have been less shocking to the rest of the country had it entailed some memorable battles and patriotic efforts to repel the invaders. Instead, the U.S. army entered Puebla, the second largest city in Mexico in 1847, without resistance.[1] As a matter of fact, the city's authorities met with U.S. General William Jenkins Worth the night before and condoned his entrance to the city.[2]

As news of the secretive dealings that resulted in the surrender of Puebla to the U.S. began to spread, indignant Mexicans expressed anger and profound bewilderment at Puebla's choice not to fight the Americans. For many in Mexico it seemed unreasonable that Puebla--a city which as recently as 1844 had been immortalized as "the undefeated" for its fierce defense of constitutionalism and its resistance to the military attack of General Santa Anna--had capitulated in the face of an invasion of no more than 4,000 men. Subsequently, Puebla became

[1] Puebla had about 80,000 people in 1847. See, Miguel Ángel Cuenya, "Puebla en su demografía, 1650-1850. Una aproximación al tema," in Puebla de la Colonia a la Revolución. Estudios de Historia Regional (Centro de Investigaciones Históricas y Sociales, Instituto de Ciencias de la Universidad Autónoma de Puebla, Puebla, 1987), 54.

[2] General Worth's division advanced to Puebla while the rest of the troops under U.S. general-in-chief Winfield Scott were still in the city of Jalapa, Veracruz. See, Ethan Allen Hitchcock, *Fifty Years in Camp and Field: Diary of Major-General Ethan Allen Hitchcock,* ed. W.A. Crofutt (New York: Putnam Sons, 1909), 257.

a preferred target for belligerent Mexicans who insisted on portraying Puebla's authorities as unpatriotic turncoats.

Indeed, the idea that Puebla refused to cooperate with the national war effort and that its authorities capriciously turned their backs on the country in its darkest hour has dominated the historiography of the war for a long time. About a decade ago, however, historians attempted to redress the view that Puebla simply gave up on the national effort to resist the invasion.[3] The historian Alicia Tecuanhuey has attempted to demonstrate that Puebla's authorities collaborated with the federal government with funds and men. According to her, only when it was clear that the Mexican army had no chance to deter the advance of the U.S. army, were Puebla's authorities forced to make the decision not to resist the occupation to avoid a bloodbath and the destruction of the city. While Tecuanhuey's analysis of the relationship between local and national governments is an invaluable contribution to the study of Puebla during the war, her determination to vindicate Puebla's authorities prevented her from looking deeper into the political motivations and arguments of the authorities of the city's Ayuntamiento in explaining the surrender of Puebla. The purpose of this chapter is to reexamine our understanding of Puebla's reaction to the U.S. invasion by focusing on the internal social and political tensions of the time.

The view that the city of Puebla was a traitor in the war with the United States certainly needs to be revised. In light of the evidence discussed in this chapter, it is very difficult to sustain that Puebla's reaction to the occupation was uniform. Rather, Puebla seems to have presented a

[3] Alicia Tecuanhuey, "Puebla durante la invasión norteamericana," in *México al tiempo de su guerra con Estados Unidos (1846—1848),* coord., Josefina Zoraida Vázquez (Mexico: Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores-El Colegio de México-Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1997), 381-416; and Cristina Gómez Álvarez and Francisco Téllez Guerrero, "Las finanzas municipales y la guerra. El impacto de la intervención estadounidense en la ciudad de Puebla," in *Mexico en guerra (1846—1848). Perspectivas regionales*, coord., Laura Herrera Serna (Mexico: Museo Nacional de las Intervensiones-Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes, 1997), 523-542.

full range of responses varying from open collaboration, by bandits who were hired by the U.S. army; to indirect collaboration by the authorities and the high clergy; to outright hostility, manifested by the case of the guerrillas and perpetrators of low intensity violence against Americans. This view is more in line with the social and political complexities of a large urban center such as Puebla in the mid nineteenth century.

Puebla and the National War Effort

Puebla's governor, Domingo Ibarra, appointed following the triumph of the federalist *pronunciamiento* (Plan de la Ciudadela) in August 1846, initially managed to reconcile internal disputes between different political factions.[4] For a short while, Ibarra's government operated with the support of the political and economic elite as well as the ecclesiastical hierarchy, which made it easier for the administration to fulfill the state's responsibility toward national defense. By April 1847, a year after the war began, the state of Puebla had dutifully contributed both monetary and human resources for the defense of the territory.[5] However, military and political events at the national level after November 1846 affected the relationship between Puebla and the national government.

Tensions between the government of Puebla and the national government began when Governor Ibarra demanded control of monies raised locally to finance the war. He asked the central government in Mexico City that the resources raised via the *Juntas de auxilios a la patria* (Committees for the relief of the patria) be administered locally and not remitted to the national

[4] The *Plan de la Ciudadela*, proclaimed by General Mariano Salas, ousted the government of General Mariano Paredes y Arrillaga, which had overthrown José Joaquín de Herrera. The new plan called for "*Federación y Santa Anna*." (Federation and Santa Anna). See Josefina Zoraida Vázquez, "Mexico y la guerra con Estados Unidos," in *Mexico al tiempo de su guerra con Estados Unidos (1846—1848),* coord, Josefina Vázquez (Mexico: Fondo de Cultura Económica, El Colegio de México, Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores, 1998), 37.

[5] Tecuanhuey, "Puebla durante la invasión," 395.

government because they were meant to fund the State's battalion, the Batallón Libre de Puebla.[6] The national government resented Puebla's reduction of its economic contribution to the war effort.

A more serious conflict between the Pueblan state government and the central government emerged on November 19, 1846, when in an attempt to enlarge the anemic national treasury, the national government decreed a forced loan of 2 million pesos from the Catholic Church and another for an extra quarter of million pesos from affluent poblanos.[7] The affected groups received the news of the proposed forced loan with hostility. The forced loans were considered an unjust imposition that violated the principle of equity by which every sector should contribute to the war effort in like measures. The *Junta de Industria de Puebla* (Puebla's industry association) voiced disagreement with the imposition of a loan and challenged the government to respond whether it considered it fair that only "one class be made accountable for what others should pay?"[8] Clearly, the members of the Junta de Industria considered the forced loan to be abusive and resisted, as did many other affluent poblanos, the government's financial strategy. In the end, an agreement was reached: the loan to the government would be voluntary with an annual interest rate of 6 percent.[9] However, this was not a strong enough incentive for many poblanos and the sum obtained under the new arrangement was much smaller than the initially proposed forced loan.

Wealthy civilians were not the only disgruntled sector in Puebla. The Catholic Church had its own history of conflict over federalist attempts to disentail ecclesiastical property since 1833. In 1847, the old foes Vice-president Gómez Farías and Puebla's Bishop Francisco Pablo

[6] Tecuanhuey, "Puebla durante la invasión," 398.
[7] Ibid., 398. The forced loan initiative affected other Mexican entities as well, but Puebla being one of the richest cities was one of the most affected by it.
[8] Quoted in Tecuanhuey, "Puebla durante la invasión," 399.
[9] Tecuanhuey, "Puebla durante la invasión," 399-400.

Vázquez engaged in another battle. On January 11 1847, the government decreed that church property across the nation was to be disentailed and sold for 15 million pesos. Puebla's bishopric was responsible for 2 million. Outraged, Bishop Vázquez, immediately reacted to the decree reminding the national authorities that "every Catholic, regardless of his status in the government, is forced to respect church property."[10] Although the decree had caused a stir throughout Mexico, the government did not rescind its plan to acquire much needed funds through the sale of ecclesiastical property.

In February 1847, Bishop Vázquez attacked again. This time, however, his objections went beyond pious reminders. Vázquez' vociferous disagreement with the federal plan led to small-scale riots in certain neighborhoods of Puebla. To subdue the protests, Governor Ibarra sent police forces "particularly to the *barrios*" where signs of unrest had appeared. In Analco the encounter between the locals and the governor's forces resulted in three deaths and ten arrested men. [11]

According to Ibarra, who had to report on the situation to the Ministry of Justice and Ecclesiastical Affairs, the unfortunate incident had become a pretext to infuse the common people with fanatical ideas. Ibarra considered poblanos erroneously persuaded that religion was under attack by the government and asked that the promoters of the mutiny in Puebla be investigated and punished by the Ministry. In response to Ibarra's report, the Ministry of Justice and Ecclesiastical Affairs sent a letter to Bishop Vázquez. This communication included Ibarra's account and a message from Valentín Gómez Farías, Mexico's vice-president and originator of

[10] "El Dr. D. Francisco Pablo Váquez por la divina gracia de la santa sede apostólica Obispo de la Puebla de los Ángeles," Puebla 27 January 1847, Archivo General del Ayuntamiento de Puebla (henceforth AGAP), Impresos Varios 1840—1846, vol. 10, 46r.

[11] According to Hugo Leicht, the *Barrio de Analco* (Analco neighborhood) consisted of four *arrabales* (subdivisions): Huilocaltitlan, Xochititlan, Yancuitlapa and Tepetlapan. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries Analco was known as the blacksmiths' neighborhood. See, Hugo Leicht, *Las Calles de Puebla. Estudio histórico* (Puebla: Mijares, 1934).

the law ordering the confiscation of Church property. In his message, Gómez Farías held Bishop Vázquez responsible for the deaths and arrests in Analco and for promoting unrest among the population. The letter to Bishop Vázquez ended with a warning: if he consented the violation of public order was again for the same reasons, the authorities would punish him.[12]

Bishop Vázquez' response did not take long. In his note to the Minister of Justice and Ecclesiastical Affairs, Vázquez first refuted Gómez Farías' arguments to justify the confiscation of Church property. Vásquez then expressed his disapproval of the government's attempts to acquire from the Church the means to sustain itself and defend the country in the war with the United States. Closely following the complaints of Puebla's economic elites concerning the injustice of forced government loans, Vázquez complained that the law of January 11 made the clergy virtually the only sector of the population responsible for the salvation of Mexico. The Bishop also rejected the accusation of Governor Ibarra concerning the death of innocent people in Analco arguing instead that the real culprit for the loss of lives and public tranquility in the city of Puebla was the law that threatened Church property and its supporters. Bishop Vázquez rejected Ibarra's version of the Analco incident claiming that it was the governor's forces that had attacked a group of about fifty people, most of them unarmed women and youngsters whose only "crime" had been to cry "*Viva la Religión*."[13]

The conflict between Bishop Vázquez and Governor Ibarra had important consequences in the alignment of Puebla's political factions in 1847. Ibarra's attack against Vázquez caused the Ayuntamiento to distance itself from the governor and move closer to Vázquez's side because, among other things, the Ayuntamiento was persuaded that the attack on church property

[12] Letter from Andrés López de Nava to Bishop Francisco Pablo Vázquez, 3 February 1847, published in *El Republicano*, Mexico City, 4 February 1847, T. II, no. 37, 1.
[13] *El Republicano*, Mexico City, 21 February 1847, T.II, no. 54, 3-4.

posed a threat to public order in the city.[14] A pamphlet authored by a group self-identified as "the secular diocesans of Bishop Vázquez" explained that the bishops of Mexico had the right and the duty to defend Church's property.[15] The diocesans voiced their suspicion about the supposed lack of governmental resources to sustain the army. While they did not question the government's resolution to defend the country's integrity in the war with the United States, the authors of the "Vindication" considered the central government capable of defraying its own expenses. More importantly, the authors of the pamphlet cautioned that undermining the power of the church would imperil public order. Portraying the clergy as the "the sole element of morality and order," the pamphlet's authors warned Gómez Farías's *puros* (radical liberals) about the nefarious consequences of stirring up mass support for the despoliation of the Church. Imagining the political involvement of the masses in the conflict, the authors of the Vindication apprehensively concluded: "when the masses are completely perverted, who will be able to contain them? Alas! Anarchy would have reached its peak."[16]

In March 1847 the law of January 11 was derogated due, in large measure, to the strong opposition it generated among ecclesiastical authorities and conservative elites.[17] In Puebla, however, its derogation apparently failed to reduce tensions between the state's governor, the state's ecclesiastical authority, and the city's Ayuntamiento. In fact, the relationship between Ibarra's government and the city's elite began to seriously deteriorate. Early in March, when the

[14] Tecuanhuey, "Puebla durante la invasión," 401.
[15] It is possible that the opinion expressed in the pamphlet mirrored that of the Ayuntamiento given that as the diocesans, the members of the city's governing corporation sympathized with the Bishop and were men of property and education.
[16] "Vindicación del Illmo. Sr. Obispo de Puebla , por sus diocesanos seculares o sea, Zurribanda al Autor del Num. 13 de la Verdad Desnuda," (Puebla: Imp. de Anteógenes Castillero Portal de Flores, 1847), 25.
[17] [Decree of Puebla's Congress] AGAP, Cabildo Documentos, vol. 114 A, 364. A decree issued on March 15, 1847 stipulated that the law of January 11 would not be obeyed. The decree also announced that no disposition that attacked the state's sovereignty and the rights of corporations and individuals would be recognized.

Americans were already in Veracruz, some of the state's troops refused to continue to obey the state's government in the city of Puebla. In the same month a leaflet circulated in the city accusing Governor Ibarra's administration of "dictatorial pretentions" and its initial support of Gómez Farías's initiatives.[18] The pamphlet defended the conservative rebellion known as the Polkos rebellion against Gómez Farías taking place in Mexico City.[19] The solution at the national level, according to the pamphlet, was to combat Gómez Farías. At the local level the proposed solution was to strengthen and support Puebla's Congress and thus curtail the power of Governor Ibarra.[20] The rumor that Ibarra planned to remove the well-respected Cosme Furlong from military command contributed to the anger of the anti-Gómez Farías faction in Puebla's capital.[21] A new pamphlet stated that the removal of Furlong would disgust "all of Puebla" and accused Ibarra of withholding funds for national defense efforts.[22] The new pamphlet ended with the wish that the governor would step down so that "public spirit" could reemerge.[23] Since Ibarra continued in his post, a more aggressive leaflet portrayed the governor as a traitor and called for Santa Anna, at the time president and commander-in-chief, to remove him from government so

[18] "Exigencias de la época," AGAP, Juzgados, 1845—47, vol. 60, 312v.
[19] The Polkos rebellion (February 26 – March 23, 1847) By most accounts, the instigators of this conflict were the propertied sectors of the population who supported the preservation of church's privileges. Since the name *polko* was a commonly used to refer to upper class youngsters who enjoyed themselves dancing the popular polkas, the conflict came to be known as the Polkos rebellion. The contending forces in the uprising were the followers of Gómez Farías, depicted in all sources as conformed by the poor, the "masses" or the "rabble".
[20] "Desenlace de la revolución de México," *El Monitor Republicano*, Mexico City, 1 April 1847, 2.
[21] Cosme Furlong had been Governor of the state of Puebla in 1833—1834. One would think that his liberalism, attested by the fact that he had sent Bishop Vázquez into exile, would have made him close to Ibarra's convictions, but that was not the case. Or at least, poblanos did not see Domingo Ibarra and Cosme Furlong in the same group at all. See, Guy Thomson, *Puebla de los Ángeles. Industry and Society in a Mexican City, 1700—1850*, Dellplain Latin American Studies, no. 25 (Boulder, San Francisco and London: Westview Press, 1989), 212.
[22] "Ocurrencias Singulares," [March/April] Puebla 1847, Beinke Rare Books and Manuscript Library, Yale University, New Haven.
[23] Ibidem.

that an effective defense against the Americans could be organized under the command of Cosme Furlong.[24]

Despite the support that some poblanos had shown for Cosme Furlong, military authorities in Mexico City appointed Nicolás Bravo as commander general charged with organizing the defense of Puebla.[25] Aware that he was not the favorite candidate among poblanos, General Bravo assured the inhabitants of Puebla that he enjoyed the support of the authorities and of the cherished General Cosme Furlong. It appears that Bravo's address did not immediately appease the poblanos for, days later, Cosme Furlong issued a communiqué expressing his approval of Nicolás Bravo whom he praised as an "insigne patriota" (noted patriot) and "héroe de la independencia" (hero of independence).[26] But the appointment of Nicolás Bravo as military commander of Puebla did not translate into enhanced efforts to prepare the province for war. In fact, during March and April 1847 Puebla's contribution to national defense diminished notably.

The already precarious position of Governor Ibarra became even more so in mid April 1847 when he upset Santa Anna, who was in desperate search for troops. Apparently trying to avoid a new source of antagonism with his foes in the city of Puebla, Ibarra refused to cede the state's authority over Puebla's Guardia Nacional (National Guard) to the regular army command, arguing that such a concession would contravene Puebla's sovereignty.[27] Santa Anna attacked the governor for denying support for the defense of the national territory. In the aftermath of this, Ibarra stepped down as Puebla's governor on April 17, 1847.

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[24] "Salvación del Estado de Puebla, o triunfo sobre el atrevido invasor," Puebla 1847, Beinke Rare Books and Manuscript Library, Yale University, New Haven.
[25] Nicolás Bravo, 22 April 1847, Beinke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, New Haven.
[26] Cosme Furlong, "El general de brigada Cosme Furlong a los habitantes del Estado," published in *El Monitor Republicano*, Mexico City, 26 April 1847, 3.
[27] Tecuanhuey, "Puebla durante la invasión," 406.

Cerro Gordo: a turning point

The neighboring eastern state of Veracruz came under attack by Winfield Scott's army in March 1847. Domingo Ibarra, still governor of Puebla, sent troops to defend the port-city. However, the U.S. bombardment destroyed or disabled a considerable number of buildings and the population suffered severely during the siege. Veracruz resisted for over two weeks before capitulating on March 29, 1847. Despite the fact that the fall of Veracruz took a toll on Puebla's armed forces, the defeat did not extinguish Puebla's sense of responsibility for national defense. On March 25, Puebla's Congress resolved that the state's government should deploy all available forces to repel Scott's army. All outstanding balances owed to the state's treasury in the city of Puebla had to be paid, and every person who owned either a saber, a lance, or any kind of firearm was to present it for the defense of the state.[28] Similarly, on April 7 Puebla's Ayuntamiento issued a communiqué invoking patriotism and insisting that internal conflicts should not prevail over rebuffing the U.S. military menace. The document considered the prospect of "losing our nationality" to be the most critical threat facing Mexico.[29]

However, the belligerent tone of Puebla soon changed. A possible explanation for this may be that the inhabitants of the city of Puebla felt penalized by the state Congress' resolution requiring immediate payment of debts to the state treasuries. Having grown resentful about the heavy burden that the war effort placed on them, poblanos decided not to cooperate with this effort. The turning point which undermined Puebla's resistance to the U.S. invasion was Santa Anna's defeat at Cerro Gordo on April 18, 1847. The profound disappointment that this defeat

[28] "Domingo Ibarra, Gobernador constitucional del Estado libre y soberano de Puebla a sus habitantes." 25 March 1847, AGAP, Leyes y Decretos , vol. 11, 97r.
[29] José Rafael Isunza, et. al., AGAP, Impresos varios, 1840—1846, vol. 10 (lomo negro), 49r.

caused was partly due to Santa Anna's portrayal of Cerro Gordo as "impregnable."[30] To the poblanos and many other Mexicans, if Santa Anna's army had proven incapable of repelling the Americans, the project of fighting with decimated forces began to look rather quixotic.[31] The contributors to the *Apuntes para la historia de la guerra entre México y Estados Unidos*, written by a mix of public figures and intellectuals while Mexico was still occupied by the United States, noted that the arrival of the defeated troops from Cerro Gordo to Puebla "produced a deep pain and bitter discouragement" among the population.[32] Thus, the disgraceful defeat of Mexican forces at Cerro Gordo appears to have marked the moment in which patriotism gave way to pragmatism in the hearts and minds of poblanos who realized their city was next on the list of battlegrounds. The memory of the destruction of Veracruz was only too recent and must have influenced the decision of Puebla's urban authorities not to sacrifice their city. They realized that there was no point in resisting the Americans from a military point of view and that failing to reach an agreement with the invaders was likely to result in a significant loss of control over the population. Puebla's authorities feared that active military engagement of the city in the war would turn into an opportunity for widespread violence, which would jeopardize their dominance and endanger their privileges. Despite the relative calm of the 1830s and early 1840s, unresolved social problems like vagrancy and banditry were indicators of uneven socioeconomic

[30] Against the opinion of some of his best engineers, the Mexican commander-in-chief deemed the Cerro Gordo an ideal location to stop the advance of Scott's troops. In the end, nothing could persuade Santa Anna to change his mind but the inadequacy of the chosen terrain was evident at the time of the U.S. attack, when the Mexican army was unable to defend the site. See *Apuntes para la historia de la Guerra entre México y Estados Unidos*, prologue by Josefina Zoraida Vázquez (Mexico: Centro Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes, 1991) 221-227.

[31] José Fernando Ramírez, former ministry of Foreign Affairs, in a letter dated on May 8 1847 wrote: "Our situation is really desperate; everything, absolutely everything is lost and according to the course of events it is dubious that independence could be saved […] Being impossible, as it is, the continuation of the war with prosperous events, the war will inevitably conduct us to be conquered […]." See José Fernando Ramírez, *Mexico durante su guerra con los Estados Unidos*. *Documentos inéditos o muy raros para la historia de Mexico,* edited by Carlos Pereyra and Genaro García (Mexico: Vda. De Bouret, 1905), 271.

[32] *Apuntes para la historia*, 243.

distribution, which was fertile ground for unrest and opportunism. With no political outlet for dissent among the general population, Puebla had a restive population. Elite preoccupation for maintaining public order, which predated the imminent U.S. invasion, intensified. In fact, the available records show that at least from February 1847, regulating public life became a major concern for Puebla's authorities. This comes as no surprise since it was in February that the relationship between the Catholic Church and Mexico's government turned hostile because the latter insisted on upholding the law that required the disentailment of church property. In Puebla there had been one violent encounter related to this conflict—the protest of Analco, and in Mexico City the issue had started to deeply divide the population and heat up the political climate. Given simmering unrest, the authorities in Puebla made every effort to minimize the opportunity for social and political conflict.

On February 8, as the city prepared for the festivities that preceded Holy Week, the prefect prohibited masquerades after the last day of carnival. Likewise, the decree warned against the use of costumes that "ridiculed religion, offended morality, [as well as those which insulted] an individual or a corporation."[33] On February 25, with the rebellion of the *Polkos* already underway in Mexico City, the prefect of Puebla prohibited all kinds of public entertainment during Lent and banned the selling of hard beverages. The new decree also prohibited visiting the *barrios* (outlying/popular neighborhoods) of San Pablito and Xanenetla, where public gatherings were forbidden.[34] Judging from the close attention that Puebla's authorities paid to matters of public order in the city, the feeling of volatility must have been palpable.

[33] "Disposiciones para contener los abusos que se notan en las diversiones de máscaras," AGAP, Leyes y Decretos, vol. 11, Puebla, 8 February 1847, 62r.
[34] "Prevenciones para evitar los desórdenes en los días santos," Puebla, 25 February 1847, AGAP, Leyes y Decretos, vol. 11, 63r.

Immediately after the defeat of Cerro Gordo, Puebla's political authorities knew that the city would not resist the U.S. army. Proof of this is that on April 21, just four days after the battle, the Ayuntamiento decided to name a commission to talk to the Americans, request guarantees for the city's inhabitants, and demand respect for private and ecclesiastical property. Also in the aftermath of Cerro Gordo, Rafael Isunza, a former member of the Ayuntamiento, was elected governor and gave orders–presumably following the advice of the municipal corporation—that all governmental offices be transferred to the town of Atlixco and that the faculties normally invested in the governor and the prefect be deposited in the Ayuntamiento.[35] These measures caused discomfort among the military authorities who took the relocation of the legislative and executive powers as indication that the city of Puebla would surrender to the U.S. invader. To redirect Puebla toward belligerence, General Nicolás Bravo, recently appointed commander general of the state of Puebla, declared the state under siege and set out to organize armed resistance to no avail.[36] Urban authorities insisted that the bulk of the state's military resources had been lost in Veracruz and Cerro Gordo and consequently no means existed to resist Scott's army. In the meantime, the central military authority in Mexico City requested that General Bravo travel to the capital to command a section of the army. Bravo's departure from Puebla gave the Ayuntamiento a clear path to continue with its plan to negotiate the surrender of Puebla. Another factor that unintentionally facilitated the strategy of the Ayuntamiento was a decree by the Minister of War on May 8, 1847. It stipulated that for states declared under siege, the legislatures, governors and senior tribunals were not subject to the authority of state military commands.[37] This decree thus confirmed indirectly the measures taken by Puebla's congress

[35] Tecuanhuey, "Puebla durante la invasión," 407.
[36] Ibidem.
[37] Ignacio Trigueros, México City, 8 May 1847, Centro de Estudios de Historia de México Carso (henceforth CEHM-Carso), Bandos del Distrito Federal, 1847, piece 62.

and governor to temporarily transfer the executive power to the city's Ayuntamiento. Although the true objective of the decree, was to transfer from state authorities to military commanders decision making authority regarding the defense of the besieged territories, in the case of Puebla, the decree confirmed the Ayuntamiento as the crucial decision-maker on the eve of the U.S. invasion.

From Cerro Gordo, Santa Anna went to Orizaba and then to the city of Puebla still confident that he would obtain support. He wrote to the minister of war that "the resources of the state of Puebla as well as the immediate assistance of the supreme government will make the prompt reorganization of the army possible." Santa Anna calculated that his army could have "about ten or twelve thousand men ready to fight the invaders."[38] Promptly after his arrival, Santa Anna asked the recently installed governor Rafael Isunza to summon all available men and armament to be immediately deployed for Puebla's defense. Contrary to what the commander in chief wanted to hear, Isunza declared that Puebla lacked the resources given that four artillery pieces and about 300 *fusiles* had been lost in Cerro Gordo.[39] Embittered by the governor's response, Santa Anna ordered the confiscation of horses to bolster his cavalry and tried to impose a loan of 30,000 pesos on the population, which only added to the frustration of the city's inhabitants. In the end, Santa Anna was unable to extract more than 10,000 pesos from poblanos.[40] Displeased and desperate, Santa Anna accused Puebla's authorities of passivity during the twenty something days after the defeat of Cerro Gordo. The commander-in-chief came close to calling Governor Isunza a traitor because instead of planning the defense of the

[38] Antonio López de Santa Anna to the Ministry of War, 9 May 1847, published in "Alcance al *Diario del Gobierno* No. 59," Mexico City, 10 May 1847.
[39] *Apuntes para la historia de la guerra*, 244.
[40] Ibidem. The authors of the *Apuntes* criticize the reaction of Bishop Vázquez and, in general, the ecclesiastic sector which according to them lacked in patriotism. See also Roa, *Recuerdos de la invasión norteamericana*, vol. 2, 130.

city, the governor had allowed the city's prefect to publish a *bando* (official communiqué) that anticipated the U.S. occupation of Puebla.[41]

Puebla in the Eve of the U.S. Occupation

In Puebla, the three-week period between the battle of Cerro Gordo and the arrival of the U.S. troops in the village of Nopalucan just a few miles away from the city, was one of increasing tension and uncertainty. During this time a governor had resigned, a new one had been appointed, and the relationship between the authorities in Puebla and the national government had become tense. Fear among the population grew with the influx of thoroughly demoralized Mexican troops. The Ayuntamiento, which had become the only recognizable authority on the eve of the U.S. occupation, quickly realized the flammable potential of the current state of affairs and strove to minimize the possibility of social disarray. An example of what could happen had already taken place in the city of Jalapa, Veracruz where the American invasion unleashed a plundering of houses and stores.[42]

On April 23, about three weeks before the U.S. takeover, the Ayuntamiento suggested that an *ad hoc* delegation be formed to deal with matters of public security. In order to avoid a massive prison break out, municipal authorities arranged the transfer of prisoners from the city's jail and presidio to a "safer place." [43] Three days later, in explicit, though premature anticipation of the foreign occupation, the Ayuntamiento issued a decree notifying the population that "as

[41] Roa, *Recuerdos de la invasión norteamericana*, vol. 2, 131. José Fernando Ramírez corroborates this information but blames the *bando* on the "government of Puebla." See, Ramírez, *México durante su guerra*, 282.
[42] Carmen Blázquez Domínguez, "Presencia norteamericana en Veracruz durante el conflicto de 1847," in *México en guerra (1846—1848.) Perspectivas regionales*, coord. Laura Herrera Serna (Mexico: Museo Nacional de las Intervenciones-Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes, 1997), 666.
[43] [Measures proposed by the Ayuntamiento to conserve public order], Puebla, 23 April 1847, AGAP, Cabildo Documentos, vol. 114 A, 386v.

soon as the enemy's troops approach the capital" all *pulque* (a nutritious beverage with low alcoholic content) and liquor stores should be shut down. The decree also stated that "when the troops enter the city" everyone should seclude themselves at home until the Americans "had taken possession of the quarters," and even then, any gathering exceeding three people, as well as carrying arms, was strictly forbidden.[44] A revised version of this document was issued right before the troops under General Worth entered the city. In the updated decree, the Ayuntamiento prohibited: any commercial activity at "*fogones, calles, plazas* and *mesones*" (streets, plazas, and inns); the use of bells, fireworks, and similar devices; the "*voceo de papeles*" (public divulgation of written statements); as well as posting of anonymous texts. No food vending would be permitted either. In short, almost every manifestation of public life was to be suspended until further notice. Moreover, in the same document the Ayuntamiento reminded the citizens that civil authorities would remain recognizable by the use of the "*bastón con borlas"* (a baton of authority.) Foreseeing that the U.S. occupation of the city could open opportunities to challenge their authority, the members of the Ayuntamiento specifically noted that only those with authority to do so should carry the *bastón con borlas*.[45] Other measures to prevent disorder sought to ensure supply of basic needs for the most volatile sectors of the population. On April 29, the Ayuntamiento arranged for the Catholic Church to take responsibility for feeding the poor at various nunneries, and asked the Bishop to make sure that some affluent individuals provided funds for this kind of assistance.[46]

The presence of the defeated but belligerent Santa Anna caused anxiety and discomfort among Puebla's authorities who, apparently, could not wait for the commander-in-chief to

[44] "José Juan Sánchez, prefecto de esta capital y su Departamento a sus habitantes," Puebla, 29 April 1847, AGAP, Cabildo Documentos, vol. 114 A, 380r.
[45] [Decree issued by the Ayuntamiento of Puebla], Puebla, 15 May 1847, AGAP, Leyes y Decretos, vol. 11, 65r.
[46] Cristina Gómez Álvarez and Francisco Téllez Guerrero, "Las finanzas municipales y la guerra," 532.

depart.[47] The authors of the *Apuntes para la historia de la guerra*, remembered that "far from reviving its combative spirit with the presence of Santa Anna's troops, Puebla desired that they abandon the site, and considered them like a "lighting rod which attracts the tempest."[48] Nothing was farther from the interests of the Ayuntamiento than the stirring up of the population in what the authorities considered a futile and dangerous attempt to resist the advance of U.S. troops. The presence of Santa Anna in Puebla jeopardized the Ayuntamiento's opportunity to negotiate the capitulation of the city with General Worth, who on May 14 1847, had sent a message inviting Puebla's authorities to discuss issues concerning the eventual occupation of the city.[49]

Unable to obtain much support from elites and authorities in Puebla, Santa Anna left for Amozoc, where he planned to interrupt the advance of the enemy. However, Santa Anna's plan was a fiasco; misinformation about the location of the enemy placed his forces in a vulnerable position forcing them to march back to Puebla having accomplished nothing in terms of defending the city or halting the Americans. The events that followed Santa Anna's return to Puebla confirm that the Ayuntamiento had reason to be preoccupied about loosing control over the population.

By all accounts, the reappearance of Santa Anna's troops and the sight of a few wounded men immediately instilled patriotic sentiment among the common people.[50] According to the *Apuntes*, the "populacho" (rabble) yelled *vivas* to Puebla and Santa Anna and death to the Yankees and continued shouting "frenetically" after a brief address by the commander in chief.[51] Despite the alleged display of enthusiasm, Santa Anna neither stayed in Puebla to meet the

[47] See Roa, *Recuerdos de la invasión norteamericana*, 130; and Orozco y Berra, *Relación de los sucesos acaecidos en la ciudad de Puebla del 14 al 27 de mayo de 1847* (Mexico: El Tiempo, 1901), 8.
[48] *Apuntes para la historia de la guerra*, 245.
[49] Orozco y Berra, *Relación de los sucesos*, 7.
[50] Santa Anna's report, published in *Diario del Gobierno*, Mexico City, 16 May 1847, T. IV, no. 65, 4; and *Apuntes para la historia de la guerra*, 246.
[51] *Apuntes para la historia de la guerra,* 246.

enemy nor employed the people who supposedly acclaimed him. Accusing Puebla's governor and military commander of failing to provide means to organize the defense, Santa Anna excused himself and hit the road again.[52] At that point, realizing that the general was not going to return to the city, the crowd became suddenly aware that "there was no point" for their enthusiasm and "in absence of an enemy to combat, [the crowd] rushed to the Alameda […] began uprooting the rose bushes, demolishing the picturesque balustrades and smashing everything; [the crowd] would have destroyed everything," reflected the witness, "had the local authorities not intervened."[53]

The previous testimony leaves no doubt that the destruction of the Alameda was an act of protest. The Alameda of Puebla was hardly randomly selected by the upset multitude. It was a site that carried a lot of significance. The Alameda was identified with the rich. It was their preferred spot to spend leisure hours. It was in the Alameda that wealthy *señoritas* enjoyed their *paseos*, showed off their jewelry and lavish dresses, and where upper class courtship took place.[54] The Alameda's entrance, statues, fountains, rose bushes, and other ornaments clearly identified the garden with the elite of the city. Considering the significance of the Alameda of Puebla, it is reasonable to conclude that the attack was an expression of anger, frustration, and disrespect for the oligarchy. It is likely that the lower classes felt the military and political

[52] Santa Anna retired to San Martin Texmelucan, almost midway between Mexico City and Puebla.
[53] *Apuntes para la historia de la guerra*, 246. Puebla's *populacho* fury was not the first instance of popular violence in the context of the war with the United States. According to Carmen Blázquez Domínguez, there had been plundering of houses and stores in the city of Jalapa (in the state of Veracruz) under circumstances that resemble the situation at Puebla. On April 18, the political and judicial authorities of Jalapa had abandoned the city because of the approaching enemy. The Ayuntamiento was left with the responsibility to deal with the Americans on its own. See, Blázquez, "Presencia norteamericana en Veracruz," 666.
[54] Albert G. Brackett, *General Lane's Brigade in Central Mexico by Albert G. Brackett, M.D., Late an officer in the U.S. Volunteer Service* (Cincinnati: H.W. Derby & Co., Publishers, New York: J.C. Derby, 1854), 136.

leaders of the city had given up their responsibility to protect the population and to defend it from an approaching invader.

Aside from the damage to the Alameda, other violent acts took place between May 14 and 15. According to an account attributed to Manuel Orozco y Berra, a first-hand witness, the small riot that started in the Alameda continued through the night when the crowd attempted to break into some houses in the neighborhood of San José.[55] Also on the night of the 14th jail prisoners "in combination with the *populacho*," aware of the diminished security forces that guarded the prison, "made repeated attempts to break out" which were only barely impeded by the appearance of the Ayuntamiento*'s* functionaries.[56]

Surprisingly, evidence of the riotous behavior of the common people in Puebla has coexisted with the most prevalent view that poblanos were indifferent to the U.S. occupation.[57] Echoing the opinion of other contemporaries, Santa Anna confessed to being disillusioned given the lack of patriotism, commenting that "everyone seemed resigned to receive the invader's yoke."[58] To this day we lack an explanation for the apparent contradiction in the story. Were poblanos apathetic or were they in the mood for change or redress? In historical records, socially disruptive events are, more often than not, portrayed or remembered from the perspective of the dominant sectors.[59] Significant contradictions in versions of the same events may indicate events

[55] Orozco y Berra, *Relación de los sucesos acaecidos en la ciudad de Puebla del 14 al 27 de mayo de 1847* (Mexico: El Tiempo, 1901), 10. Manuel Orozco y Berra (1816—1881) was left in charge of representing Puebla's government once governor Rafael Isunza had retreated to Atlixco. In May 1847, Orozco was a young man who experienced firsthand the events he describes in the diary. For over half a century, Orozco's diary remained a seldom consulted manuscript until 1901 when Nicolás León, a well known physician, naturalist and antiquarian, published it.
[56] Orozco y Berra, *Relación de los sucesos*, 8.
[57] Bustamente, *El Nuevo Bernal*, 405; and Roa, *Recuerdos de la invasión norteamericana*, vol. 2, 130.
[58] Quoted in Roa, *Recuerdos de la invasión norteamericana*, vol. 2, 132.
[59] This was one of the major contributions of the New Social History school, which is best represented in the works of Edward P. Thompson, Eric Hobsbawm, Douglas Hay, and George Rudé. Most recently the school of Subaltern Studies has reminded us that most historical records are a production of those who hold power.

or developments that are particularly relevant, threatening, or confusing to society so that no unified view exists of them. It is impossible to believe that the *same people* who on a given day are apathetic and resigned to foreign domination, wake up the next day demanding weapons to combat the invaders. It is likely, therefore, that these accounts talk about different "peoples," that is, different social sectors of Puebla's population. In fact, the sources already indicate this by identifying the group that attacked the Alameda, the neighborhood of San José, and attempted a prisoners' breakout as "*gente popular*" or "*populacho*," (the lower classes or rabble.) The sources that describe apathy and resignation among the population of Puebla are not specific about a group of people. Thus, the poblanos' attitude with respect to the eventual military occupation of their city varied by social group as they reacted differently in the context of heightened tension and uncertainty about their immediate future. While the lower classes were restive, the available evidence suggests that middle and upper sectors remained quiet, leaving to the authorities the task of getting the *populacho* back in line and making the best possible bargain with the Americans. Is it possible that, as some sources suggest, the *populacho* intended to defend the city? Unfortunately, there is no definitive evidence. However, from the available information about the popular conduct on the eve of the U.S. occupation, at least one conclusion can be drawn in connection with the social atmosphere in the city of Puebla: the *populacho* of Puebla was anything but calm or lethargic. Popular violence on the eve of the U.S. occupation had a profound impact on Puebla. Preoccupied by the demonstrations of popular irritability, many poblanos–including those who felt that Puebla should not have surrendered—willingly abandoned the idea of opposing the U.S. occupation since resistance would have increased the possibility of heightened popular violence.[60]

[60] "Copia de una Carta escrita en Puebla por persona de todo crédito," Puebla, 26 May 1847, published in *El Monitor Republicano*, Mexico City, 5 June 1847, 3.

Close to midnight on May 14, 1847, the members of the Ayuntamiento resolved that a commission should swiftly meet with General Worth to communicate the conditions under which the Ayuntamiento was willing to allow the occupation of the city.[61] In what came to be known as the Chachapa Accords, the Ayuntamiento requested the U.S. army to "inviolably" respect Catholic faith and worship, as well as ecclesiastical and private property. The Ayuntamiento also demanded that it remain as the civil authority of the city, specifying that "if the General [Worth] deemed it pertinent that in addition to the already exposed precepts an extra tenet be necessary, especially concerning the conservation of public tranquility and order," the Ayuntamiento should be consulted and its decisions respected. The Ayuntamiento asked General Worth that only regular troops, that is, military academy-trained soldiers and not his volunteers be allowed to enter the city of Puebla.[62] Although this may sound like a minuscule detail, if we take into consideration the fame that the volunteers had acquired in Mexico as American riffraff, the Ayuntamiento's intention to keep them out of the city confirms its anxiety about upsetting the precarious social balance. U.S. volunteers were considered too fond of alcohol and prone to stealing. The last thing that the Ayuntamiento needed was to increase the ranks of possible instigators of disorder. Finally, the Ayuntamiento requested that the jails under municipal jurisdiction remain under the control of local forces until they could be replaced by U.S. forces.[63]

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[61] General Worth was later criticized by U.S. General-in-chief, Winfield Scott when he arrived to Puebla later in May1847. Scott considered that Worth had granted too much. It should also be call to attention that the attitude of Puebla's Ayuntamiento was not unprecedented; Jalapa's municipal authorities had bargained in a very similar way in mid April 1847, see Carmen Blázquez Domínguez, "Presencia norteamericana en Veracruz durante el conflicto de 1847," in *México en guerra (1846—1848.) Perspectivas regionales*, coord. Laura Herrera Serna (Mexico: Museo Nacional de las Intervenciones-Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes, 1997), 668.

[62] [Draft of petitions to U.S. General Worth], Puebla May 1847, AGAP, Juzgados 1847—48, vol. 22, 76r; and **"**Acta de la sesión del sábado 15 de mayo de 1847," AGAP, Actas de Cabildo, 1847 vol. 114, 136v-137r.

[63] Orozco y Berra, *Relación de los sucesos*, 38-40. According to the daily *El Republicano*, judge Duran protested to Scott about the decision no to let him continue in charge of the processes against the

In sum, the core of the accords aimed to preserve public order and guarantee the interests of propertied sectors of the population. Clearly the "surrender" did not mean relinquishing all power to the U.S. army. On the contrary, the Ayuntamiento was explicit about the necessity of their continuing to exercise civil authority over the city's population during the U.S. takeover.

To many Mexicans including some from the state of Puebla, the Ayuntamiento's resolution to arrange the peaceful occupation of the city amounted to national treason. As late as May 15, 1847 the *Monitor Republicano*, one of the most important newspapers in Mexico City published a piece entitled *"¡A las armas poblanos!*" ('To arms, poblanos!') in a last attempt to incite patriotism among poblanos. This bellicose piece read: "No peace, no transactions. Blood and only blood should be your program. North-Americans' blood and traitors' blood."[64] Most likely the author was making indirect reference to the members of the Ayuntamiento and to Bishop Vázquez.

Opinion was divided as to who the culprits of Puebla's inaction were. Some people blamed the military leaders, others blamed the Ayuntamiento, others blamed the ecclesiastical authorities, and yet others considered that the general apathy of all poblanos had inevitably led to the surrender of the city. The author of a private letter published in *the Monitor Republicano* on June 5 1847, asserted that if Governor Isunza and Baltazar Furlong, the city's prefect and brother of General Cosme Furlong, "had wanted to deliver the city from infamy and opprobrium" they could have enlisted 4,000 men to join Santa Anna's army for the defense of the city. The disgruntled author of the letter emphasized the lack of patriotism and denounced some 60

Mexicans accused of murdering American soldiers and Scott agreed to return the accused to Puebla's judicial authority. See, *El Republicano*, Mexico City, 9 June 1847, T. II, no. 160, 4.

[64] "¡A las armas poblanos!" *El Monitor Republicano*, Mexico City, 15 May 1847, 3.

military officers in Puebla who had presented themselves before U.S. general William Jenkins Worth to swear they would not attack the Americans.[65]

Similarly, the author of another letter expressed his disbelief about Puebla's alleged lack of monetary resources arguing that, in 1844, "Mr. Furlong had been able to collect money and people from everywhere."[66] Puebla's clergy received a great deal of criticism for the surrender of the city. Even Carlos María de Bustamante, a fervent Catholic, censured the attitude of some clerics. "[I]nstead of preaching in favor of the defense of the fatherland," Bustamente alleged, "priests and brotherhoods were guiding, in devotional processions, four or five thousand men that would have done better carrying a fusil. (riffle or firearm)."[67] The contributors to the *Apuntes para la historia de la guerra* also exposed the alleged indolence of Puebla's Bishop in light of the country's situation, highlighting Vazquez's swift actions to assure that Church property remained out of reach from the needy Mexican government.[68] Finally, mixing sarcasm and wrath, writing under the pseudonym of "Baltasar Nicodemus" a contributor to the *Monitor Republicano* blamed poblanos for deceiving the nation about their intention to fight the Americans. "[I]t was said that in the Pinal there were 10 guerrillas," Nicodemus informs his imaginary correspondent, "[…] it was said that in Amozoc every manufacturer of spurs and bits was producing nothing but lances and daggers […] But what do you think happened? […] that Winfield Scott managed to sneak into Puebla […] without a single person telling him 'go to hell!' Poblanos are so timid!"[69]

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[65] "Copia de una carta escrita en Puebla por persona de todo crédito," Puebla, 26 May 1847," published in *El Monitor Republicano*, Mexico City, 5 June 1847, 3.
[66] [Letter written in Atlixco,] 24 May 1847, published in *El Monitor Republicano*, Mexico City, 5 June 1847, 4.
[67] Bustamante, *El Nuevo Bernal*, 404.
[68] *Apuntes para la historia de la guerra*, 244.
[69] "Correspondencia de Baltasar Nicodemus a su compadre Pánfilo Oblea," 29 May 1847, published in *El Monitor Republicano*, Mexico City, 17 June 1847, 3.

On May 15, 1847, the day of the entrance of U.S. troops in Puebla, the atmosphere of the city was one of tense expectation and uncertainty. One particular scene seems to have captivated the attention of many witnesses, namely, the moment when U.S. soldiers, already in possession of the main square, left their weapons in "*pabellones*" (bunched together forming a hut-shaped pile) and threw themselves to the ground to rest from the long journey while several thousand poblanos gathered around the same plaza blocking access to it. Although suspenseful, the scene becomes anti-climatic as reported in sources that noted "*el pueblo*" (the people) encircling the plaza were merely observing.[70] This scene would become one of the most lamented episodes once Mexico had lost its capital to the U.S. forces. In retrospect, the passivity of the poblanos became unpardonable to the contributors to the *Apuntes*, who stimulated the resentment of their audience by recalling that "without a doubt, more than ten thousand people filled [Puebla's] plaza and its entrances [and, therefore,] just one cry, a single effort, the heart of one brave man would have sufficed to besiege the Americans […] But nothing was done!"[71] In a very similar vein, another letter describing the situation in Puebla during the occupation confirms the feeling of unpredictability but adds a component of volatility to it. According to the author of the letter, the people "tolerated" the Yankees and "looked at them with indifference" because they were aware of the non-confrontational behavior of the authorities. "[H]owever, the author continues, a single spark could inflame [the people], [who] only hoped that their attempt [to attack the U.S. troops] would not be in vain and be assisted by our army."[72] It is difficult to establish how close

[70] Most depictions of this event describe the multitude abstractedly as "*el pueblo*." However, a letter and the account of Roa qualify the mass gathering around the Americans as "*la plebe.*" See, Bustamente, *El Nuevo Bernal*, 385; *Apuntes para la historia de la guerra*, 247; Orozco y Berra, *Relación de los sucesos*, 11; "Puebla 16 Mayo 1847" in *Diario del Gobierno*, Mexico City, 29 May 1847, T. IV, no. 78, 2; and Roa, *Recuerdos de la invasión norteamericana*, 141.
[71] *Apuntes para la historia de la guerra*, 247.
[72] "Copia de una carta escrita en Puebla por persona de todo crédito, Puebla, 26 May 1847," in *El Monitor Republicano*, Mexico City, 5 June 1847, 4.

to the truth these speculations were. It is crucial to point out, however, that their reconstruction of the facts seems to be heavily informed by the events that took place in Mexico City during the U.S. occupation of the main plaza in September 1847, when Mexicans gathered around the main square to watch the Americans take over the national palace, and a man among the multitude dared to incite his fellow Mexicans to stone the invaders.[73]

Additional details scattered in the sources magnify the image of the people surrounding Puebla's plaza in May 1847. For example, we know that there were whistles coming from the rooftops. Despite the orders of civil authorities, the inhabitants of the city's center did not seclude themselves, but actually opened their windows and stood on their balconies observing the occupation of the city. Puebla's central streets began to fill before all the U.S. troops entered the city.[74] Thus, the available information about the events immediately before and after the appearance of U.S. troops in Puebla makes it possible to revise the traditional view that has oversimplified Puebla's response, emphasizing acquiescence and ignoring actors other than the dominant sectors of the population.

Dynamics of Occupation

After the meeting with General Worth in Chachapa, members of the Ayuntamiento had high expectations of conserving a significant degree of authority over local matters. However, this prospect began to dissipate sooner than these authorities could have anticipated. In reality, the

[73] The *Apuntes*' description of poblanos' passivity before the American occupation of the plaza resembles what Guillermo Prieto, one of the contributors of the *Apuntes*, says about the response of the people to the American occupation of the *zócalo* in Mexico City in his "Charlas domingueras," which appeared for the first time in the *Revista Universal*, Mexico City, September and October 1847. See. Guillermo Prieto, *Mi Guerra del 47*, prologue by María del Carmen Ruiz Castañeda, introduction by Miguel Angel Castro (México: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2006), 70-72.

[74] "Puebla 16 Mayo 1847," in *Diario del Gobierno*, Mexico City, 29 May 1847, T. IV, no. 78, 2; *Relación de los sucesos*, 10-11; Roa, *Recuerdos de la invasión norteamericana*, 141.

relationship with U.S. authorities did not go as smoothly as the members of the Ayuntamiento had wished.

The diary attributed to Manuel Orozco y Berra is an invaluable source to document the dynamics of the occupation and relations between Pueblan and U.S. authorities. Although the account barely covers a two-week period, the wealth of detail regarding the interaction between the Ayuntamiento and the American officers makes it an important document. The *Relación* includes a description of one incident that underscores the intricate relationship between Pueblan authorities, city dwellers, and the occupying forces.

Contravening the Ayuntamiento's prohibition of congregating in public, on May 17, 1847, a large group of people gathered in a bookshop on the occasion of the issuing of the first pronouncement by General Worth. Soon after, two members of the Ayuntamiento arrived at the scene and dissolved the gathering resulting in the detention of one individual, apparently a *lépero* (a vulgar/poor individual) who insulted one of the authorities. When the bookshop incident reached General Worth's ears, he appeared to feel sorry for the arrest of the Mexican and requested that the members of the Ayuntamiento visit him to discuss the matter. Even when the representatives of the municipal organization assured him that the arrest of the offender was only temporary, the U.S. general insisted on his release. Although apparently recognized, the authority of the Ayuntamiento was being undermined by the presence of the U.S. army. Still not completely intimidated by Worth's confrontation, the Ayuntamiento protested the publication of the announcement which had caused the bookshop incident in the first place. From the perspective of the Ayuntamiento the publication violated the Chachapa accords and scorned the corporation's authority.

By May 20, only five days after the arrival of U.S. troops in Puebla, the *Ayuntamiento* was debating its own dissolution. That the municipal body continued to function implied a degree of acquiescence that was very difficult to justify, especially because Worth's announcement made it look as though one of the Ayuntamiento's main purposes was to meet the needs of the occupying army. In what seemed like a very loose interpretation of the Chachapa accords, in its 4th article Worth's announcement stipulated: "Whatever the occupying forces and the additional [U.S.] forces that approach Puebla may need will be supplied, or ordered to be supplied, by the city's prefect or the civil authorities …." [75]

Contrary to what the Ayuntamiento expected, more conflicts loomed ahead. Worth was unwilling to modify the terms in which the article about supplies had been couched. The U.S. general also refused to let the Mexicans accused of murdering two American soldiers remain under Mexican jurisdiction; even worse, on May 22 Worth "abolished" the authority of Puebla's Congress and government, thereby absolving poblanos from any obedience to those institutions.[76] Worth's orders were a response to the city prefect's ill-fated attempt to make the presence of Puebla's government felt among poblanos by posting a set of orders issued by the state's government. By May 25, the members of the Ayuntamiento were persuaded that the only way out of this difficult situation was to dissolve the body. However, in this case, General Worth also refused to accept the will of the city's authorities. For a while, the prefect alone,

[75] Orozco y Berra, *Relación de los sucesos acaecidos en Puebla*, 41.
[76] It can be said that the lack of communication between the city's prefect and the Ayuntamiento led to Worth's hostile response. It is worthwhile to point out that according to the Ayuntamiento's records, Worth had "absolved" poblanos from allegiance to the Mexican Government. However, Worth's orders of May 22nd refer to Puebla state's congress and government, not to the Mexican government. See, Orozco y Berra, *Relación de los sucesos*, 26, 32, 43-44, and 46-47.

Baltazar Furlong, represented the city but a new Ayuntamiento was installed on August 11, 1847.[77]

The conflictual relation between Puebla's Ayuntamiento and General Worth was partly due to Worth's distrust, which led him to make questionable decisions, accusing Puebla's authorities of trying to poison the entire U.S. army or constantly spreading alarm among his forces about supposedly imminent Mexican attacks. The relationship between local and occupying authorities changed, although not necessarily to the advantage of Puebla's authorities, once General Winfield Scott arrived in the city at the end of May 1847. General Scott was in thorough disagreement with the measures Worth had taken during the occupation of Puebla. The commander was especially concerned about Worth's having granted terms of capitulation to Puebla, which he considered completely inappropriate and refused to recognize.[78]

While Scott was in Puebla, there was another important point of friction with civil authorities. Arguing that many of the prisoners in Puebla's jail had been unjustly incarcerated, Scott ordered the liberation of a significant number of them. Profoundly disturbed by this, Baltazar Furlong wrote to the American military governor first on June 27 and later on July 2, requesting the apprehension of the ex-convicts; but he implored in vain.[79] In fact, about a dozen famous robbers recently liberated were already working for the U.S. army.

The significance of the U.S. occupation of Puebla went far beyond the interaction between authorities. It impacted groups in various ways. Apparently, for propertied poblanos and merchants alike, the arrival of Americans and their dollars was an unexpected but welcome economic stimulus. Not only did Americans lift customs payments which immediately relieved

[77] Tecuanhuey, "Puebla durante la invasión," 410.
[78] Hitchcock, *Fifty Years,* 258-259; and *Diario Oficial*, Mexico City, 24 July 1847, T. IV, no. 133, 2.
[79] Letter of Baltazar Furlong to the Military Governor of Puebla, 2 July 1847, United States National Archives (henceforth NA), Office of the Adjutant General (RG 94), Mexican War Army of Occupation Miscellaneous Papers, box no. 3.

merchants, but soon after the occupation of the city, the "elevated classes" as one observer called them, began doing business with the Americans.[80] The new inhabitants and the city in general were in need of pretty much everything, from food and beverages to lodging, clothing and even entertainment and the merchants of Puebla were willing to provide it all as long as it was paid for.[81] In a personal letter to his friend, a poblano estimated that the monthly expenses of each U.S. soldier were about forty pesos. To that amount, he added that the U.S. army had six or seven thousand beasts that consumed two thousand corn *cargas* a day.[82] It was not required that merchandise be immediately paid for in cash because suppliers were willing to take "*libranzas*" (IOUs).[83] Economic transactions with the foreigners in Puebla also included more delicate ventures such as the clandestine sale of arms, as well as money lending with at 3 percent daily interest rate.[84]

A report of General Gabriel Valencia, a military officer in Santa Anna's army, provided additional evidence that for affluent poblanos, the military occupation of Puebla had turned into a profitable enterprise. Valencia asserted that some poblanos had the intention of keeping

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[80] This was the case in many Mexican cities where the Americans' stay was long enough. For instance Saltillo, Monterrey, Jalapa or Mexico City. See, Laura Herrera Serna, coord. *México en guerra (1846—1848.) Perspectivas regionales* (Mexico: Museo Nacional de las Intervenciones-Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes, 1997.)

[81] "Copia de una carta escrita en Puebla por persona de todo crédito," *El Monitor Republicano*, Mexico City, 5 June 1847, 3-4; Letter of Francisco Blanco to *a juez de hacienda* , 7 January 1850, 1852 Puebla, Archivo Judicial de Puebla, Civil, T.S.J.; Baltazar Furlong, "Disposiciones para conciliar el bien público con su seguridad en las presentes circunstancias." 18 August 1847, AGAP, Leyes y Decretos, Tomo 11, 67r; [Letter to Capt. Irwin], NA, Records of the Office of the Quartermaster General (RG 94), Records Relating to Various Subjects, Mexican War, 1846—1848, box 1; and Roa, *Recuerdos de la invasión norteamericana*, 142.

[82] "Parte del General Gabriel Valencia, 7 August 1847,"Archivo Histórico de la Defensa Nacional (henceforth AHDN), exp. bóveda XI/480/47, 28r. One *carga* equals approximately 300 kg or 661.3 pounds.

[83] "Copia de una carta escrita en Puebla por persona de todo crédito," *El Monitor Republicano*, Mexico City, 5 June 1847, 3-4.

[84] "Parte del General Gabriel Valencia, 7 August 1846." AHDN, exp. bóveda XI/480/47, 27v. As it turned out, the U.S. army did set out to Mexico City soon after this report was written, on August 10. However, Valencia's impression that poblanos found Mexican military presence in Puebla undesirable was correct.

Mexican military intervention in Puebla at bay in the interest of business. "Those infamous egotists who are taking economic advantage of the enemy," noted Valencia, "are determined not to let the Mexican army move one step closer to Puebla [by] spreading rumors that the U.S. army will soon march toward [Mexico's] capital."[85]

But cordial economic transactions in Puebla were short-lived. By the end of July 1847, poblanos complained that: "the religiousness with which Americans used to pay for everything, was a thing of the past."[86] Various notes in the *Diario del Gobierno* from Puebla began to portray American soldiers as thieves who stole what they pleased, forcefully occupied houses, abducted women, and consumed all kinds of goods without paying for them.[87] Perhaps a sense of conquest had emboldened many U.S. soldiers. At any rate, the bulk of the U.S. forces left Puebla in early August and only a small U.S. military garrison remained in Puebla.

The single most controversial relationship in the context of the U.S. occupation of Puebla was the one between representatives of the Catholic Church and U.S. officers. The Pueblan clergy, especially Bishop Vázquez was in the spotlight because of the prelate's kindness toward the Americans. The clergy had been criticized for its indolent and receptive attitude towards the invaders once they occupied Puebla. In fact, in contrast to the rough-edged dealings with the Ayuntamiento, the relationship between the U.S. military authorities and Puebla's ecclesiastics seemed to have been characterized by mutual understanding and marked with cordiality and attentiveness from the outset.

[85] "Parte del General Gabriel Valencia, 7 August 1846." AHDN, exp. bóveda XI/480/47, 24r.
[86] *Diario del Gobierno*, Mexico City, 24 July 1847, T. IV, no. 133, 2.
[87] *Diario del Gobierno*, Mexico City. 14 July 1847, T. IV, no 123, 2; 28 July 1847, T. IV, no. 137, 4; and 3 August 1847, T. IV, no. 143, 2-3.

Bishop Vázquez took the initiative and secretly contacted General Scott well before the Americans arrived in Puebla.[88] Aside from the often-cited testimony of Anastasio Zerecero who claimed that Vázquez offered the surrender of Puebla to the U.S. general, another piece of evidence about these dealings is relevant. U.S. Inspector General Ethan Allen Hitchcock recorded in his war diary that while still in the city of Jalapa between mid April and mid May 1847, General Scott received the visit of a secret agent sent by Bishop Vázquez. Antonio Campos, the prelate's envoy, carried a preliminary version of a "proclamation" drafted, presumably, by the bishop himself.[89] The document addressed Mexicans very respectfully and highlighted the communion between the political creeds of Mexico and the United States. It also blamed Mexican politicians, especially Santa Anna, for failing to bring peace and prosperity. The document argued that Americans were interested in Mexico's well being.[90] Vazquez's plan was that, following necessary editorial changes, Scott sign the proclamation and then the bishop would arrange for the document to reach Mexico City in time to influence national politics against the intransigent belligerence of the federalist clique.[91]

After some initial hesitation, Scott agreed to sign the proclamation, according to Hitchcock's diary. But Bishop Vázquez's plot was spoiled when the proclamation was intercepted somewhere between Jalapa and Puebla. On May 15, the same day General Worth occupied Puebla, the *Monitor Republicano* reported that a "young Spaniard" had been found carrying multiple copies of a proclamation addressed to all Mexicans. The fact that the proclamation was written in "not bad Spanish" raised suspicions about the possible collaboration

[88] Anastasio Zerecero, *Memoria para la historia de las revoluciones en México* (México: Imprenta del Gobierno, 1869), 75.
[89] Hitchcock, *Fifty Years*, 255.
[90] *El Republicano*, Mexico City, 15 May 1847, T. 11, no. 135, 4.
[91] On May 15, 1847, the Mexican Congress was supposed to elect a new president, who would substitute Santa Anna. In the end, he remained in power until September. Hitchcock, *Fifty Years*, 255.

of a Mexican with the U.S. General. The Mexican government threatened that the law would be "implacable" for anyone implicated in collaborating with the Americans.[92] Luckily for Vázquez, his name was never directly associated with the affair. Anastasio Zerecero also attributed to the bishop's maneuverings two additional events relating to Puebla's collaboration with the Americans: the appointment of Rafael Isunza as governor, an unconditional ally of the bishop and of the Ayuntamiento, as well as the removal of all of the city's armament to the town of Izúcar so that Mexican military commanders would find organizing the defense of the city impossible.[93]

The failure of the proclamation strategy and the occupation of Puebla by U.S. troops did not change the good will of the Catholic Church toward the Americans. Even though invading troops occupied a number of convents not always smoothly, by and large, the relationship between Americans and Puebla's clergy remained cordial. The Americans reciprocated for the cooperation of the church by letting religious life and religious figures go unmolested throughout the occupation of Puebla. Churches had been shut down in anticipation of the arrival of U.S. troops, but were promptly reopened, at General Worth's insistence, on the second day of the occupation of the city.[94] One of Worth's first acts after taking possession of Puebla was to pay a visit to the Bishop. Days later, Vázquez and Worth exchanged some communication to arrange the visit of Scott to the bishop's house.

While the presence of U.S. military authority limited Puebla's civil authorities to intervene in public life, the religious sector was permitted (even encouraged) to continue with their activities as usual. This created a new problem for the Ayuntamiento whose orders forbidding religious parades and celebrations began to be systematically ignored. For instance,

[92] *El Monitor Republicano*, Mexico City, 15 May 1847, 4.
[93] Zerecero, *Memoria,* 75.
[94] Roa, *Recuerdos de la invasión norteamericana*, 142.

on May 23 on behalf of the Santa Clara nuns, an individual presented himself before the permanent commission of the Ayuntamiento asking for permission to toll the convent's bells and have fireworks. A second person solicited a license to carry out the procession of the *Santo Entierro*. Despite the Ayuntamiento's ban, the nuns tolled their bells and the procession filled the streets. When representatives of the Ayuntamiento went to the convents to protest, they were insulted and quickly dismissed.[95]

The deference with which the Americans treated ecclesiastics paid off. Bishop Vázquez began to publicly show some signs of sympathy for the Americans, as was made evident when "one or two of the choir chaplains forced a group of people seated on [a bench reserved for Mexican authorities] to move somewhere else so that the Americans could take those seats [in the Cathedral]."[96] Devout women also began to show signs of appreciation, which according to the testimony of a poblano amounted to the beginning stages of the "moral conquest" of Puebla.[97] Clearly, deference and respect towards Puebla's clergy and religious activity were part of a U.S. strategy devised to gain the hearts of Catholic poblanos. It worked, in part, because of the recent conflict between the federalist wing of the government and Bishop Vázquez (among other ecclesiastical figures) regarding the disentailment of Church property. The central government's "attack" on Church property had been perceived by poblanos as an attack on religion and even morality. They sympathized with whomever restored the sanctity and integrity of the Church. In this sense, the relationship between Americans and Puebla's church figures was decisive for the day-to-day dimension of the U.S. occupation of Puebla.

[95] Orozco y Berra, *Relación de los sucesos*, 28.
[96] Ibid., 28-29.
[97] [Letter written in Puebla, 17 May 1847], published in *Diario del Gobierno*, Mexico City, 29 May 1847, T. IV, no. 78, 2.

Order Disrupted and Order Regained

In early August 1847, General Scott left the city of Puebla and began the expedition to Mexico City. Puebla was left under the supervision of Colonel Thomas Childs and a mere 400 American soldiers. Soon after Scott departed, the precarious public order of Puebla frayed, in part, due to the actions of Mexican General Joaquín Rea, who taking advantage of the reduced U.S. force commanded Mexican guerrillas to harass the invaders. Rea worked without the authorization and certainly against the will of Puebla's Ayuntamiento, which had always been hostile to the idea of inviting in the guerrillas or any other promoter of turmoil to the city. On September 2, 1847, Puebla's prefect complained about the ubiquity of *compañías de malhechores* (gangs of wrongdoers) that pestered the city.[98] It is likely that Rea's guerrillas and the wrongdoers that the prefect complained about were the same. Guerrillas and bandit gangs were often indistinguishable from one another. Both obtained their resources by stealing, both engaged in tremendous violence and had no qualms about attacking Mexicans and Americans alike.[99]

For a short while, General Rea mobilized some guerrillas and commanded the offensive against the Americans in Puebla. According to Colonel Childs, no open acts of hostility occurred until the night of September 13, 1847, "when fire opened up from some of the streets." The attacks upon the Americans intensified. The night of September 14 the battle arose "from every street" and "with a violence that knew no cessation for twenty eight days and nights." Childs also reported that the number of besiegers in Puebla "augmented daily" just as "the fire increased."[100] Nevertheless, the Americans managed to keep the Mexicans at bay and even damage their forces. Stripping away all the heroism that filled Childs' report, Mexican versions

[98] Baltazar Furlong, Puebla 2 September 1847, AGAP, Leyes y Decretos, vol. 11, 112v.
[99] *Apuntes*, 389; Blázquez Domínguez, "Presencia norteamericana en Veracruz," 667.
[100] Col. Thomas Childs, "Siege of Puebla-Official Account," 13 October 1847, published in *Nile National Register,* 27 November 1847, 196.

of the Siege of Puebla described the military actions of General Rea as unimportant. The *Apuntes para la historia de la guerra* maintained that no military actions under Rea had any significant consequences and only cite as praiseworthy two events: the successful resistance of part of Rea's guerrillas to a U.S. column attempting to enter the city to obtain supplies, and the positioning of an artillery piece in a dominant point by one of the battalions under general Santa Anna.[101] The Mexico City daily *Eco del Comercio* harshly criticized the actions of General Rea as preposterous. His forces, the *Eco* sustained, "hardly reached sixty Indians mounted on famished horses some with bridles made of "*mecate"* (rough twine)."[102] More than anything else, the *Eco* condemned the siege of Puebla because while it failed to damage the Americans in any significant way, it had harmed the population of the city who became the victims of the robberies and arbitrariness inflicted by the "*guerrilleros*."[103]

Initial hostilities in Puebla coincided with the "*alzamiento popular*" (popular uprising) caused by the arrival of Scott's troops in Mexico City on September 13, 1847. Rea's followers were described as "guerrilleros" and, even more revealingly as "Indians," thus suggesting that Rea's forces came from non-elite sectors of the population, just like the fighters in the *alzamiento* in Mexico City. Also, the testimony about the warm welcome that "the people" gave to General Santa Anna on September 24 and their alleged insistence on actively participating in the siege, hints that the actions of Rea and Santa Anna against the Americans in Puebla enjoyed some popular support.

One of the few accounts of the course of events in Puebla during the siege of September and October 1847 comes from Albert G. Brackett, a member of the Brigade sent to assist Colonel

[101] *Apuntes para la historia de la guerra*, 395.
[102] *El Eco del Comercio*, Mexico City, 20 March 1848, T. II, no. 9, 4.
[103] Ibidem.

Childs' besieged forces. Brackett's corps arrived in Puebla around one o'clock on the afternoon of October 12, 1847 and witnessed a rather interesting scene:

> As we advanced along the wide streets the scene was most imposing, as nearly every house displayed a flag from the balconies of the upper story. Here was seen the red cross of England, floating from the walls of an antiquated building –further on the white flags of non-combatants, while opposite appeared the proud banner of old Spain, beside the red and white flag of Austria. Along those wide and well-paved streets, there fluttered the ensigns of nearly every civilized nation on earth. We were frequently fired upon from houses which had white flags displayed, and this treacherous mode of fighting was in exact keeping with the Mexican character.[104]

It was not the first time that urban residents received the Americans by displaying foreign flags; the same scene had taken place only a few weeks before in Mexico City. As the plebeian sectors of the population took to the streets and rebelled against the U.S. occupation, aristocratic residences displayed foreign flags from their balconies. Presumably, the objective was to dissuade U.S. troops from attacking "non-Mexican" houses. Historian Luis Granados has argued, that this was indicative of "socially differentiated conduct" in the face of the U.S. invasion.[105] The people of some of Mexico City's *barrios* (outlying/popular neighborhoods) fought and protested both the invasion of the capital and the indolence of the wealthy *capitalinos* who renounced combat by making their supposed affiliation to a foreign country explicit. The display of foreign flags was one of the clearest examples of the internal conflict among different social groups that the U.S. invasion exacerbated to a breaking point. Could the information provided by Albert Brackett about the siege of Puebla possibly indicate the presence of an internecine conflict similar to that of the popular rebellion in Mexico City? It is unlikely that the people who in October 1847 decided to fight the Americans--those "treacherous" poblanos shooting from behind white flags that Brackett talks about-- could have been members of Puebla's elite. The

[104] Brackett, *General Lane's Brigade*, 111.
[105] Luis F. Granados, *Sueñan las piedras. Alzamiento ocurrido en la ciudad de México, 14, 15 y 16 de septiembre de 1847* (Mexico: Era-Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes-Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, 2003), 20-21.

affluent and prominent citizens of Puebla had been faithful supporters of the Ayuntamiento's decision to surrender the city and ask for guarantees for their families and property. It was clearly in their interest to keep warfare at bay, therefore, it is unlikely that they changed their minds. This suggests that part of Puebla's population partook in the violence stimulated by General Rea, while others, presumably affluent residents, had tried to pass for neutral foreigners. A communiqué of the city's prefect issued on October 14, 1847 first reprimanded the attacks on the Americans saying: "Do not delude yourselves with false or exaggerated ideas, it is not patriotism but an assault to morality to treacherously assassinate the enemy. Peaceful inhabitants are not touched by war, and it will not be done in the city now. "[106] Then, as though addressing a different audience, the prefect's reprimand gave way to an apologetic plea: "Dedicate yourselves to your usual occupations, open your workshops and stores, stay calm in your houses and rest assured that [the authorities] will make all kinds of efforts so that you will not suffer inconveniences such as the recently experienced."[107]

A proclamation by Colonel Childs, at the time military governor of Puebla, issued on October 14, 1847, unequivocally reveals that some of the violence during the siege was directed towards propertied poblanos. Motives other than patriotism apparently prompted the perpetrators. Reinforcing Furlong's message, Childs "urgently requested" the restoration of business as usual in the city and assured poblanos that they would be "protected" and offered policing and sentinel services to business owners.[108]

With General Rea out of sight and Santa Anna defeated and fleeing, the city of Puebla seems to have been fairly quiet for a while. There was no news of major acts of violence during

[106] Baltazar Furlong, "El Prefecto de esta Capital y su Departamento, a sus Habitantes," Puebla, 14 October 1847, AGAP, Leyes y Decretos, vol. 11, 6r.
[107] Ibidem.
[108] Thomas Childs, "Proclamation," 14 October 1847, Puebla, AGAP, Leyes y Decretos, vol. 11, 8r.

the rest of October or the subsequent months of 1847, however the guerrillas remained active. "The time of our men, during the month of December," Albert G. Brackett wrote, "was pretty well divided between guard mounting, beating up guerrilla quarters, and attending the theaters."[109] Guerrillas, Brackett said, continued to "infest" Puebla and kept killing U.S. soldiers in the streets.[110]

Puebla's authorities did not abandon publishing *bandos* (official communiqués) aimed to prevent disorder especially during religious festivities, by prohibiting the sale of liquors, restricting the sale of *pulque*, and forbidding "*diversiones públicas*" (public entertainments). Furthermore, a document of the Ayuntamiento signed in January 1848 explicitly mentioned that the "*pueblo*" of the city of the Angels was rather fed up and eager to show their frustration at the slightest misstep by the authorities. The document discussed the pressure of the U.S. military government's demand to have the Ayuntamiento collect taxes on stamped paper and playing cards on behalf of the U.S. authority.[111] This request was really adding insult to injury given the already humiliated position of the Ayuntamiento. Obeying the Americans would in fact make the Ayuntamiento look like a puppet. The honorable alternative was dissolution. However, some of the Ayuntamiento's members considered that the disappearance of the municipal council did not solve the problems faced by both the council and Puebla's residents. If the Ayuntamiento ceased to exist, the Americans would collect the taxes themselves and, even more worrying, the public order would be dangerously compromised. The entire document is a justification of accommodating the most recent demands of the Americans arguing that, as the only remaining

[109] Brackett, *General Lane's Brigade*, 197.
[110] Ibid., 220.

Mexican authority in the city, the Ayuntamiento's dissolution would pose a serious threat to the "social edifice."[112]

In one of its core paragraphs, the document exonerates the Ayuntamiento and blames the "*pueblo*" for the situation in Puebla declaring:

> If there was even a remote probability that in abandoning our posts the people would rise up against the enemies of the fatherland, we would not vacillate for a moment to consider the dissolution [of the Ayuntamiento.] But when far from expecting such a generalized reaction, we see the people abandon themselves to an unexplained apathy and instead appear willing to raise the cry of rebellion against its legitimate authorities, then what effect would our dissolution produce?[113]

More than just losing control over tax collection, the possibility of a popular upheaval continued to be the great fear of Puebla's elites. The potential rebellion that worried Puebla's authorities was not a popular revolt against the invader, but a popular uprising against the increasingly ineffective Mexican authorities. It is worth noting how in the cited document, the pueblo becomes the group to fear. Indeed the Ayuntamiento made the *pueblo* the actual culprit for the disgrace of the U.S. occupation. The pueblo had failed to rise up against the national enemy, and later, in the midst of the occupation, the pueblo had become a threat to the rest of the population. The Ayuntamiento, in contrast, portrayed itself as patriotic in the sense that it was willing to make terrible sacrifices such as complying with U.S. instructions so as to protect the city's

[112] The Ayuntamiento feared not only to loose control over taxes but also the American resolution to confiscate money or property if the economic exigencies of the Americans were not met. The war contributions that occupying forces requested from Mexican authorities increased since the end of 1847 and an order from the military head-quarters announced that in case a State failed to pay the requested contribution, its functionaries should be ousted and the owed money collected by almost any means. See, María Gayón Córdova, "Los invasores yanquis en la Ciudad de México," in *Mexico en guerra (1846—1848). Perspectivas regionales*, coord., Laura Herrera Serna (Mexico: Museo Nacional de las Intervensiones-Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes, 1997), 225-226.

[113] "Sobre el cobro [de impuestos por] papel sellado y naipes, a consecuencia de la nota del gobierno americano," Puebla, January 1848, AGAP, Expedientes, vol. 211, legajo 2588, 287r-287v.

inhabitants by serving as intermediaries between the U.S. military government and the population.[114]

Documents from March 1848 continue to illustrate a polarized view of Puebla's society revealing the persistence of seditious and violent acts. One of the most scandalous was Esteban Barbero's assault on Puebla's state government in an attempt to overthrow Rafael Isunza, an action which apparently won popular support as it was characterized as a "civil war."[115] An article dated in Puebla on March 13, 1848 and published days later in the *Eco del Comercio* underscored the heightened internal tension in Puebla. Titling the article "*El Pueblo y el Populacho*," the author makes his primary objective to distinguish between "the people" and "the rabble" which according to him resembled the relationship between a mere "action" and "the intelligence that determines it."[116] In other words the author sees the populacho as a brute force and "the people" as directing a rational process. Despite the author's praise for representative government, he laments that the champions of the Mexican republic had committed the terrible mistake of considering the majority of the country's inhabitants as part of the pueblo when only rational and knowledgeable individuals deserved to be defined as such. If this distinction had been made, the author felt, "the populacho would continue to be as peaceful and obedient as it used to be."[117]

Authorities in Puebla were able to snuff out Barbero's revolt, but the correspondents of the *Eco del Comercio* did not appear entirely satisfied. They considered that to effectively

[114] "Sobre el cobro [de impuestos por] papel sellado y naipes, a consecuencia de la nota del gobierno americano," Puebla, January 1848, AGAP, Expedientes, vol. 211, legajo 2588, 287r-287v.
[115] *El Eco del Comercio*, México City, 21 March 1848, T. II, no. 10, 2.
[116] "El Pueblo y el Populacho," *Eco del Comercio*, Mexico City, 21 March 1848, T. II, no. 10, 2.
[117] Ibidem.

undercut the possibility of future disarray, the rabble should be stopped and the authorities must be merciless toward seditious leaders.[118]

With the peace treaty between Mexico and the United States signed in February 1848,[119] various regiments of the U.S. army began their withdrawal from Mexico's territory in the spring of that year. The last American troops left the city of Puebla in mid June. The lack of a military presence renewed the alarm of the city's authorities about the possibility of popular unrest. On June 18, 1848, Puebla's prefecture published a bando that stipulated a series of prohibitions to be observed from the date of publication until further notice. As was customary, hard liquor could not be sold and *pulquerías* would only open from 9 to 11 in the morning to attend to the sick. Commercial operations would be restricted to groceries, no public gathering would be tolerated, no public entertainment would be allowed. The fifth article of the bando is particularly revealing as it "very severely" prohibited any kind of public verbal demonstration, especially "insults or injuries to individuals or residences." The violators of this ruling would be accused of being "*alborotadores públicos*" (agitators) and imprisoned. Lastly, the prefecture's bando reminded the population that the *vecinos varones* (male residents) were obligated to participate as night guards in their neighborhoods.[120]

Neither military reports nor newspapers had anything important to report on the U.S. withdrawal from Puebla. It seems that the removal of troops was effected without causing commotion. It is possible that some residents had bid goodbye and gave their blessing to the

[118] *El Eco del Comercio*, Mexico City, 21 March 1848, T. II, no. 10, 2.
[119] Although the treaty was on the negotiating table since early in 1848, it was ratified only on May 19, 1848, which explains the late retirement of the American troops.
[120] "Prevenciones para precaver cualquier desorden a consecuencia de ser absolutamente desocupada la ciudad por las tropas americanas," Puebla, 18 June 1848, AGAP, Leyes y Decretos, vol. 11, 106v.

departing soldiers, as had happened in April 1848 when, according to the testimony of Albert Bracket, a portion of General Lane's brigade had departed the city of Puebla.[121]

Although the occupation of the city did not go exactly as envisioned in terms of the relationship with the U.S. army, the Ayuntamiento of Puebla was successful in avoiding the devastation of the city and in protecting the lives and property of poblanos. Small scale thefts and some murders were common events, but in general Puebla remained relatively calm during the U.S. occupation. The most significant exception to public order was the siege commanded by Generals Rea and Santa Anna, who acted without the support of Puebla's authorities. However, after twenty-eight days, the Americans recovered full control over the city and Puebla went back to its business almost as usual. For the most part, Americans and Mexicans unproblematically shared the urban spaces such as the Alameda, the theater, plazas, markets, and churches. Frequently, affluent poblano families invited U.S. officers to dine at their homes, where the soirées included piano recitals or other forms of home entertainment. If we are to believe the testimony of Albert Brackett, some poblanos had become fond of the Americans and expressed grief when they left the city.[122]

As the evidence suggests, many aspects of popular reactions to U.S. occupation escaped the control of Puebla's authorities. For example, the authorities were unable to stop the isolated killing of U.S. soldiers and had some difficulties ridding the city of the guerrillas who victimized Americans and Mexicans alike. But the formation of the Mexican Spy Company as the Americans called it, a group formed with some bandits who had been released by General Scott's orders and who openly collaborated with the "national enemy," constituted one of the best

[121] Brackett, *General Lane's Brigade*, 274-275. Historian María Gayón Córdova has noted that some residents of Mexico City expressed inconformity with the retirement of the American troops and went as far as proposing that Mexico hired foreign troops. See, Gayón Córdova, "Los invasores yanquis," 231.
[122] Brackett, *General Lane's Brigade*, 275.

examples of a popular response to the invasion that went well beyond the control of Puebla's authorities. It also shows that the authorities and elite of Puebla were not delusional in their fears that the U.S. invasion would incite some sectors of the population to disorder. As we will see in the next chapter, the group of poblanos that began working for the United States in June 1847 were willing to go quite far in their actions against the established order. Showing great apprehension about the rumors of the formation of this band, Baltazar Furlong, Puebla's prefect tried to dissuade the American military governor from allowing the prisoners' release warning that "because of their depravation, these men are incapable of respecting any deal celebrated with them." Not entirely mistaken in his belief, Furlong prophesied that once freed, the bandits would become "a plague which not only [Puebla] will suffer, but the entire Republic."[123]

In fact, the formation of the *contra-guerrilla*, as the group of collaborators was called among Mexicans, did a lot to inculcate belief in Puebla's treason during the war with the United States. Although poblanos thoroughly rejected such notion, it was not an easy one to dispel. As late as the 1860s and 1890s poblanos still strove to defend themselves with respect to the role that Puebla had played during the Mexican-American war and consistently reminded the rest of the country that only bandits and not a single honorable poblano had joined the U.S. invaders. Over time, the degree of consent for the U.S. occupation on the part of Bishop Vázquez, the Ayuntamiento, and many poblanos who in some way profited from it began to be downplayed. Such view turned the bandits that formed the contra-guerrilla into the sole villains of the story.

[123] Letter of Baltazar Furlong to Military Governor of Puebla, 2 July 1847, NA, Office of the Adjutant General (RG 94), Mexican War Army of Occupation Miscellaneous Papers, box no. 3.

Conclusions

Puebla's attitude toward the war with the United States was contingent on the state of national affairs. While in 1845 and 1846 poblanos had seconded the war cry uttered throughout the country, in January 1847, the federalists' attempt to seize Church property in order to obtain urgent funds alienated the support of a sizeable portion of poblanos. The elite of the city of Puebla was alarmed to the point of declaring their own war against Puebla's federalist governor Domingo Ibarra as well as against Vice-President Gómez Farías. The attempt of the government to disentail and sell ecclesiastical property became a strongly contended issue and deeply damaged the relationship between Ibarra and Puebla's Bishop Francisco Pablo Vázquez. This, in turn, meant that Puebla's collaboration with the federal government was not forthcoming.

The capitulation of Veracruz and the subsequent defeat of Santa Anna's army at Cerro Gordo made it clear for poblanos that their city was the next military target. At that point a combination of two factors persuaded urban political authorities to make the decision not to resist the U.S. occupation and reach instead an agreement with U.S. authorities that property and public order would be safeguarded during the occupation. First, the manifest incapability of Santa Anna's army to defend the national territory extinguished all hopes that the U.S. army could be repelled in Puebla. Second, popular discontent threatened to whirl out of manageable proportions if the city was suddenly immersed in the chaos of warfare. Indeed, the menacing albeit short-lived popular uprisings that took place on the eve of the occupation of Puebla, the popular engagement in assailing the Americans during the siege of the city, as well as other acts of popular violence against Mexican authorities and American soldiers alike leave no doubt about Puebla's volatility. As evidence shows, in the context of lower class discontent economic and politically prominent groups in Puebla were willing, although sometimes grudgingly, to

accommodate to the U.S. presence and demands and even cultivate and strengthen collaborative ties with the foreigners in the aim of suppressing popular dissent.

Under the American occupation, Puebla's authorities were relatively successful in containing popular violence and retaining some degree of control over local affairs, albeit, much less than the group had hoped for. As for the relationship between Americans and the majority of the civilian population, it seems to quickly have found a point of equilibrium that made coexistence possible and even agreeable. As it happened in other occupied Mexican cities, in Puebla, restaurant or tavern owners, entertainers, and other merchants benefited economically from the American presence. The majority of the city's population seems to have carried on with their lives the best they could in the midst of the occupation, and tried to avoid both confronting and collaborating with the Americans. It is crucial to point out, however, that those cases in which poblanos engaged in disorderly conduct seem to have been much less anti-American demonstrations than expressed challenges to Mexican authorities. Surely the boldest case in this regard was the *contra-guerrilla* of Manuel Domínguez.

Scholarship on Puebla's role in the Mexican-American war has remained centered on the position of the Ayuntamiento as mediator in the midst of the crisis. Recent approaches to the subject have tried to debunk the consensus that Puebla's authorities treacherously surrendered to the Americans, but have done very little to account for the experience of other sectors of the population. This chapter has attempted to attend to this omission by casting the occupation of Puebla by the U.S army in a different light, one that focuses on internal divisions and the interplay between elite and plebeian sectors of the population. In doing so, this chapter challenges previous interpretations about the attitude of certain sectors of Puebla's population towards the U.S. occupation. It shows that looking to avoid social disarray and thus protecting

the interests of the political and economic elites of Puebla, the Ayuntamiento and the Bishop of Puebla approached U.S. authorities to arrange the surrender of the city and secure their dominant position. The chapter also shows that the common people of Puebla were not apathetic. While it was not always clear in their demonstrations of anger that their target was the foreign enemy, there is ample evidence that the acts of the plebeian sectors of the population kept Puebla in a state of unrest. Such a context was fertile ground for banditry and other forms of violence unleashed during the U.S. occupation, but also facilitated the emergence of rebellious groups such as the *contra-guerrilla* of Manuel Domínguez. The story of this peculiar group is the subject of the next chapter.

Chapter 3: The Mexican Spy Company

This chapter tells the story of the group of Mexicans who, in June 1847, were hired by U.S. Lieutenant Colonel Ethan Allen Hitchcock to serve as spies and couriers for the U.S. Army during the Mexican American War. The leader of the band was Manuel Domínguez, also known as "*El Chato*," a celebrated Mexican highwayman who took it upon himself to recruit forces from among his acquaintances, most of them also bandits. The Mexican Spy Company operated uninterruptedly until the U.S. army withdrew completely from Mexico in June 1848.

The employment of a group of men from the state of Puebla by Hitchcock to assist the U.S. army is a fairly well documented fact in the history of the conflict and the name of Manuel Domínguez surfaces from time to time in studies of the Mexican American war. However, in the last decade no new attempt to study this group has been made. The existing literature on the Mexican Spy Company repeats information provided by contemporaries whose accounts, published widely and well known, have been around for some time.[1]

Given the nature of the Mexican Spy Company, it is not surprising that Domínguez and his band are very negatively regarded in Mexican historical memory as criminals and traitors. The authors of the *Apuntes para la historia de la guerra*, the first historical account of the war, even regretted having to mention the Mexican Spy Company, which they described as "about a hundred bandits [who] had come with the enemy to make war against Mexico City [and

[1] The only published studies on the Mexican Spy Company are Brooke A. Caruso, *The Mexican Spy Company: United States Cover Operations in Mexico, 1845—1848* (Jefferson, NC, and London: McFarland and Co., 1991); and Alfredo Ávila, "La contraguerrilla de Manuel Domínguez 1847—1848," in Album Conmemorativo de la Guerra con los Estados Unidos (Mexico, DF: Historia en Red, 1997) http://sunsite.unam.mx/revistas/1847 (accessed August 2007). Caruso's book was the first attempt to investigate the Mexican Spy Company making exclusive use of U.S. documentation. The article by Alfredo Ávila remains the only study of the Mexican Spy Company in Spanish, but it does not present any new information on the matter.

became], in those ill-fated days, a scourge to their fellow countrymen."[2] In a similar vein, Carlos María de Bustamante, a contemporary and one of the most prolific authors of his day, bitterly portrayed Domínguez and his band as "the legitimate descendants of the ancient *tlaxcaltecas*" who took revenge against the Mexicas (or Aztecs) by allying themselves with Hernán Cortés, the Spanish conqueror.[3] More than a century after the war, the view of the Mexican Spy Company remains virtually unchanged. Historians and others continue to condemn the "unpatriotic" decisions and actions of the *contra-guerrilleros,* while perpetuating the notion of their inherent criminality.[4] U.S. historical memory has not been more benevolent. The entire episode of the Mexican Spy Company has become surrounded by a picturesque (sometimes even cartoon-like) aura that denies its connection to popular discontent in mid-nineteenth century Mexico.[5]

[2] Ramón Alcaráz, et. al., *Apuntes para la historia de la guerra entre Mexico y Estados Unidos*, prologue by Josefina Zoraida Vázquez, Cien de México (Mexico City: Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes), 382.

[3] Carlos María de Bustamente, *El Nuevo Bernal Díaz del Castillo, o sea, historia de la invasión de los angloamericanos en México* (Mexico: Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes, 2005), 32. "Tlaxcaltecas" are people from Tlaxcala a territory that in 1847 was part of the state of Puebla. Very much in line with Bustamante's opinion, a Mexico City's chronicler said: "After three hundred years, Puebla still presented the same inclination to join forces with the invaders of its patria." See "Tercer Acto." In *Undécimo Calendario de Abraham López arreglado al meridiano de México y antes publicado en Toluca para el año de 1849* (Mexico: Imprenta del Autor, 1848), 63.

[4] See Ávila, "La contraguerrilla de Manuel Domínguez 1847—1857"; and Jaime Sánchez Sánchez, "El territorio tlaxcalteca y la guerra contra Estados Unidos," in *México en Guerra (1846—1846). Perspectivas Regionales*, coord. Laura Herrera Serna (Mexico: Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes, 1997), 635-655.

[5] See for instance, Joseph Hefter and John R. Elting, "Mexican Spy Company, 1846—1848," *Military Collector & Historian. Journal of the Company of Military Historians* 21, no. 2 (Summer 1969): 48-50; Albert G. Brackett, *General Lane's Brigade in Central Mexico by Albert G. Brackett, M.D., Late an officer in the U.S. Volunteer Service* (Cincinnati: H.W. Derby & Co., Publishers, New York: J.C. Derby, 1854); Justin Smith, *The War with Mexico*, 2 vols. (New York: Macmillan Co.,1919); Caruso, *The Mexican Spy Company*; and Timothy Johnson, A Gallant Little Army: The Mexico City Campaign (University Press of Kansas, 2007).

Furthermore, U.S. sources insinuate that U.S. forces did not seek out Domínguez, but rather that Domínguez offered his services to the Americans.[6] Whether or not this is true is unclear.

While drawing on some familiar primary sources such as Hitchcock's war diary, this chapter is based largely on archival research conducted in Mexican and U.S. archives. Aside from offering a reinterpretation of old accounts, the following pages also present new information about the creation and operations of the Mexican Spy Company. The chapter further aims to revise the traditional interpretation of the Mexican Spy Company, or contra-guerrilla *poblana*, as simply a mercenary and criminal group.[7] By focusing on the Company's foremost characteristics, namely, the use of violence and remorselessness, I show that the participation of the group in the war acquired a political dimension as the group took an oppositional stand in relation to the Mexican government. Furthermore, the similarities between the actions of the Mexican Spy Company and other cases of popular mobilization confirm the political character of the group.

To embark on the analysis of the political angle of the Mexican Spy Company, I think of the case within the parameters of Charles Tilly's discussion on collective violence as a form of contentious politics. Collective violence, Tilly says, "counts as contentious because participants are making claims that affect each other's interests. [And] It counts as politics because relations of participants to governments are always at stake."[8] Located within Tilly's model of contentious politics, the case of the Mexican Spy Company can be classified along the lines of other instances of collective violence in nineteenth century Mexico, such as rebellions and protests.

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[6] See for instance "Domínguez Mexican Company" in *The Handbook of Texas Online*, The Texas State Historical Association, 1997-2000, http:www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/DD/qid1.html; accessed 7 June 2010.

[7] In the rest of the chapter I use both of the group's names, Mexican Spy Company and *contra-guerrilla* poblana interchangeably.

[8] Charles Tilly, *The Politics of Collective Violence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 26.

What has prevented this kind of comparison in the past is the presence of economic remuneration paid to the members of the Spy Company. But the similarities with cases that have unequivocally been regarded as political are, to me, more significant than those setting the Spy Company apart. Following Tilly, we would call these elements part of a "repertoire of contention," the set of actions available to express dissent.[9] The sacking of haciendas, attacks on government agents, destruction of judicial files and liberation of prisoners are the most salient elements that make the case of the Mexican Spy Company comparable to rural uprisings or urban protests.

Like the participants in other kinds of rebellions, the Mexican Spy Company defined an antagonistic relation with Mexican authorities and asserted its claims through use of violence. Often, the participants of uprisings, riots and protests clearly enunciate concrete claims that become the banner of their movements: land, access to natural resources, or better salaries, for instance. The claims of the Mexican Spy Company, however, were more elusive. Nonetheless, the chapter aims to show that apart from making obvious material claims, the members also protested the judicial system and established authority through their actions. Ultimately, the members of the Mexican Spy Company found in the U.S. occupation of Mexico a perfect opportunity to assert their claims to power.

The Formation of the Mexican Spy Company

The Mexican Spy Company started out with the hiring of Manuel Domínguez and a handful of his friends by the U.S. army in Puebla in 1847. According to U.S., as well as Mexican sources, Domínguez was a renowned robber and so were his aides, many of whom were released from the main prison in Puebla by direct order of the U.S. General-in-Chief Winfield Scott.

[9] Charles Tilly, *The Contentious French: Four Centuries of Popular Struggle* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986); and Charles Tilly, "Contentious Repertoires in Great Britain, 1758—1834" in *Social Science History*, 17, vol. 2 (Summer 1993): 253-280.

Soon after the occupation of Puebla on May 15, 1847 by 4,000 U.S. soldiers at the command of General William Jenkins Worth, a resident of the city "secretly pointed out" Manuel Domínguez to Worth, for Domínguez was a "perfectly known" robber who, despite his crimes, continued to stroll the streets of Puebla with impunity.[10]

A native *poblano*, Domínguez was, in fact, already notorious for his criminal career well before the Mexican American war. Aside from the information that his nickname "*El Chato*" reveals—that he had a pug nose, only a of couple depictions of his physical appearance have survived. A Mexican source described Domínguez as "very repugnant," a man with "copper colored skin, thick and bristly hair and beard, a disproportionately big mouth with fat and purplish lips, a pug nose with wide nostrils, and small fierce dark eyes framed by dense eyebrows that gave him a ferocious aspect." Domínguez, the description continues, "never appeared in public without a pair of pistols and a dagger at the waist, and when he mounted his horse he carried a lance and a machete."[11] In stark contrast to that description, U.S. officer Henry Moses Judah, who met Domínguez in the summer of 1847, described him as a "very fine looking man with a good face and nothing indicating cruelty in it."[12] This opinion corresponds well with an engraving by a nineteenth-century artist who portrayed Domínguez as an elegant man, a rendition more in line with the stereotype of the gentleman robber than with that of the vicious criminal. (See fig. 2)

The available information about Domínguez's professional background is also difficult to reconcile. While Mexican sources including judicial and military papers portray Domínguez as a

[10] Ethan Allen Hitchcock, *Fifty Years in Camp and Field: Diary of Major-General Ethan Allen Hitchcock,* ed. W.A. Crofutt (New York: Putnam Sons, 1909), 263 and 336.
[11] Antonio Carrión, *Historia de la ciudad de Puebla de los Ángeles*, vol. 2 (Puebla: J. M. Cajica, 1970), 304. Unfortunately, Carrión did not identify his source.
[12] George Winston Smith and Charles Judah,.eds, *Chronicles of the Gringos: The U.S. Army in the Mexican War, 1846—1848. Accounts of Eyewitnesses & Combatants* (Albuquerque: The University of New Mexico Press, 1968), 231.

long-time criminal and public enemy, Lt. Col. Hitchcock reported that Domínguez had once been an "honest weaver" dedicated to the sale of *rebozos* (Mexican shawls), who turned to banditry only after having been the victim of abuse by Mexican authorities.[13] Surely, the discrepancy originates in the sources' particular agendas. Just as Mexicans had no interest in recognizing that Domínguez could have had cause for his acts, it was in Hitchcock's interest to make Domínguez look like a victim of Mexican corruption and not as a ruthless criminal unscrupulously hired by the U.S. army. Whatever the reasons, sources concur that by 1847 *El Chato* Domínguez was the well-known leader of a band of highwaymen who operated on the main roads linking Puebla with Mexico City and Veracruz. According to one account, Domínguez commanded as many as 10,000 men on Pueblan highways and had made a lot of money selling safe-conducts to rich merchants whose valuables were left untouched as a result.[14] While the estimated number of men under Domínguez's command in this account is undoubtedly exaggerated, Puebla's roads were certainly famous for the presence of bandits and it is possible that such gangs were particularly large in the area.

It is not clear to what degree Domínguez's allegedly charismatic persona, or strong character, and/or bold actions explain his leadership. One Mexican newspaper attributed Domínguez's leadership to his "criminal prowess," referring to both his viciousness and his skillfulness at escaping justice. The newspaper asserted that Domínguez's "criminal prowess" surpassed that of his followers, and also noted that he was a natural leader to the "ferocious horde" that he led because his personality combined "the subtlety of the fox, the rapacity of a blood-thirsty bird of prey, the ferocity of a tiger and the animal-like stupidity of a beast."[15]

[13] Hitchcock, *Fifty Years*, 335.
[14] Smith and Judah, *Chronicles of the Gringos*, 231.
[15] *El Universal. Periódico Independiente*, Mexico City, 30 December 1849, III, no. 410, 2-3.

Clearly, Domínguez must have had the attributes to appeal as a leader and to remain out of the grasp of Mexican authorities for a long time.

Although well known among his fellow *poblanos,* Manuel Domínguez was a total stranger to General Worth who arrived in Puebla in May 1847 at the head the U.S. invading forces. One can speculate about the reasons that persuaded the general to recruit Domínguez. First, it seems logical that General Worth sought to make his authority felt among Mexicans and the capture of one of the most wanted bandits in the area would be a perfect opportunity. The capture of Domínguez would help the general maintain –albeit briefly—the sympathy of the propertied sectors of Puebla. After the conversation with Puebla's authorities that resulted in the Chachapa Accords by which the surrender of the city was arranged, Worth was conscious of how sensitive Puebla's elite was to maintaining public order. Having a man like Domínguez on the loose in a situation as compromised and tense as the military occupation of Puebla by the U.S. army disquieted the elite. Indeed, Domínguez came to Worth's notice because of certain poblanos denounced him and asked the U.S general to apprehend him. Second, after hearing about Domínguez, Worth realized the possible benefits of the services that the bandit could provide. A few days after Domínguez was detained by the U.S. forces, Worth let him know that "he had no friends among Mexicans" and offered the bandit a job with the U.S. army.[16] Lt. Col. Hitchcock, who was in charge of Gen. Scott's army intelligence, noted in his war diary that "[t]he plan took," and the bandit was rapidly sent to him.[17]

Domínguez apparently made a deep impression on Hitchcock. After their first meeting, the U.S. officer described the robber as "a very extraordinary person—a Mexican, rather portly for one of his profession, but with a keen, active eye and evidently 'bold as a lion' or an honest

[16] Hitchcock, *Fifty Years*, 264.
[17] Ibidem.

man."[18] Hitchcock seemed to like Domínguez right away but he did not trust the Mexican immediately. To test both Domínguez's reputed control of the highway between Veracruz and Puebla and his loyalty, Hitchcock commissioned Domínguez to deliver a letter to Col. Thomas Childs in Jalapa (about a hundred miles from Puebla.) Domínguez quickly left with the letter, delivered it safely, and soon returned to Puebla with a reply for Hitchcock. In the midst of the war, when any traveler was bound to be stopped on the road by either Mexican officers asking for passports and safe-conducts or by some of the many gangs of highwaymen, the expedited delivery of the letter made it obvious that Domínguez had some of the necessary credentials for a job as a spy and courier. Hitchcock was already envisioning more, a larger group under the command of his new ally. "Through this man," Hitchcock wrote, "I am anxious to make an arrangement to this effect: that, for a sum of money yet to be determined, the robbers shall let our people pass without molestation and that they shall, for extra compensation, furnish us with guides, couriers, and spies."[19]

Soon after the safe delivery of the letter to Childs in Jalapa in mid June 1847 and persuaded of the advantages of employing Domínguez, Hitchcock asked Domínguez to bring "the whole band of professional robbers that line the road from Mexico to Veracruz" into the service of the U.S. army. If we are to believe the testimony of the U.S. officer, Domínguez agreed although he "frankly spoke of the difficulty of vouching for [the bandits'] good faith and honesty." To strike the deal, Hitchcock paid Domínguez $110 which included the cost of a uniform, and suggested he "think the matter over."[20]

[18] Hitchcock, *Fifty Years*, 259.
[19] Ibid., 263.
[20] Hitchcock, *Fifty Years*, 264. These monies came from a Secret Service fund created to cover various expenses of war intelligence.

The Spy Company had a modest beginning with Domínguez and only five other men whom he recruited from his closest acquaintances. Beginning on the evening of June 22, 1847 these men made $2 per day while Domínguez, the chief, received $3 a day for their services to the U.S. army.[21] The next increase in the membership of the Spy Company came as a result of a shrewd plan devised by a man called Ferra, who apparently maintained close ties to the U.S. army headquarters. There are two principal versions of how this plan developed and was executed. One is from the testimony of Hitchcock and the other from Mexican newspapers.

Ferra, a Maltese merchant who had lived in Mexico for some time before the war and had been hired by the U.S. army "to look up competent guides," recruited new members for Domínguez's company from Puebla's principal prison.[22] To this end, U.S. soldiers arranged Ferra's arrest and sent him to jail. This was easy to do because since late May the U.S. army was in control of the city's prisons given that the Ayuntamiento lacked the resources to supervise them. Once inside Puebla's jail, Ferra's mission was to talk to some of the prisoners and offer them their liberty in exchange for service to the U.S. army. At 10 in the morning on June 25, only a few days after his detention, Ferra was released from prison and promptly submitted to Hitchcock the names of those prisoners who had accepted the U.S offer. By 1 pm General Scott had already ordered the release of twelve men.[23]

According to Hitchcock, Gen. Scott approved the release of the individuals on Ferra's list who had been accused of robbery but not of murder or rape. Furthermore, they had already spent three or four years in prison without a trial. This information was available to Scott from the

[21] Ibidem.
[22] Hitchcock, *Fifty Years*, 338.
[23] *El Diario Oficial*, 14 July 1847, IV, no. 123, 2-3.

jail's records and from the prisoners' own declarations.[24] Not surprisingly Scott was severely criticized by the *Diario del Gobierno,* which accused him of being gullible about the prisoners' stories.[25] Needless to say, the liberation of prisoners upset Puebla's elite. After all the trouble the Ayuntamiento had gone through to prevent public havoc, the release of prisoners by U.S. forces was criticized. Just as the prefect of Puebla predicted, the release of prisoners resulted in renewed threats and acts of violence.

When Ferra's work was complete, Hitchcock sent the twelve recently released bandits to Domínguez. As it turned out, Domínguez knew them well. Possibly the only American to witness the meeting, Hitchcock recalled that the former prisoners emotionally embraced one another and Domínguez and "[e]ternal fidelity to each other was either pledged or renewed." He added, "with an allowance for the purpose, they made a merry night of it."[26] Indeed, it must have been quite a night since the allowance amounted to $50 for each one of Domínguez's acquaintances.[27]

The incorporation of the twelve ex-prisoners into Domínguez' band in late June 1847 marked an important development in the evolution of the Spy Company. Domínguez acknowledged their responsibilities, which included providing for themselves the horses, uniforms, food and whatever else they needed to operate. Hitchcock promised a monthly

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[24] Hitchcock, *Fifty Years*, 338; and *El Diario Oficial*, 14 July 1847, IV, no. 123, 2-3. This newspaper published a list of prisoners who had been set free by order of the U.S. general on June 25 and 28, and from July 1st to 4th. The twelve individuals who joined Domínguez were Joaquín Palacios, Lino García, Pedro Arria, Rafael Rocha, Bartolo Capello, Antonio Osorno, Ignacio Morales (aka) Cristóbal Guillén, Domingo García, Miguel Ávila, José María Arroyo, José de la Luz Lastivi and Juan Cacho (aka) Rivera; all of them released on June 25, 1847. Four of the names that appeared in the *Diario Oficial*'s list reappeared later in military records corroborating that at least Palacios, Arria, Rocha and Lastivi continued to be part of the Mexican Spy Company after July 1847. As for Ferra, Mexican sources identified him as a Spaniard named Juan Ferro and identified him as one of the leaders of the band. However, his name does not appear again after 1847.

[25] *El Diario Oficial*, July 1847, various issues; and 5 August 1847, IV, no. 144, 1.

[26] Hitchcock, *Fifty Years*, 264 and 339.

[27] Ibid, 265.

payment of $20 and instructed them to organize in companies under the orders of Gen. Scott.[28] By the end of June 1847 Domínguez's band had seventeen members, but it continued to grow. Having confided in Hitchcock that he could control about 300 men of the roads, Domínguez was commissioned to "enroll 200 of them."[29]

It is hard to estimate the actual size of the Spy Company when it was at full strength. Hitchcock, the U.S. official who knew the group best, gave varying numbers at different times. Although he initially conceived of the company as just over 200 men, once the war was over, Hitchcock wrote that the company may have "increased some thousands."[30] But we are left with no information as to when and where the growth took place. Apparently, new members joined frequently even after the occupation of Mexico City in September 1847. To add to the uncertainty, Hitchcock also stated that the military payroll never included more than 100 Spy Company men.[31] That suggests that most of its members were paid off the books.[32]

Mexican sources are equally vague regarding the size of Domínguez's band. For example, a chronicle of the occupation of Mexico City mentions that on August 9, 1847, when Scott's army left Puebla to march toward the capital of Mexico, there were "a little more than 200 *poblanos* in the cavalry assisting the U.S. army."[33] Around the same time, a Mexican military report said that the *contra-guerrilla* had "62 soldiers," though the *Diario Oficial*

[28] Ibidem.
[29] Hitchcock, *Fifty Years*, 264 and 265.
[30] Ibid., 337.
[31] Ibidem.
[32] Ibidem.
[33] "Segundo Acto. Últimos acontecimientos de la capital de la República Mexicana, [atacada] por el ejército de los Estado Unidos del Norte, hasta el 17 de septiembre de 1847," in *Décimo calendario de Abraham López para el año bisiesto de 1848* (Mexico: Impreta de Abraham López, 1847)," 57. Often, the members of Domínguez's band were called *poblanos*, given that the group was levied in the city of Puebla.

reported that "110 bandits" had been sent as "vanguard" of Scott's army.[34] While Carlos María de Bustamante, in his contemporary account, would simply identify Domínguez's band as a "horde," other Mexican sources are more specific.[35] In his diary, Mariano Riva Palacio wrote that the *contra-guerrilla* was composed of 200 men "most of them scar-faced, not all of them brave and, in general, badly mounted."[36] Lastly, José Ma. Roa Bárcena calculated that the band had "some 400 men."[37] Roa's number almost coincides with information published in the *National Era* in November 1847, which stated that "four hundred and fifty Mexicans" composed the Spy Company.[38]

Lack of consensus concerning the size of the Spy Company among Mexican and U.S. sources maybe explained by the fact that it operated in groups scattered throughout a large portion of territory thus obscuring its full dimensions. It is possible that even U.S officers were never fully aware of how many people Domínguez had in his band at any one time. In any case, the differences in the estimates underscore that the membership of the Mexican Spy Company fluctuated. Available information suggests that the Mexican Spy Company had a steady core of about 200 men along with many more temporary members.

Unfortunately, the histories of the majority of the men who participated in the *contra-guerrilla* remain unknown. Contemporary accounts insisted that most of the *contra-guerrilleros* were former criminals from Puebla, however, the available evidence shows that some men joined

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[34] "Parte del General Gabriel Valencia" 7 August 1847, AHSDN, exp. XI/480/47, 31r; and *Diario Oficial*, Mexico, 13 August 1847, IV, no. 153, 4. This issue stated "110 bandits" were the "vanguard" of Scott's army.
[35] Bustamante, *El Nuevo Bernal*, 32.
[36] Josefina Zoraida Vázquez, "Breve diario de don Mariano Riva Palacio (agosto de 1847)," *Historia Mexicana,* 47, no. 2, La guerra de 1847 (Oct. - Dec., 1997): 441-455, 444.
[37] José María Roa Bárcena*, Recuerdos de la Invasión Norteamericana (1846—1848) por un joven de entonces*, 3 vols, ed. Antonio Castro Leal (Mexico City: Editorial Porrúa, 1993) 2: 145.
[38] "Army News," *National Era*, Washington D.C, 25 November 1847, vol. 1, no. 47, 3. American Periodical Series Online, accessible from New York Public Library.

the *contra-guerrilla* in Mexico City or in the nearby towns. It is difficult to get a general picture of the socio-economic background of the group. Only in a few cases do the records give us information about the occupations of these men before the war. Manuel Domínguez was involved in commerce, Pedro Arria was a shoemaker, Roque Miranda was a courier, Nicanor Martínez was a *jornalero* (day laborer) and Domingo Jiménez was a *carretero* (conductor of oxcarts.) The only conclusion that seems possible to draw about the social composition of the *contra-guerrilla* is that it was not homogeneous. Some of its members came from an urban milieu, others from the countryside, some knew how to write, some did not, some had a long criminal history but others had none. It is probable that the band comprised a large number of impoverished men, but it would be inaccurate to characterize the *contra-guerrilla* as largely destitute.

The *contra-guerrilla* seemed to have a strong group identity, as well as a sense of pride and confidence. As General Gabriel Valencia noted, they self-identified as "the guerrilla in favor of the Americans."[39] The group's cohesion perhaps originated in the strong friendship bonds among some *contra-guerrilleros*. Hitchcock noticed, for example, that when Domínguez and his associates reunited, they called each other *compadre*.[40] There is a great need for more studies on dissenting urban movements in order to make a comparison with the *contra-guerrilla* in regards to the level and nature of the group's cohesion. Meanwhile, the high level of kinship and friendship in the *contra-guerrilla* makes it similar to peasant rebellions, where the importance of agrarian subsistence ensures the prevalence of ties to land and, by extension, to kin.

Once hired by the U.S. army, the *contra-guerrilleros* began using military terms to refer to the leaders; thus, Manuel Domínguez was "Colonel Domínguez" and Pedro Arria became

[39] "Parte del General Gabriel Valencia," 7 August 1847, Archivo Histórico de la Secretaría de la Defensa Nacional, exp. XI/480/47, 31r.
[40] Hitchcock, *Fifty years*, 337.

"Captain Arria." These titles were not real. From the way that Hitchcock and other U.S. sources refer to "Colonel" Domínguez—always between quotation marks—it appears that the decision to use military rank to identify the leaders of the group came from the *contra-guerrilleros* themselves. This is significant because it emphasizes the band's sense of coherence as a group, united and organized under identifiable leaders. On January 1848, the daily *American Star* recorded an incident that exemplifies this point. Two of Domínguez's subordinates threatened to take the life of a shopkeeper in Veracruz who had referred to Domínguez "disrespectfully." Drawing their swords the *contra-guerrilleros* let the shopkeeper know that when talking about their chief, he must call him "Col. Domínguez, of his Excellency Gen. Scott's Life Guard."[41] It is possible that the *contra-guerrilleros* in question came up with this pompous title on the spot with the intention of further annoying and insulting the shopkeeper. But this was not an isolated incident; there were other occasions in which the *contra-guerrilleros* gave testimony of their self-assurance. Antonio García Cubas described how, as the band entered the village of Tacubaya, near Mexico City, the *contra-guerrilleros* made certain they were noticed by the population. They showed off their *charro* outfits and incited their horses to jump and prance about.[42] Other sources also mention the bravado of the members of the Spy Company. Albert Brackett, a U.S. artillery officer for example, recalled that during a journey with the *contra-guerrilleros*, they took pleasure in "discharging their escopets every few minutes" and "singing ribald songs."[43] Apparently, the *contra-guerrilleros* relished causing scandal. Far from feeling

[41] *The American Star*, Mexico City, 9 January 1848, vol. 1, no. 85, [2]
[42] Antonio García Cubas, *El libro de mis recuerdos* (Mexico: Imprenta de Arturo García Cubas, Hermanos Sucesores, 1904), 430.
[43] Albert G. Brackett, *General Lane's Brigade in Central Mexico by Albert G. Brackett, M.D., Late an officer in the U.S. Volunteer Service* (Cincinnati: H.W. Derby & Co., Publishers, New York: J.C. Derby, 1854), 187.

embarrassed or irresolute about their participation in the war, the members of the Mexican Spy Company seemed to have been rather confident about it.

As soon as the terms of their employment with the Americans were spelled out, the members of the Spy Company diligently applied themselves to organizing and preparing for their future missions. It was agreed that the enlisted *poblanos* should acquire what they needed to operate through their own means, and so they did. Beginning in July 1847 the men of Domínguez's band occupied themselves with obtaining the necessary equipment: horses, weapons, uniforms, food, forage, among other items. Domínguez and his people established their quarters in a house on *La Merced* Street in Puebla where they held daily meetings. Determined to meet their need for recruits and equipment, the band, organized in separate groups, scattered across nearby towns, villages and ranches. Domínguez himself went as far as Orizaba, midway between Puebla and Veracruz, in his effort to raise a sizable force.[44]

For strategic purposes, the uniform of the Spy Company was very similar to that of Mexican lancers; it featured a bright green jacket, dark trousers and a red pennon on their spears (see fig. 2.) Only a bright red band tied around their hats distinguished the *contra-guerrilleros* from the lancers, and this soon became the single most important symbol identifying the *contra-guerrilleros*. One patriotic and resentful Mexican compared their "*trapos encarnados*" (red bands) with the *sanbenitos* of colonial times, a visible sign of opprobrium.[45]

By the end of the summer of 1847, the Spy Company was outfitted and rather confident about the new venture. An artillery officer who met Domínguez and the band in Puebla reported that he had asked them if they were afraid of being put to death by other Mexicans for

[44] *La Voz de México*, Mexico City, 3 January 1897, XXVIII, no. 38, 2.
[45] "Segundo Acto," 47. In colonial times a kind of cloak or tunic called Sanbenito, San Benito or sambenito was to be worn by the condemned of the Inquisition tribunal.

collaborating with the U.S. army. Domínguez responded, "that is our business, we will take care of ourselves."[46]

By the time General Scott announced that his troops would soon leave the city of Puebla in early August 1847, the Spy Company was ready to depart, or at least part of it. Members of Domínguez's squad who intended to quit had established secret contact with General Gabriel Valencia of the Mexican Army. Unable to set foot in Puebla given the U.S. occupation, Valencia kept himself informed about the situation in that city by means of a spy. In a report, General Valencia disclosed to the Ministry of War that "the founder or leader" of the *contra-guerrilleros* regretted his crime and was considering presenting himself and sixty more of his men to the Mexican government. What is more, Valencia informed the Ministry that his spy had scheduled a meeting with "the contra-guerrillero who knows how to write" to take place on August 10. The purpose of that meeting was "to give the contra-guerrillero safe-conducts so that he with his guerrilla can avoid an attack from Mexican troops."[47] Although the General referred to the contra-guerrillero who contacted him as "the founder or leader [of the group]" it seems improbable that Domínguez considered ended his collaboration with the U.S. Could it have been an alibi? We will never know. General Scott's timetable seems to have thwarted plans of the Spy Company's potential deserters. By August 10, Domínguez's Company had already left Puebla.

Between July 9 and August 6, the press reported that some former convicts who had been ransomed by the Americans in Puebla had requested official pardons.[48] Whether these men were among the remorseful contra-guerrilleros is difficult to establish. However, Valencia's report and

[46] Anderson, *An Artillery Officer*, 266.
[47] "Parte del General Gabriel Valencia," 7 August 1847, AHSDN, exp. XI/480/47, 24r.
[48] *Diario Oficial*, Mexico City, 24 July 1847, IV, no.133, 2; and 6 August 1847, IV, no. 146, 4.

the news about pardoned ex-prisoners show that some men sought to restore their relationship with Mexican authorities while others decided to ignore the opportunity.

Mercenaries or Rebels?

General Scott readied the military divisions that comprised his army together with the Mexican Spy Company to march on Mexico's capital as early as July 25, 1847. According to Scott, Domínguez's Company "should be the vanguard" of the troops during the Americans' advance on Mexico City.[49] Knowing the roads better than any of the Americans, the Mexican Spy Company's task was to guide the U.S troops, to keep U.S. generals informed of the location of the Mexican forces, and to clear the path of Mexican guerrillas. These tasks they fulfilled with great efficiency. As early as August 11 the *contra-guerrilleros* had already eliminated a Mexican guerrilla of one hundred men.[50]

The existing literature on the *contra-guerrilla* has emphasized its role as a provider of spies, guides and couriers to such a degree that their job as combatants and the actions that make the group comparable to a contemporary rebel movement have been overlooked.

As mentioned in a previous chapter, plundering and burning of haciendas was a standard practice of rebel groups from the wars of independence up to the Revolution of 1910. The *contra-guerrilla* was no exception. The raids began in July 1847 when the *contra-guerrilla* plundered the ranches of *Santa Cruz*, *La Concepción* and *Zavaleta*, in the vicinity of the city of Puebla.

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[49] Report of General Scott to U.S. Secretary of War, 25 July 1847, in "Verdaderos documentos oficiales de los gefes del ejército de los Estados Unidos de America sobre los hechos de la Campaña de México en los años de 1846, 1847 y 1848," trans. Ignacio Medinilla, Mexico 1856, 79. Manuscript, Archivo General de la Nación.

[50] José Fernando Ramírez, *México durante su Guerra con Estados Unidos*, ed. Carlos Pereyra and Genaro García (Mexico: Vda. De C. Bouret, 1905), 293.

The *contra-guerrilla* also resorted to larger scale operations executed with the direct support of U.S. troops. This support gave the group the capacity to seize entire towns. According to a report by the prefect of Tepeaca, in the early hours of Saturday July 17, "around a hundred cavalrymen, including about thirty or forty from the guerrilla composed of Mexicans" entered the city of Tepeaca searching for the prefect, the judge, the *alcalde,* and the tax collector. Not having found any of them, the *contra-guerrilla* attacked the *prefectura*, where "they destroyed the doors and smashed the windows to extract whatever they could from the place." However, the prefect stressed in his note that "they were unable to take any papers" and explained that he had managed to move them to a safe place.[51] The words of the prefect are significant. They corroborate that the acts of the *contra-guerrilla* were inscribed in the "repertoire" of contemporary rebellious groups. The office of the judge was spared the destruction. When the attackers did not find him there, they proceeded to open the local jail to release the five prisoners found there. Three or four of them joined the *contra-guerrilleros* on the spot and were immediately furnished with arms that had just been snatched from the prison guards. The *contra-guerrilla* followed the assault on Tepeaca by breaking into several houses from which they took horses, saddles, and any weapons they could find.[52]

The prefect of Tecali wrote a very similar report for the government of Puebla in Atlixco. Tecali's prefect noted that a force of 50 men from the U.S. army accompanied 160 *contra-guerrilleros* who arrived in town looking for him. These men scattered throughout the town and

[51] Félix María Aburto, Prefectura de Tepeaca to Secretary of Government at Atlixco, 19 July 1847. Published in *El Diario Oficial*, Mexico 3 August 1847, IV, no. 143, 3.
[52] Ibidem.

attacked wealthy households taking horses, saddles and jewelry. As had happened in Tepeaca, contra-guerrilleros took over the prison Tecali and set its prisoners free.[53]

The attacks of the combined forces of U.S. soldiers and Domínguez's men continued for the rest of July. Miguel Jiménez, judge of San Juan de los Llanos, wrote to his superiors that on July 30th "a section of the North American army" invaded the village and that following his futile attempt at defense, the enemy plundered his office and set it on fire causing the loss of all pending criminal cases. As they had done in Tepeaca and Tecali, the *contra-guerrilleros* broke open the jail and released its prisoners.[54] In a second note, Jiménez added that at least one of the ex-prisoners joined "the enemy lines," which suggests that the operation might have been part of Domínguez's recruiting campaign. [55]

Robbery was, however, not the only agenda. The events described above were not isolated or indiscriminate attacks solely for the sake of loot. The liberation of prisoners and the burning of judicial records have been two classic components of popular riots/rebellions worldwide throughout modern history and they were certainly prominent in Mexico at the time. Rural uprisings of the 1840s such as those in the Huasteca region, the State of Mexico, and the Sierra Gorda included attacks on prominent judges and other authorities, as well as the burning of judicial files. Beyond the acquisition of booty, the objective of this kind of violence was, in equal measure, to increase the forces of the seditious, take revenge for previous imprisonments or prosecutions, settle old conflicts with the authorities, as well as terrorize entire towns. Indeed, spreading terror was no small part of what Domínguez and the band sought. Insofar as

[53] Andrés Martínez to Puebla's Governor, 18 July 1847. Published in *Diario Oficial*, Mexico, 3 August 1847, 3.
[54] "Expediente instruído por el Juez de letras de los Llanos participando la invasión de los Norteamericanos en aquel lugar, y pérdida de las causas criminales y algunos expedientes civiles," 4 August 1847, Archivo Histórico Judicial de Puebla (hereafter AHJP), exp. 27059.
[55] Ibidem.

violence facilitated the submissiveness of people it became a way in which the *contra-guerrilleros* exerted power.

Various testimonies provide information about the *contra-guerrilleros'* tactics and the impact these achieved. Most of these come Tacubaya, a village outlying Mexico City where the urban wealthy had vacation residences and haciendas. U.S troops and Domínguez's band established themselves in Tacubaya during an armistice following the Mexican defeats in Contreras and Churubusco, on August 20 and 21 1847 respectively. According to the testimony of witnesses to the occupation of Tacubaya, the *contra-guerrilleros* did nothing but steal from Tacubayans and, in general, displayed reprehensible and scandalous behavior. Bernabé Gonzáles, a *jornalero* (day laborer), recalled that a *contra-guerrillero* "wearing the red band on his hat," and "commanded by other *contra-guerrilleros* robbed his house by destroying his *nopales* with a *machete* and took a basket of his tortillas."[56] Miguel Aguilar, another Tacubayan, reported knowing several of the *contra-guerrilleros* because his shop was on the *Calle Real* in front of the inn where they were quartered. Aguilar said that he tried to avoid contact with "such people" because he considered the *contra-guerrilleros* "hungry wolves."[57] Francisco Martínez remembered Domínguez "the leader" and "six others," and asserted that he witnessed the myriad of "atrocities committed by *the contra-guerrilleros*," which made "the population of Tacubaya fear them even more than the Americans."[58] Finally, Guillermo Zalazar, owner of the inn in which the Spy Company was quartered, recalled being harassed by Domínguez and his

[56] "Case against Nicanor Martínez," 1853. Archivo Histórico del Distrito Federal (hereafter AHDF), Fondo Municipalidades, Sección: Tacubaya, Justicia y Juzgados, box 13, exp. 45, 8v.
[57] Ibid, 34v and 35r.
[58] Ibid., 45r, and 46r.

lieutenants. According to Zalazar, the *contra-guerrilleros* forced his family to live in a single room and often times left Zalazar locked out of his own property.[59]

Unfortunately for the Tacubayans, the departure of the Americans once the armistice ended did not put an end to their suffering. On the contrary, when the U.S. troops left for Mexico City, the *contra-guerrilleros* openly and brutally harassed the population. Zalazar recounted that the *contra-guerrilleros* "shot whoever crossed their path" and that "merely looking at them" was offensive enough to make the *contra-guerrilleros* attack. In his testimony, Zalazar gave the example of two Tacubayans who spoke ill of the *contra-guerrilleros* in a *pulquería* and did not live to tell the tale.[60] The testimonies of Tacubaya reveal two things. First, the *contra-guerrilleros* took advantage of their position among the victorious war faction to satisfy their ambition for power, however sporadic and informal this power was. Second, the *contra-guerrilleros* did not reserve the use of force to despoil the wealthy. They attacked property owners and jornaleros alike. In this, the *contra-guerrilla* sets itself apart from other nineteenth-century popular mobilizations like Hidalgo's movement in the early 1810s or the riot of the Parián in 1828, both of which targeted the wealthy, in particular rich Spaniards. The *contra-guerrilla* was a more anarchic mobilization in which hostility was not necessarily directed towards an enemy defined along socio-economic or racial lines but towards whoever opposed or restricted their possibilities to exert power.

When the war's armistice ended with no prospect of peace with the U.S., the Mexican government was in a desperate position. It became clear that Mexico City could not be effectively defended and the U.S. troops were at its doorstep. The *contra-guerrilla*, meanwhile, had proved its effectiveness as a war machine and its determination to continue to use violence

[59] Ibid., 37v and 38r.
[60] Ibid., 36r-36v.

against other Mexicans. Under such circumstances, the presence of the *contra-guerrilla* in Mexico City could only further undermine the capital's morale if not spark violence among civilians. At any rate, it was clear that the government could not ignore that bringing Domínguez and his band to the Mexican side would be of great help. The government then reiterated an offer of full official pardon for the Mexican Spy Company. A first offer had been made back in August 1847 by the government of Puebla. According to the testimony of Hitchcock, an agent of the Mexican government –not knowing that Manuel Domínguez was already in the service of the U.S. army in August 1847—entrusted him with two letters addressed to whom the authorities supposed were the principal collaborators. The offer included pardon for their crimes and a bounty if the *contra-guerrilleros* quit their collaboration with the U.S. But it failed to interest Domínguez who, if we are to believe Hitchcock's account, immediately took the letters to him with a scornful smile in his face.[61]

The second time, the proposal of official pardon came directly from General Santa Anna, commander-in-chief of the Mexican army and the Minister of Foreign and Internal Relations. A letter, signed at the National Palace on September 11, 1847 reminded Domínguez and the *contra-guerrilleros* that they were Mexicans and that if they abandoned the enemy's forces, they would do a great favor to their country. Santa Anna tried to encourage the *contra-guerrilleros* to bring over a "considerable number of soldiers and wagon mules" or "set fire to the enemy's ammunition magazines."[62] He also promised that such actions would be rewarded with a pardon for their past crimes, material compensation, and a guarantee of their lives. However, just as before, Domínguez rejected the offer. If the *contra-guerrilleros* were only opportunists, driven to collaborating with the U.S. primarily by economic motives, they would have given the

[61] Hitchcock, *Fifty years*, 339.
[62] Ibid., 340.

proposal some consideration as the benefits of the Mexican promise could have surpassed those from their association with the U.S. army. Furthermore, had Domínguez changed sides and contributed to harm the Americans, he might have become a hero or, at the very least, a free man entitled to a reward. That Domínguez rejected what was being tendered to the Spy Company attests to the group's determination to keep at the pursuit of their cause (or combination of causes) of aiding U.S. military victory, making war against Mexico's government and society, and seeking revenge against authorities with whom some *contra-guerrilleros* had accounts to settle. Last but not least, the government's offer of amnesty also acknowledges the *contra-guerrilla* as being similar to other popular political mobilizations of the day. Amnesty was the most usual and effective way in which opposition was neutralized. A case in point was the movement of Eleuterio Quiroz, the outlaw who headed a small army of peasants in the Sierra Gorda who collaborated with the U.S. for a short time and later accepted the incentives offered by the government in exchange for the pacification of his forces.

During the occupation of Mexico City, which began on September 15 1847, the Spy Company operated in separate areas with different missions. A considerable number of Domínguez's men who made themselves at home in the *Mesón de Migueles* (an inn in the center of the city) supported the military presence of U.S. forces in the capital. Other *contra-guerrilleros* kept U.S. forces well informed of what happened between Mexico City and Veracruz. Under "Captain" Pedro Arria,[63] a subgroup of *contra-guerrilleros* assisted colonel Childs in Puebla to regain control over the city and repel the attacks of Generals Santa Anna and Joaquín Rea in September and October 1847.

[63] Pedro Arria was one of the famous twelve prisoners released from Puebla's main jail on June 25, 1847. His name was published in the *Diario Oficial*, Mexico 14 July 1847, IV, no. 123, 2-3.

Patrolling the roads between the capital and the eastern coast appears to have been a mission entrusted to Domínguez. Perhaps the U.S. commanders considered him the only one capable of keeping his people under control along the road. Nevertheless, they sent a small detachment of U.S. soldiers to accompany and keep and eye on Domínguez as he delivered important documents to the U.S. postal outlet in Veracruz among other missions. To a large extent it is from the accounts of Americans that we know that Domínguez's excursions did not always go smoothly.

On October 19, 1847 while on its way to the coast, the Spy Company met with a detachment of three or four hundred Mexican troops of General Anastasio Torrejón. According to the *American Star*'s coverage, these forces were "surprised" in a corral, which gave Domínguez an incredible advantage over his adversaries. Trapped, "[t]he Mexicans were seized with panic […] the walls not being easily scaled" and "a great many were lanced."[64] After the combat Domínguez learned that the main forces of Torrejón were two miles ahead. Disinclined to have to face these forces, Domínguez contented himself with burning the hacienda that had been the setting for the fight and immediately returned to Puebla.

Another famous encounter with Mexican troops took place at Ojo de Agua, in January 1848.[65] This time, Domínguez and his men not only came face to face with General Torrejón, but also took him prisoner along with Generals Antonio Gaona, Vicente Miñón and some other high-raking Mexican officers.

Apparently emboldened by their victory, Domínguez's squad violated acceptable military codes of conduct when they had the opportunity to torment and humiliate the above-mentioned Mexican officers. The *contra-guerrilla* once again took advantage of their newly acquired power

[64] *The American Star*, Mexico City, 28 October 1847, vol. 1, no. 25, 3 and *The American Star*, Mexico City, 12 January 1848, vol. 1, no. 87, 1.
[65] Ojo de Agua was a small village between Puebla and Perote.

to further their own revenge agenda. U.S. officer and physician, Elisha Kane, who tried to protect the lives of the Mexican prisoners, ended up wounded by a *contra-guerrillero*. The excessive violence and cruelty that Domínguez and his men displayed in the capture of Torrejón, Gaona and Miñón was not surprising. *El Chato* Domínguez was taking revenge against General Gaona, who had had him publicly whipped in the past. The intervention of U.S. officers in the incident at Ojo de Agua stopped Domínguez and his band from continuing to torture the prisoners. According to a U.S. artillery officer, Albert Brackett, Gaona was deeply mortified about having been taken prisoner by Domínguez, his old foe.[66] Indeed, Gaona's subsequent ill fame was, in part, the work of Domínguez and his band. The press did little to spare him and the other officers the humiliation of their defeat. There were rumors that the officers had been cowardly in surrendering, and Gaona's letter of thanks to the U.S. military doctor who had defended and treated him was harshly criticized as adulatory.[67] In March 1848, when it was known that Gaona would remain in his post as Commander of Puebla, the *Eco del Comercio* expressed disapproval about the decision and suggested that the central government revoke the appointment. Gaona "was not worthy of occupying such a distinguished post [and] should be condemned to oblivion and contempt."[68]

Aside from the wound that a *contra-guerrillero* gave the U.S. officer and physician Kane, there were other incidents in which Domínguez's men committed aggressions against the Americans. On the night of January 1848, startled by the presence of strangers in a carriage at the door of their hiding place near Nopalucan, Domínguez's sentinels shot at a group of U.S. soldiers. Luckily for both parties, nobody was harmed and the confusion soon ended when

[66] Brackett, *General's Lane*, 223.
[67] "Correspondencia particular," *The American Star*, Mexico City, 21 January 1848, vol. 1, no. 95, 3; *Eco del Comercio*, Mexico City, 10 March 1848, II, no. 1, 4 and 20 March 1848, II, no. 9, 4.
[68] "General Gaona," *Eco del Comercio*, Mexico City, 20 March 1848, II, no. 9, 4.

Domínguez stuck his head out of the door to inquire who the strangers were. The Americans were then able to recognize his "fat head," and "a mutual understanding was soon reached."[69] By now, however, some Americans had begun to raise serious concerns about the Spy Company, worried about its inclination to violence and mayhem, which threatened some of the alliances and mutual agreements that Americans had managed to establish with representatives of the Mexican government, especially after February 1848 when the peace treaty had already been signed.

On February 15, 1848 Col. Childs, governor and military commander of Puebla, received a letter from Colonel Seymour informing him that Joaquín Espinosa, the prefect of San Andrés Chalchicomula (a town in the state of Puebla,) had bitterly complained about Domínguez. Instead of staying put at Ojo de Agua and thus supporting the U.S. forces stationed at Perote as he was supposed to do, Domínguez had been "running over the country" in pursuit of what seemed to be his own agenda. According to Espinosa, Domínguez and his men, aided by "some neighbors of the town," had challenged his authority by attempting to persuade other public figures to deny his legitimacy.[70] Moreover, Domínguez had gone "to the extreme of sending a dispatch to the *Alcalde Primero* (the town's Major) urging him to reject the prefect's authority and that of the police forces."[71] The case is significant as it brings further evidence that the *contra-guerrilla's* claims were not exclusively focused on material gain but also on intervening in political life. Concerned about the report, Col. Seymour pointed out in his letter to Childs that the town of San Andrés was "in a state of great excitement on account of the disorder

[69] *The American Star*, Mexico City, 26 January 1848, vol. 1, no. 99, 2.
[70] Letter from Col. Seymour to Col. Childs, 15 February 1848, USNARA, Office of the Adjutant General (RG 94), Mexican War Army of Occupation, Miscellaneous Papers, Box no. 3; and Letter from Col. Campillo to Co. Seymour, 15 February 1848, USNARA, Office of the Adjutant General (RG 94), Mexican War Army of Occupation, Miscellaneous Papers Box no. 2.
[71] Letter from Col. Campillo to Co. Seymour, 15 February 1848, USNARA, Office of the Adjutant General (RG 94), Mexican War Army of Occupation, Miscellaneous Papers Box no. 2.

produced by Domínguez"[72] and asked for immediate action to remedy the problem. Seymour also underlined that the Mexican authorities at San Andrés and Perote had been friendly to the U.S., thereby implying that letting Domínguez's mischief go unchecked would imperil the good relationship with Mexican authorities.

In mid March 1848, a month after the U.S. military governor of Puebla had received a complaint about Domínguez and company, General William Butler, who had just recently replaced General Scott as the commanding general of the U.S. Army in Mexico City, received another complaint about the Spy Company for vicious behavior they had displayed during the chase of General Gaona and his party. Dr. Kane, the American who had been severely wounded felt the necessity to detail for General Butler certain facts he considered "a complete violation of law and humanity." First, "after formal surrender" Domínguez together with Rocha and Palacios "in cold blood, attempted to sabre the prisoners." Second, the members of the Spy Company had "menaced and assaulted" an American officer. Third, *contra-guerrilleros* had distributed among themselves the "personal effects of the prisoners, including horses, clothing, watches, money, and swords" with the "consent" and "participation" of Domínguez, who had taken for himself the "elegantly caparisoned" horses of one of the Mexican generals valued at "more than three thousand dollars." Forth, the contra-guerrilleros had forced two prominent Mexican generals to ride horses without bridles, and had "promiscuously huddled together [the prisoners] in one room, destitute of food or clothing," which Domínguez refused to give back even after some U.S. officers had asked him to do so. To end his long list of charges, Kane accused Domínguez of ordering the execution of the prisoners. According to Kane, Domínguez only reconsidered his order when someone reminded him that he had no authority over the lives of the prisoners and

[72] Letter from Col. Seymour to Col. Childs, 15 February 1848, USNARA, Office of the Adjutant General (RG 94), Mexican War Army of Occupation, Miscellaneous Papers, Box no. 3.

that U.S. military authorities would surely punish him if he proceeded with his plan.[73] Dr. Kane insisted that these facts amounted to serious charges and should be properly investigated and punished. However, there is no evidence that any action was ever taken against Domínguez or other members of the Spy Company. In this affair, as well as all other occasions Domínguez's band disregarded orders from the U.S. army in order to fulfill their own goals first, which often interfered with the job of the U.S. The *contra-guerrilleros*, therefore, did not understand their role in the war as simply mercenary.

By the time Kane's letter reached him, Gen. Butler had already sensed that the *contra-guerrilleros* were a liability in more ways than one. He was also aware that the fund to defray the expenses of the Spy Company was nearly exhausted. Therefore, early in March 1848 Butler consulted with the U.S. Secretary of War about the possibility of significantly reducing the size of the Spy Company, a process that he had already started by instructing Domínguez to "get clear of" as many *contra-guerrilleros* as possible and to "have them employed as laborers for a time" within the departments of the army.[74] Butler recognized the difficulty of effectively diminishing the size of the Spy Company since Domínguez's men were seriously compromised in Mexico and could not survive without U.S. protection.

Butler's initial plan to gradually reduce the Spy Company to avoid further troubles was unsuccessful. As a matter of fact, it was precisely from March onwards that the misconduct of the *contra-guerrilleros* intensified in Mexico City and became a source of constant protest against the U.S. and Mexican authorities in the capital. Representatives of the Police

[73] Letter of E. K. Kane to Gen. Butler, 14 March 1848, USNARA, Office of the Adjutant General (RG 94), Mexican War Army of Occupation, Miscellaneous Papers, Box no. 2.
[74] Letter from Gen. Butler to Marcy, 2 March 1848, USNARA, Records of the Adjutant General Office (RG 94), 1780—1917. Mexican War, Letters Sent, 1845—1848, Commanding General At Mexico City, Feb-July, 1848, vol. 2.

Department, judicial authorities, and residents alike made countless requests that the *contra-guerrilleros* be contained and adequately punished for crimes committed.[75]

Indeed, the presence of the *contra-guerrilleros* in the capital was one of the city's most severe problems since U.S. The *contra-guerrilleros* robbed, attacked, and insulted people in the streets of Mexico City. Apparently, even an inappropriate glance could offend the *contra-guerrilleros* and lead to violent response.[76] However, most of their mischief seems to have been concentrated in the neighborhoods where they were quartered. Proximity to their hub allowed for rapid mobilization of reinforcements if the need arose, and facilitated successful escape and resistance to persecution by law enforcement authorities. [77]

According to police records, robberies and assaults occurred in broad daylight. Outraged, the newspaper *Monitor Republicano* reported that a group of *poblanos* had spent the entire afternoon of March 14 mugging every unfortunate person who crossed the *Puente de los Tecolotes* "until seven o'clock, at which time they retired."[78] On another occasion in an act of extreme impudence, Rafael Rocha, one of Domínguez's lieutenants, chased Don Pedro Salazar "sword in hand" to the very *palacio municipal* (municipal palace) where some guards took Salazar in an attempt to protect him. Rocha summoned a group of fellow *contra-guerrilleros* and "without any considerations" got inside the *palacio*, tied Mr. Salazar up with a rope and committed all kinds of other excesses that the guards were unable to impede.[79]

Mexican authorities and city residents complained that the *contra-guerrilleros* continued to go about their business with impunity. Only on rare occasions did Mexican authorities arrest

[75] See El *Monitor Republicano* and the *Eco del Comercio* various issues starting on March 1848, especially their police and security sections.
[76] *El Monitor Republicano*, Mexico City, 20 November 1847, 4.
[77] Dispatch signed by Icaza, 9 May 1848, AHDF, Fondo Ayuntamiento, vol. 2268, exp. s/n, 475r-475v.
[78] *El Monitor Republicano*, Mexico City, 17 March 1848, no. 1041, 4.
[79] *El Eco del Comercio*, Mexico City, 20 April 1848, II, no. 36, 4.

and hold them accountable for their crimes. In fact, Mexican authorities were in a difficult position, as the *contra-guerrilleros* were under the authority of the U.S. army. Their actions leave no doubt that the *contra-guerrilleros* were aware of their invulnerability and enjoyed capitalizing on it.

Newspapers reported that "*los poblanos,"* as the *contra-guerrilleros* were commonly called, were accused of robbery and murder with relative frequency. However, from the lengthy reports on policing and public safety, it is clear that the favorite pastime of the *contra-guerrilleros* was to chase, pester, or otherwise injure Mexican policemen and guards, especially the lighting stewards, who became favorite prey. The attack on government agents, however, had been a feature of the violence inflicted by the *contra-guerrilla* since their time in Puebla, including a well-known attack and robbery of a tobacco official and two guards who escorted him in the road.[80] When not physically attacked by the *contra-guerrilleros*, the lighting guards were commonly abducted or robbed. "The time has come," complained one police officer, "when the lighting stewards cannot come close to the areas in which the *contra-guerrilleros* are quartered without being injured, wounded, or killed with impunity as has already happened."[81] Days later the police officer emphasized his point by adding: "the unfortunate guards are exhausted from the continuous struggle with the *poblano*s," whose hostility was "unbearable."[82] By early April, some of the guards had begun to miss their shifts tired of enduring the *contra-guerrilleros'* viciousness.[83]

But there was more to the *contra-guerrilleros*' harassment of lighting stewards than a mere attack on particular individuals. By preventing the guards from doing their job, *the contra-*

[80] *El Diario Oficial*, Mexico City, 24 July 1847, IV, no. 133, 2-3.
[81] *El Monitor Republicano*, Mexico City, 3 March 1848, 2.
[82] *El Eco del Comercio*, Mexico City, 30 March 1848, II, no. 18, 3.
[83] *El Eco del Comercio*, Mexico City, 8 April 1848, II, no. 26, 3.

guerilleros caused large portions of the city to remain in the dark and thereby subjected the population to hours of anxiety and fear. By May 1848 the city's Ayuntamiento was deeply concerned about the "constant complaints of the neighbors" who were suffering due to what the officers deemed the *poblanos*' determination "to make the population feel the heavy burden of the war, demonstrating a depraved behavior that not even the Americans exhibited."[84] What disquieted Mexican authorities the most was the rumored nexus between the *contra-guerrilleros*, the city's bandits, and other unruly groups. For the Ayuntamiento, the mischief of the *contra-guerrilla* had become a serious social problem as it was persuaded that the *poblanos* were "in combination with the city's *malhechores*," supplying the city's outlaws with arms and protecting thieves by admitting them to their quarters when pursued by the police.[85] The shrillest alarm seemed to come from the rumor that the *contra-guerrilleros* were sponsoring plans for an uprising of Indians who lived on the outskirts of the capital.[86] The Ayuntamiento's fear about a "*guerra de castas*" (race war) was certainly exaggerated but not completely unfounded. In the recent past, the lower classes of the capital had taken up arms against the government and the wealthy on two occasions: during the *Polkos*' rebellion during February and March 1847, and for three days after the entrance of U.S. troops in Mexico City. Considering this background of long-simmering social conflict, the possible connection between *contra-guerrilleros*, Indians, and bandits or any other marginal groups was cause for concern.

The *contra-guerrilla's* active persecution of authorities and their responsibility for the state of disorder and trepidation in Mexico City strongly suggest that part of the *contra-*

[84] Dispatch signed by Icaza, 9 May 1848, AHDF, Fondo Ayuntamiento, vol. 2268, exp. s/n, 474r-474v, and *El Eco del Comercio*, Mexico City, 8 April 1848, II, no. 26, 3; and *Eco del Comercio* 26 April 1848, II, no. 41, 3.
[85] Dispatch signed by Icaza, 9 May 1848, AHDF, Fondo Ayuntamiento, vol. 2268, exp. s/n, 475r.
[86] Report on secret session of the Ayuntamiento, 16 May 1848, AHDF, Fondo Ayuntamiento, vol., 691, exp. 113, 1-1v, and Dispatch of Juan Maria Flores to the Ministry of War, AHSDN, exp. XI/481.3/2761, 278r-279r.

guerrilla's purpose was to openly confront and defy Mexico's government. One interesting reflection in this sense comes from Judge Bernardino Olmedo, who was in charge of the case against Lázaro Pérez, accused of having participated in the *contra-guerrilla* in 1848. According to him, it was a mistake to indict the *contra-guerrilleros* for treason.[87] Judge Olmedo made the important point that the *contra-guerrilleros* had never pretended loyalty to the Mexican government and had not covered up their collaboration with the U.S. army. On the contrary, and this Olmedo stressed as crucial in his analysis, the *contra-guerrilleros* had openly displayed their alliance with the national enemy. By rejecting to interpret the *contra-guerrilleros*' offences as treason, the judge hinted that he considered the formation of the *contra-guerrilla* an overt declaration of war on Mexico's government and society. Although the judge did not speak of the *contra-guerrilla* as a revolt, it seems clear that he came close to thinking of Domínguez's band in those terms. The fact that a heated debate about the nature of "*delitos políticos*" (political crimes) and about the best way to eradicate them unfolded in the aftermath of the absolution of two former *contra-guerrilleros* supports the idea. Significantly, the discussion often lumped together mutinies, revolts, the latest *pronunciamiento* of General Paredes and the *contra-guerrilla*.[88] At any rate, Judge Olmedo's interpretation caused controversy and stirred a juridical debate about what treason was. Ultimately, the need to hold them accountable for their contribution to the disgraces of war won over, and in 1853 the government persecuted the *contra-guerrilleros* again for treason to the homeland. Nevertheless, the opinion of Judge Olmedo is significant as both first-hand witness of the participation of the *contra-guerrilla* in the war and as a judicial authority.

[87] "Sobre que los contraguerrilleros deben ser juzgados por la autoridad militar conforme a las leyes vigentes," Mexico, 18 July 1858, AGN, Justicia 118, vol. 606, exp. 46, 233r-245r.
[88] See *Eco del Comercio*, Mexico City, 28 July 1848, II, no. 121, 4 and *Eco del Comercio*, Mexico City, 29 July 1848, II, no. 122, 3-4.

By the end of May 1848, the threat of the *contra-guerrilleros* had become virtually unbearable to Mexico City's Ayuntamiento. It had deeply undermined its authority and it was adding an element of violence and instability to the already precarious situation in Mexico City on the eve of the complete withdrawal of the U.S. army.[89] As they had done previously with no success, the members of the municipal corporation appointed a commission to go to General Butler and request his collaboration in getting the *contra-guerrilleros* out of Mexico City.[90] Since the peace treaty had been signed and the U.S. army was shortly to retire from the capital, General Butler agreed to the authorities' petition and "in private and friendly conversation" he confided that "if he had been in charge of the American army from the beginning, he would have never approved the hiring of the *contra-guerrilleros*."[91] Undoubtedly, the fact that a peace agreement had been signed in February 1848 and that the U.S. army was soon to retire from the capital were major factors in Butler's openness to the Ayuntamiento.

With the war officially over, the members of the Spy Company abandoned their quarters in the streets of *Migueles* and *San Camilo* before May 30. According to the daily *Eco del Comercio*, the neighbors "as though signaling a great victory, used fireworks, cried *vivas*, and by all conceivable means manifested their joy" over the departure of the *contra-guerrilleros*.[92] However, the noticeable disaffection expressed by Mexico City's dwellers was not enough to completely eradicate the *contra-guerrilleros,* many of whom decided to stay in the capital after the U.S. troops had retired. The municipal government employed the police to apprehend the

[89] The U.S army initiated its retirement from Mexico City early in June 1848.
[90] According to its own records, the Ayuntamiento's requests to Gen. Butler regarding the ejection of the *contra-guerrilleros* form Mexico City previous to May 1848 had been denied "perhaps because, at that time, the hostilities [between Mexico and the U.S] had not ceased." See, Dispatch signed by Icaza, 9 May 1848, AHDF, Fondo Ayuntamiento, vol. 2268, exp. s/n, 476r.
[91] Dispatch from Juan Maria Flores to the Ministry of War, 11 May 1848, AHSDN, exp. XI/481.3/2761, vol. II, 278r-279v.
[92] *El Eco del Comercio*, Mexico City, 30 May 1848, II, no. 70, 4.

"*malhechores*" who had serviced the United States army, but as far as can be determined, this was not a successful endeavor. [93] Only one man, Roque Miranda, was brought to justice.

Aside from Manuel Domínguez, Roque Miranda and Nicanor Martínez, whose stories will be the subject of the next chapter, little is known about the fate of the members of the Spy Company after the U.S. army retired from Mexico. According to General Butler, the *contra-guerrilleros* were offered two options at the end of the U.S. occupation: they could be transported to the United States "without pledges as to the future" or they could be discharged in Veracruz receiving $20 each as compensation for their services. Perhaps seeing little prospect for demanding more, the members of the Spy Company said they preferred to be discharged in Veracruz. However, once there, the *poblanos* alleged that their survival was unlikely if abandoned in Mexico and cajoled Butler into taking them to the United States.[94] The general relented and gave orders that the *contra-guerrilleros* be taken to the area of Corpus Christi; but he insisted that "they were to receive no more pay from the U.S."[95]

The whereabouts of the majority of the *contra-guerrilleros* after July 1848 are, therefore, hard to establish. Some settled near the border with Mexico. Manuel Domínguez and others went to New Orleans, while others decided to embark on an expedition to Campeche organized by General Joseph Lane "on his own hook."[96] Contrary to Hitchcock's prediction that the *contra-guerrilleros* established in the Rio Grande frontier would soon disperse, they remained together and acted as bandits and smugglers in the territory between Brownsville and the

[93] "Contra-guerrilleros Poblanos, sobre que se inquiera el lugar donde existen estos y se aprehendan," 1 July 1848, AHDF, Fondo Ayuntamiento, Sección: Policía Seguridad, vol. 3691, exp. 118, 1848, 1r.
[94] A U.S. report on the retiring troops states that eighty *contra-guerrilleros* left the country under the command of Gen. Butler. See "Verdaderos documentos," 274. However, according to the testimony of Butler, only 60 former *contra-guerrilleros* were transported to the United States.
[95] Butler to Marcy, 27 June 1848, USNARA, Records of the Adjutant General Office, 1780—1917 (RG 94), Mexican War, 1846—1848, Commanding General At Mexico City, February-July, 1848, vol. 2.
[96] Hitchcock, *Fifty Years,* 330.

Mexican city of Matamoros.[97] Moreover, in the summer of 1849 former *contra-guerrilleros poblanos* were involved in the failed independence movement of the *República de la Sierra Madre,* partly directed by their old chief Manuel Domínguez. Former *contra-guerrilleros* were living in Brownsville as late as 1855, when five of them submitted a petition to the U.S. Congress for bounty lands and extra pay in consideration to their previous services in the war against Mexico. Their petition reached the Senate's Committee on Public Lands, which "discharged [it] from further consideration" on August 11, 1856.[98]

Very little is known about the fate of the *contra-guerrilleros* who stayed in Mexico in the years immediately following the war. The *Eco del Comercio* supposed that "unable to show themselves," many former *contra-guerrilleros* would become *ladrones de caminos* (highwaymen).[99] Indeed, after the U.S. withdrawal from Mexico, former *contra-guerrilleros* were in a delicate position and it is likely that they prolonged their absence from those places where they would be recognized until the memory of their misdeeds faded. The gravity of their situation eased after 1848 when –following debate regarding the adequacy and utility of indicting former *contra-guerrilleros* for treason—judicial authorities of the Supreme Tribunal ruled that ratification of the peace treaty invalidated charges of treason against the *contra-guerrilleros.* This was the controversial conclusion reached in the case of Roque Miranda. However, the issue refused to die. A 1853 decree issued by Santa Anna, who was then back in the presidency, revoked the previous judicial decision to drop the charge of treason to the homeland. He ordered

[97] Hitchcock, *Fifty Years*, 343; Luis G. Zorrilla, *Historia de las relaciones entre México y Estados Unidos*, vol. 1 (Mexico: Porrúa, 1977), 247; and Moisés González Navarro, *Anatomía del poder en México (1848-1853)* (Mexico: El Colegio de México, 1977), 251.
[98] *Senate Journal for 1st and 2nd sessions of the 34th Congress*, 555.
[99] *El Eco del Comercio*, Mexico City, 13 June 1848, II, no. 82, 3.

the initiation of prosecutions of former *contra-guerrilleros* via court martials.[100] According to archival records, and despite the repeated efforts of Santa Anna to make former *contra-guerrilleros* pay dearly for their treason, only a few men were accused of having taken part in the *contra-guerrilla poblana* and we know of none who were imprisoned. Most cases against former *contra-guerrilleros* were closed for lack of evidence to convict the accused.

Conclusion

The evidence presented in this chapter about the participation of the *contra-guerrilleros* in the war with the U.S. suggests that it is possible and necessary to question the traditional interpretation of the Mexican Spy Company as a purely mercenary and bandit organization. It is undeniable that material gain constituted an important incentive to assist the U.S. in the war. The monthly earnings of the *poblanos* surpassed the monthly salary of many U.S. soldiers and were vastly superior to what Mexican soldiers received.[101] However, the *contra-guerrilleros* were more than spies, guides and couriers at the service of the U.S. army. The Spy Company was a highly effective armed group that often overstepped the power that the U.S. army had granted it. This suggests that a good salary was not all that Domínguez and his men sought.

The generalized chaos unleashed during the war with the United States was a stimulus for the marginalized to take advantage of the situation. In nineteenth century Mexico, people like Domínguez and many of his comrades—mestizo, young men from middle and lower strata—suffered much of the impact of economic stagnation and political instability. Typically then, people like the *contra-guerrilleros* were ambitious and restless, prone to quickly respond to whatever opportunities opened up for their social and economic advancement. In turn, this

[100] "José Mariano de Salas, Gobernador y Comandante general del Estado de México, a todos sus habitantes," 1853, AHDF, Fondo Municipalidades, Sección San Ángel, Bandos, box 27, exp. 13L.
[101] Hitchcock, *Fifty Years*, 265; and Caruso, *The Mexican Spy Company*, 152.

meant that they were often in trouble with authorities, which frequently pushed them to live in permanent outlawry.

Previous analyses of the Mexican Spy Company reduce the case to one of economic opportunism by focusing too narrowly on the plunder in which the *contra-guerrilleros* engaged. Indeed, the *contra-guerrilleros* robbed repeatedly; yet they did not collaborate with the U.S. with the single purpose of obtaining a sizable booty. If all they wanted was to loot, it was not necessary to enlist in the *contra-guerrilla*. The near collapse of the Mexican government during the war ensured that the chances of being caught and punished for robberies and such were slim.[102] Besides, if the *contra-guerrilleros* were solely interested in stealing, they could have chosen to enlist in a Mexican guerrilla group. In fact, many of them had already gained fame for their criminal excesses; enrolling in a Mexican guerrilla would have had the benefit of the possibility of obtaining official pardon for their past crimes. Many former prisoners obtained official pardons *precisely* because of their involvement in anti-U.S. guerrilla units. But clearly, the members of the *contra-guerrilla* were not interested in this.

Furthermore, getting involved in the *contra-guerrilla* poblana implied significant risks: first, because of the obvious perils of war; and second, because collaborating with the national enemy was treason to the homeland, punishable by death. Beyond physical danger, joining the *contra-guerrilla* meant being detested by Mexicans and Americans alike. The *poblanos* became a preferred target in explaining the disgrace of the war especially after the occupation of Mexico City. Deemed despicable traitors, the *contra-guerrilleros* were regarded with resentment and

[102] Public opinion across the country complained on a daily basis about the lack of sufficient and effective police. The issue can be followed in newspapers such as *Monitor Republicano*, *Eco del Comercio*, *El Siglo XIX*, etc.

repugnance as revealed by the fact that they were commonly referred to as "*perros*" (dogs).[103] Neither were the *poblanos* highly regarded among U.S. soldiers. For one thing, the criminal past of some of the *contra-guerrilleros* was well known; therefore, Domínguez and his band were always viewed with a degree of suspicion and revulsion. Besides, the assistance of the *contra-guerrilleros* appeared to some as a betrayal of American values. For example, in their memoirs of the Mexican War, two American officers confided that they "cursed" Domínguez's people and referred to them as "jail birds," "ragamuffins" and "The Forty Thieves."[104]

Despite the considerable risks, Domínguez and his men soon realized that as part of the winning side they gained some access to power regardless of how fleeting. Domínguez and his men exercised power through violence, which they never confined to military encounters with Mexican guerrillas or regular army forces. In fact, the *contra-guerrilleros* did not even restrict the use of violence to wartime, but employed it routinely against fellow Mexicans after hostilities between Mexico and the United States had officially ended and a peace treaty had been signed. In short, far from being strictly a function of war, the *contra-guerrilleros* employed violence to inflict fear and subject people to their will.

The political dimension of the *contra-guerrilla* comes to the fore when we consider it in comparison with other popular mobilizations of its time. As in the case of other movements, friendship and kin bonds that united some of the *contra-guerrilleros* before the war seem to have given the *contra-guerrilla* a significant cohesion. During the war, however, the group's identity

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[103] Carmen Blázquez Domínguez, "La presencia norteamericana en Veracruz durante el conflicto de 1847", in *México en guerra (1846—1848). Perspectivas regionales*. L. Herrera Serna, coord. (Mexico City: Museo Nacional de las Intervenciones-Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes, 1997), 669.
[104] Brackett, A. G., *General Lane's Brigade in Central Mexico by Albert G. Brackett, M.D., Late an officer in the U.S. Volunteer Service*. (Cincinnati and New York H.W. Derby & Co., Publishers, 1854), 186-187; and Anderson, R*., An Artillery Officer in The Mexican War 1846-7. Letters of Robert Anderson Captain 3rd Artillery, U.S.A.* Preface by Eba Anderson Lawton (Freeport, New York: Books for Libraries Press, 1971), 266.

revolved around alliance with the U.S. army. As far as the evidence allows us to tell, the *contra-guerrilleros* proudly wore their uniform and referred to their leaders with military titles. More importantly, the actions of the *contra-guerrilla* followed to a significant extent a "repertoire of contention" featured in other cases of popular mobilization. The persecution of judicial and political authorities, the burning of judicial files, and opening up of jails to liberate prisoners were paramount elements of popular political violence during the nineteenth century.

Through their participation in the war as *contra-guerrilleros*, Domínguez and his band made a public statement, however inarticulate or anarchic, against established authority. Domínguez's refusal of two government pardons in 1847 is further evidence of the *contra-guerrilla's* opposition to the Mexican government. Aside from the material reward it entailed, this pardon constituted a passage from outlawry to the rule of law and if Domínguez had accepted the offer, he and his comrades would have abandoned their status as outlaws and seamlessly become insiders, allies of legitimate authority. However, the offer was turned down.

This chapter focused on the collective action of the *contra-guerrilla* during the Mexican American War. The next chapter examines the stories of three members of the Mexican Spy Company in order to analyze their individual relationships with society and with the authorities and to compare their cases with the predominant theoretical models/modes of banditry: social versus entrepreneurial/profit driven.

Chapter 4: Social and Judicial Background of Three Contra-guerrilleros

In Mexico, prolonged warfare, lack of political consensus and a depressed economy created fertile ground for various forms of popular violence throughout the first half of the nineteenth century. Banditry was a prevalent form of violence related to various forms of popular political engagement that began during the wars of independence. Banditry remained a problem throughout the century, in part, because the administration of justice in Mexico was ineffective. At one end of the problem were slow-moving bureaucracy, lack of resources, corruption and impunity. At the other end, socio-economic pressure and political instability contributed to making banditry attractive.

By and large, Mexican banditry during the first half of the nineteenth century had little to do with "social banditry" as Eric Hobsbawm described it. Mexican banditry was not about realigning power relationships according to acceptable forms of domination; it bore more resemblance to what Block and many historians identify as banditry motivated by opportunism and individualism. Under the right circumstances, the grievances and ambitions of young men became the basis for popular mobilization that declared war on society, undermined government authority and exposed the problems that an incapable judicial system had created. Banditry was not devoid of political content. The war with the United States introduced a new set of circumstances that made it possible for anti-social attitudes to escalate into anti-national ones. The war exacerbated Mexico's old problems such as insecurity, poverty and violence and caused the near collapse of government. The chaos produced by warfare opened fertile ground for explosions of long-nurtured social rancor and rapacious opportunism. In order to understand how personal ambition can become the basis of collective mobilization and how anti-social attitudes

can become anti-national, biographies of bandits are used to illuminate the larger phenomenon of banditry. They shed light on factors that favored the rise of such individuals. What follows is an analysis of the three best-documented cases of men who participated in the Mexican Spy Company: Manuel Domínguez (the head of the band,) Roque Miranda and Nicanor Martínez, whose position within the group remains unknown. The stories of these men are illustrative how the war opened up a window of opportunity to promote their interests. Their stories are also illuminating of problems in the administration of justice, particularly of the often-cited authorities' tolerance of bandits in the cases of Domínguez and Miranda.

Most of what we know about Domínguez, Miranda and Martínez comes from judicial records. The veracity of such sources is not always easy to establish. Other kinds of information that would give us a clearer picture of the social history we are trying to reconstruct do not abound. There are, however, myriad historical studies that use judicial archives as main sources, and other historians have already elaborated on the particular advantages and disadvantages of judicial documents.[1] Thus, I read my sources aware that these documents had the explicit aim of incriminating the three men deemed a menace to law and order and that there is a good chance that the judicial records reflect the perspective of groups in power. Many of the judicial files, however, include statements by the accused, which provide invaluable information even in cases where their words are not recorded verbatim.

According to the available studies on the administration of justice during the first half of the nineteenth century in Mexico, no standard legal framework existed to deal with crime. An

[1] See for instance, William B. Taylor, D*rinking, Homicide, and Rebellion in Colonial Mexican Villages*. Stanford University Press, 1979; William B. Taylor, "Bandit Gangs in Late Colonial Times: Rural Jalisco, Mexico, 1794—1821." In *Bibliotheca Americana*, 1, no. 2 (Nov. 1982): 29-57; Eric Van Young, *The Other Rebellion: Popular Violence, Ideology, and the Mexican Struggle for Independence, 1810—1821.* Stanford University Press, 2001 and Ricardo Salvatore D., *Wandering Paysanos. State Order and Subaltern Experience in Buenos Aires during the Rosas Era.* Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2003.

abundance of legislation inherited from colonial times continued in place beyond the mid nineteenth century, alongside a good number of laws and decrees issued by federal or state governments. The multiplicity of laws relating to the same issue was an impediment to the prompt administration of justice. A group of contemporaries aptly stated, "legislation is a chaos from which both the honest as well as the crooked litigants can appeal to numerous laws to make eternal and contentious the simplest case in the world."[2] The high expense of judicial procedures also impeded the execution of justice. Once someone was accused of a crime, a long process of gathering evidence began by obtaining statements from witnesses and other people called to testify by the judge. Often, these oral testimonies provided insufficient information about the crime to determine innocence or guilt, leading very frequently to inaction.[3] It was not uncommon for criminal cases to remain unsolved for years. By the 1840s the ineffective administration of justice had convinced many that cases against bandits should be tried by a military tribunal so that bandits would receive immediate punishment for their crimes.[4] Nevertheless, for most of the first half of the nineteenth century, robbery and murder were considered crimes of the *fuero común* (ordinary jurisdiction) and therefore judged in civil courts.

Criminal cases were generally within the competence of *juzgados de primera instancia* (district court.) According to the constitution of 1824, in vigor until 1836 and then again between 1846 an 1857, no one could be detained for more than sixty hours without evidence of his/her

[2] Varios Mexicanos, *Consideraciones sobre la situación política y social de la Republica Mexicana, en el año 1847* (Mexico: Valdés y Redondas Impresores, 1848), 13.
[3] *Memoria del Ministro de Estado y del Despacho de Justicia y Negocios Eclesiásticos, leída ante las cámaras del congreso general, en las sesiones de los días 15 y 16 de Enero de 1849* (Mexico: Imprenta de Vicente García Torres, 1849), 9.
[4] Laura Solares Robles, *Bandidos somos y en el camino andamos. Bandidaje, caminos y administración de justicia en el siglo XIX, 1821—1855. El caso de Michoacán* (Instituto Michoacano de Cultura-Instituto de Investigaciones, Dr. José María Luis Mora: Morelia, Michoacan, 1999),163.

involvement in a crime.[5] When the initial investigation was insufficient to incriminate the suspects, they were allowed to go on bail. If the *averiguación* (investigation) provided sound evidence to charge a suspect, the individual(s) in question were formally imprisoned. The resolution of the judge of the *juzgado de primera instancia* could be appealed to a higher tribunal that had the right to confirm, reject or modify the sentence. The main elements of the judicial process can be identified in the three stories that will be presented in this chapter. Each of these, however, has peculiarities that are not always easy to explain. This is owed to both the lack of consistency in how trials were carried out at different moments and in different places, as well as to gaps in the judicial files. That the trials of Miranda and Martínez, went to both military and civil courts adds confusion.

The case of each man is presented separately. I address certain parallels between Domínguez and Miranda before telling the story of Martínez, whose case offers an interesting contrast. For example, prior to their involvement in the *contra-guerrilla*, Domínguez and Miranda were well-known bandits while Martínez was a humble man with no criminal record.

Manuel Domínguez

To this day, stories about Manuel Domínguez repeat either the account of U.S. General Ethan Allen Hitchcock or the view of Mexican public opinion. Hitchcock's version that Domínguez was once an honest weaver and trader of *rebozos* (shawls) who had become a robber only after having been disappointed by the Mexican justice system is an apologia. In contrast, public opinion in Puebla and Mexico City has traditionally regarded Domínguez as an unrepentant

[5] Elisa Speckman Guerra, "Justicia, revolución y proceso. Instituciones judiciales en el Distrito Federal, 1810—1829," in *México en tres momentos: 1810—1910—2010*, coord. Alicia Mayer (Mexico: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México-Instituto de Investigaciones Históricas, 2007), 202.

criminal who used the U.S. invasion of Mexico as an opportunity to make fellow countrymen pay dearly for previously making him an outcast. My own research in Puebla's archives seems to support, for the most part, the view that Domínguez was a troublemaker from an early age and that he was, in fact, well known for his mischief in Puebla before the Mexican American war loomed on the horizon.

The man who came to be known as *El Chato* Domínguez and is remembered as a ruthless bandit and a traitor to his homeland during the war with the United States was a native of the city of Puebla. Domínguez must have been born around 1815, amidst the generalized political and social strife of the independence wars, which lasted until 1821. He was the son of Joaquín Domínguez and Joaquina (or Josefa) Quiñones of whom we have almost no information other than that in 1833 they inhabited a house with several rooms, a stable and a veranda on Puente del Toro street, not far from the main square of Puebla.[6] The characteristics of the house, as well as the fact that Manuel Domínguez is called "Don" in the first judicial case found, suggest that although neither rich nor aristocratic, the Domínguez family was reasonably well off. We know nothing about Domínguez's schooling except that he knew how to sign his name. Although far from elegant, graceful or expert, the strokes of his signature are not interrupted as those of someone who has barely started to write, but smooth enough to indicate that Manuel was familiar with the rudiments of writing. An official communication to U.S. Colonel Sidney Seymour mentioned that Domínguez sent a letter to the mayor of San Andrés Chalchicomula in Puebla,

[6] "Causa criminal formada contra Dn. Manuel Domínguez por la herida que le infiró a Pedro León y en averiguación de los excesos cometidos en la casa del primero por dos patrullas de soldados cívicos del batallón 20," 1833, Archivo Histórico Judicial de Puebla (hereafter AHJP) exp. 15649. In 1833 Domínguez said to have been eighteen years old. However, this does not fit neatly with his testimony of 1839, when he said to be twenty-two years old. There is not doubt, however, that we are talking about the same person in both years. Among other indicators of his identity, Domínguez signature is unmistakable. The Puente del Toro Street where Domínguez said his residence was corresponds to today's 2 Oriente Street, only a block away from the main square of Puebla. Internet; http://www.hoteles-puebla.com/gonzalez2.htm; (accessed March 11, 2009.)

but since the document has not survived we cannot compare the handwriting to verify if he wrote it himself, which would mean that he was literate. According to his testimony in 1833 Manuel Domínguez was a "cívico de caballo," that is, a mounted member of the civil militias in the city of Puebla. Since Domínguez never mentions this position again, it is possible that he did not last long in this corps. According to the historian Antonio Carrión, at some point in his life Manuel had a butcher shop and he also sold trinkets and blankets. These commercial activities, Carrión claims, gave him expertise in the roads.[7] After the death of Manuel's mother, between 1833 and 1839, he and his younger brother José María moved in with their uncle Fernando Quiñones and his wife.[8] Quiñones worked as a livestock broker and also as a courier. Apparently not too far apart in age, Manuel and Fernando were good friends in leisure time, associates in business and companions in their repeated appearances in Puebla's courts.

From an early age Domínguez appears to have been prone to quarrels and through the years involved himself in illicit acts of different magnitudes, from street fighting to homicide, which contrast starkly with Hitchcock's image of Domínguez as a humanitarian robber chief who "strictly forbade murder."[9] Manuel Domínguez was brought to court, perhaps for the first time, in October 1833. He was eighteen years old and was arrested in his own house because his neighbor, Pedro León, accused him of attacking and wounding him badly. According to Leon's account, Domínguez was the instigator of the fight, but the latter assured the court that he had only defended himself against various intolerable offenses by León. Since neither version could

[7] Antonio Carrión, *Historia de la ciudad de Puebla de los Ángeles,* vol. 2 (Puebla: J. M. Cajica, 1970), 303.
[8] "Causa criminal formada en averiguación del robo de cantidad de dinero que con escalamiento fractura de una puerta y fuerza de armas en pedimento Dn. Pablo Peres, por lo que están presos Manuel Domínguez y Fernando García,, a,, Quiñones,"1839, AHJP, exp. 20115; and "Contra José María Domínguez y Francisco Nava...," 1845, AHJP, exp. 24907.
[9] Ethan Allen Hitchcock, *Fifty Years in Camp and Field: Diary of Major-General Ethan Allen Hitchcock,* ed. W.A. Crofutt (New York: Putnam Sons, 1909), 336.

be verified, Domínguez was released on bail. Significantly, however, the investigation continued in order to examine the use of excessive violence in the apprehension of Domínguez. Soldiers of the 20th civil battalion had arrived at the site of the fight in considerable numbers and searched Domínguez's house, forcefully breaking into some of its rooms. According to his account, the soldiers fired some shots because "they had orders to kill him."[10] No progress was made in the investigation and the case seems to have been dismissed on April 1834.

Based on Domínguez's statement that the soldiers had reacted violently because "they had orders to kill him" and considering that nobody challenged or contradicted the statement during the investigation, we can infer that, in fact, someone within the 20th battalion or with authority over it was seeking revenge against Domínguez. Taking into account that Domínguez was a civil guard himself at the time, it is possible that the affair was an attempted settlement of accounts.

Domínguez's whereabouts after the fight with León are imprecise until March 1835, when he was accused of highway robbery and was incarcerated for the crime in Huejotzingo (just outside of the city of Puebla.) While in jail, Domínguez killed Matías Flores, a fellow inmate, and for this crime was transferred to Puebla's prison as the murder was investigated in the *juzgado primero criminal* presided over by Judge Manuel María Ochoa.[11]

After hearing the testimony of the witnesses to the fight in which Matías Flores lost his life, judge Ochoa decided that Domínguez had acted in self-defense and allowed him to be released on bail. Ochoa later recalled that he would have liberated Domínguez sooner had he not suspected that many of the witnesses in the case thought Domínguez was a "*riquillo*" (wealthy

[10] "Causa criminal formada contra Dn. Manuel Domínguez por la herida que le infiró a Pedro León...," 1833, AHJP, exp. 15649.
[11] "Causa criminal en averiguación del homicidio que ejecutó el reo Manuel Domínguez en la persona de Matías Flores dentro de la misma cárcel," 1840, AHJP, exp. 20677.

enough) and therefore might have hope to sell their testimony. Ochoa also said he had delayed the release of Domínguez in an attempt to extend the opportunity for the "youngster" to rehabilitate himself, since he had made important efforts to that end and shown remarkable abilities in the shoemaking workshop.[12]

It is difficult to ascertain conclusively whether Ochoa's decision to grant Domínguez freedom was justified on the grounds of the judge's diligent judicial investigation and humanitarianism or, whether the judge's knowledge of Domínguez's moderate wealth was an incentive to act in his favor. Whatever the reason that made Ochoa tip the scale, there is evidence that he intervened in favor of Domínguez in two additional occasions.

In August of 1839, Don Pablo Pérez accused Domínguez of breaking into his house accompanied by other men and stealing money, jewelry and clothing. Pérez suspected Domínguez and Fernando Quiñones because "they spent every day lingering idly in the *pulquería*" across the street from his house.[13] Pérez was also convinced that the voice of Domínguez was identical to the voice he heard the night of the robbery. Despite Domínguez's insistence that he was ignorant of the reason for his detention, the authorities searched his house and found two coffers with 250 and 300 pesos respectively. Domínguez vowed the money belonged to him and that he had recently received it in the house of Judge Manuel Ochoa. He also explained that it was capital he had invested with a merchant. As evidence that he was telling the truth, Domínguez presented a document that indicated that the merchant was supposed to pay certain sums of money to Domínguez. The testimony of Fernando Quiñones supported Domínguez's version that the money was legitimately earned but Judge Julián Cantú, who was in charge of the case, continued the investigation requesting that his colleague, Judge Ochoa, send a

[12] Ibidem.
[13] "Causa criminal formada en averiguación del robo…,"1839, AHJP, exp. 20115.

written response to what Domínguez and Quiñones had said. Ochoa's dispatch soon appeared and, sure enough, corroborated Domínguez's version about the origin of the money found in his house. In Ochoa's own words, "some time ago I was asked to keep in custody the monies that Don Mariano Romero, merchant of the Parián, owed Manuel Domínguez and would pay in installments."[14] As far as the origin of the money, Ochoa commented towards the end of his letter, that he was under the impression that it constituted part of Domínguez's inheritance, but that he could not guarantee this to be true.[15] Upon receiving this communication from Ochoa, Judge Cantú released Domínguez and Quiñones on bail while exhorting them to "observe a better conduct so that they do not raise suspicions in the future."[16] Judge Cantú and Domínguez, however, saw one another soon afterwards.

In January 18, 1840 Domínguez became the prime suspect in a robbery on the highway. The description of the bandit captain's physical attributes apparently matched those of Domínguez and he was arrested.[17] As per the court papers, some of the stolen items were found in Domínguez's house, and the travelers were able to identify the robber from among a group of detainees.[18] Domínguez insisted the artifacts found belonged to him and to Fernando García (Quiñones) and was able to prove that on the day of the robbery he had been in the city of Puebla in company of two other men.[19] In the absence of further evidence, judge Cantú dismissed the robbery charges. However, he prohibited Domínguez from being released because his last court

[14] "Causa criminal formada en averiguación del robo...," 1839, AHJP, exp. 20115.
[15] Ibidem.
[16] Ibidem.
[17] "Causa criminal, formada en averuguación del robo que con asalto y en camino público espresaron Dn. Patricio Arriaga, Dn. Joaquín Juárez, Dn. Manuel García, Dn. Francisco García, Dn. Miguel Iriarte, y Dn. Manuel Durángo; por el que está preso Manuel Domínguez," Puebla 22 January1840, AHJP, exp. 20650.
[18] Ibid.
[19] The judicial record has his name as Fernando García. This last name appeared in other documents before but always in company of the name Quiñones. I am certain to be dealing with the same individual; however, there is lack of uniformity in Fernando's last names in various judicial papers.

appearance had revealed that the case against Domínguez for the murder of Matías Flores remained outstanding. In fact, Judge Manuel Ochoa had resolved the case giving Domínguez a light sentence, but Ochoa had failed to submit his decision to the Supreme Tribunal and thus the case was considered unresolved.[20]

When Judge Cantú set out to investigate whether justice had been properly administered in the Flores' case, he found a significant obstacle. All the documents gathered under the auspices of Ochoa had been lost. The investigation led nowhere because none of the original witnesses could be found. Thus, Cantú determined that a report from judge Ochoa was needed. In May 1840 Ochoa wrote a letter informing Cantú of as many details about the case of Matías Flores' homicide as he "retained in his memory."[21] But this did not add anything new. Ochoa insisted that witnesses' accounts convinced him that Domínguez had acted in self-defense. Cantú, however, was not persuaded that the homicide had been adequately investigated and denied Domínguez his liberty.

Of all of Ochoa's interventions, it is the one in 1840 that raises the most suspicions regarding his connection to Domínguez. When the public prosecutor Duarte investigated the absence of the judicial file that Ochoa was supposed to have kept on the murder of Flores, he stumbled across a number of irregularities. These were too many and too important to be fortuitous. Ochoa had failed to submit the case to the Supreme Tribunal under the pretext that it "must have been mixed up with other files, but should reappear once the inventory was completed."[22] Asked for a second time to submit the file to the tribunal, Ochoa announced that

[20] "Expediente instruido por Manuel Domínguez sobre la apelación que interpuso del auto de prisión impuesta por el juez primero de letras del ramo criminal de esta ciudad." Puebla March 1840, AHJP, exp. 20859.2, 4.
[21] "Criminal en averiguación del homicidio…," 1840, AHJP, exp. 20677, 15.
[22] "Estracto con relación de los expedientes en solicitud a la causa de Manuel Domínguez. Responsabilidad del Sor. Lic. Ochoa" 1840, AHJP, exp. 21038.

although the inventory had been finished Domínguez's case had not appeared. According to Ochoa, there was still a chance that the documents had been accidentally included in the wrong file but it was improbable. Judge Ochoa went on to justify the confusion in his archives as due to a swift gathering of the documents during a prisoners' breakout attempt and finally admitted that the file that contained the documents of Domínguez's case was probably lost.[23] Additionally, the investigation of the prosecutor shed light on another unconventional occurrence. Although the jail's records noted Domínguez's entry on January 26, 1839, the prison's commandant said that Domínguez had been dismissed on January 14 and transferred to the *cuartel de artillería* (artillery garrison) as requested in a written order presented by Judge Ochoa. Yet, the Artillería had no record of Domínguez's arrival.

Thus, the evidence suggests that Domínguez received the protection of Judge Ochoa to escape justice. But that does not exclude the possibility that some of his arrests were in part settlement of accounts or even fabricated attempts to put him behind bars. Court documents support this idea. In 1833 he was the victim of excessive violence during the search of his household. Years later, lacking evidence that Domínguez was involved in a robbery, the suspicion of one man that Domínguez was one of the burglars was enough to prompt the authorities to search his house and arrest him. In a similar vein, a description given by a mugged traveler prompted the authorities to go after Domínguez despite the fact that they did not have further proof of his involvement in the crime. In fact, while under investigation for the homicide of Matías Flores, Domínguez made repeated appeals in which he insisted he had been a victim of abuse of authority and defamation. "Since 1829 I have suffered cruel persecutions motivated by the aversion some have for me; but despite the efforts invested in incriminating me, never have

[23] Ibidem.

my enemies been able to make me responsible for the slightest crime."[24] More concretely, Domínguez attributed his detention in 1840 to the personal hatred of the prosecutor Duarte, with whom he had had a quarrel years ago when the latter had been the prefect of Puebla.[25]

According to Domínguez, he had recognized his stolen horse in the possession of one of Duarte's *mozos* (servants) and dared to claim it. Since that complaint, Domínguez insisted, he had suffered a lot of injustices even though he had relinquished the disputed horse to avoid exposing himself further to Duarte's power. Given this background, Domínguez requested that the *fiscal* stop his intervention in the case.[26] Duarte denied the story of the stolen horse and stated that he had certainly no desire "even less than Domínguez himself" to be involved in the case.[27] Although it is impossible to verify Domínguez's allegations about Duarte, what is certain is that they knew each other from a previous arrest of Domínguez. It is also true that if Duarte did not hate Domínguez, he at least distrusted him and suspected that he had the sympathy of some of the authorities that had handled the case of the murder of Flores.[28]

In August 1840, Domínguez's defense lawyer, José María Vega, lodged a new appeal for the release of his client. The demand stopped short of directly blaming the authorities involved in the case for their malice against Domínguez. Vega stated that he could see no other impediment for Domínguez's release but a "personal whim."[29] The defense also tried to get Judge Cantú on its side by alluding to his sense of justice, which would not permit that an "unfortunate man" to become prey to personal caprice in order to make Domínguez "eternally miserable."[30] A last

[24] "Expediente instruido por Manuel Domínguez sobre la apelación…," 1840, AHJP, exp. 20859.2, 3r.
[25] Ibid. 6r.
[26] Ibidem.
[27] Ibid,. 5v, 6r and 21v.
[28] "Estracto con relación a los expedientes en solicitud de la causa de Manuel Domínguez…," AHJP, Puebla 1842, exp 21038.
[29] "Criminal en averiguación del homicidio…,"1840, AHJP, exp. 20677, 26v.
[30] Ibid., 27r.

appeal came in September 1840. In it, Vega denounced aggression on the part of the prosecutor. Duarte had gotten into Domínguez's face yelling that the loss of the trial documents must have cost Dominguez some money, which confirms that Duarte believed that Domínguez had bribed Ochoa or some other authority and he wanted to prove it. Indeed, a dispatch signed long after, in June 1842, indicates that Attorney Duarte continued to investigate the role of Judge Ochoa in relation to the case against Domínguez for the homicide of Matías Flores even though Domínguez had been off the hook for this crime for a while.

In November 1840 Judge Cantú determined that the case of the murder of Matías Flores was still unclear and, therefore, it was impossible to confirm whether Domínguez had acted in "self-defense" or with premeditation. Cantú gave Domínguez a sentence of four years in prison counting in his favor the time he had already spent in confinement between August 1836 and July 1839. Domínguez refused to accept the verdict and the case went up to a second tier tribunal for review. Finally, on January 22 1841, the tribunal declared that Manuel Domínguez had paid for the murder of Matías Flores with the "three years and eleven months he had spent in prison on different occasions"[31] and issued orders for his release.

In pointing out the tension between the characterization of Domínguez as a culprit, but also as a possible victim my intention is neither to claim that Domínguez was innocent and unjustly persecuted nor that he had bought a judge. Rather, I want to emphasize that far from being mutually exclusive, these conditions reinforce one another. Bandits like Domínguez were supported and protected by some authorities and even by sectors of society while at the same time persecuted by other authorities, in part, in reaction to the favoritism they had received. This is consistent with what Hitchcock said about the dynamics between bandits and Puebla's society in 1847. Despite being well known, robbers could stroll in the center of the city in daylight and

[31] Ibid., 56v.

nobody would "point a finger at them."[32] According to the testimony of another U.S. officer, Domínguez's impunity was due to "money and fears of his persecutors for their lives."[33] Similarly, Hitchcock found it a "remarkable fact" that Domínguez lived openly in Puebla where his crimes were well known. Yet, from Hitchcock we also know that U.S. authorities received word of Domínguez's wrongdoing from a *poblano*.[34] The fact that Domínguez was denounced to U.S. authorities in 1847 is significant. It underscores the public's frustration with the malfunctioning of the Mexican administration of justice while suggesting that someone with influence over the judicial system had protected Domínguez. The protection of bandits by authorities, prominent residents, or *hacendados* was just one example of the complex relationships of patronage that characterized social and political life in nineteenth century Mexico. In the absence of effective state institutions, outlawry could not be successfully battled and the protection of bandits was a way not to become their victim or, even better, to receive some benefit from them. Ironically, and to the dismay of Domínguez's detractors, far from putting a stop to the career of *El Chato*, the arrival of the U.S. army gave it a last but decisive spur as chief of the *contra-guerrilla poblana.*

One of the last mentions of Domínguez in Puebla's judicial records is from 1845. Domínguez and at least nine other men were accused of robbing a stagecoach near the entrance to Mexico City in May 1842, but additional information about the case and the accused has not survived.[35] All versions of Domínguez's feats, including Hitchcock's romantic depiction, agree

[32] Hitchcock, *Fifty Years*, 336.
[33] George Winston Smith and Charles Judah, eds., *Chronicles of the Gringos. The U.S. Army in the Mexican War, 1846—1848: Accounts of Eyewitnesses & Combatants* (Albuquerque: The University of New Mexico Press, 1968), 231.
[34] Hitchcock, *Fifty Years*…, 336.
[35] "Expediente relativo a la causa instruída contra Manuel Domínguez, el capitán Manuel Sosa, José María Bermudes (a) finado González, Cristobal Saavedra, Juan Rojano, Hilario Montes, José Rosano,

that by 1846 the bad reputation of *El Chato* Domínguez was prevalent. A document from one of Puebla's *juzgados*, for example, questioned Domínguez's assertion that a detainee named Cisneros was employed in his textile factory. As a matter of fact, from the point of view of the authorities it was precisely his link to Domínguez that made Cisneros' honesty all the more doubtful.[36] Likewise in April 1846, in a case against José Maria Merlo, the fact that he was said to live in the house of Manuel Domínguez made him "even more suspect" before the authorities.[37]

Domínguez's engagement in the war as the head of the Mexican Spy Company or *contra-guerrilla poblana* in 1847 was a turning point in his trajectory. Up to 1847 Domínguez was regarded as a public enemy; he was not only a robber but an outlaw to the full sense of the word. Being still very young, Domínguez already had some enemies and was prone to quarrels; he was said to linger around in the *pulquería*; he was a primary suspect of various robberies and killed one person. Regardless of his criminal fame, he had systematically evaded imprisonment. With the exception of his confinement for murder, every time Domínguez was accused of robbery he had been released on bail. In sum, he appeared to be a threat to order both because of his ability to escape justice, and because his alleged deeds elicited public outrage.

Having shown a lack of repentance for collaborating with the U.S. by turning down two governmental amnesty offers, it was vital that Domínguez leave Mexico when the war ended. His family and other *contra-guerrilleros* departed in the Palmetto, a steamship that sailed for New Orleans from the port of Veracruz on June 19, 1848.[38] Once in the United States

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José Ríos, Agustín Lastrini, Ignacio Garate y socios por el robo con asalto a las diligencias la mañana del 25 de mayo de 842," Puebla 1845, AHJP, exp. 24644.

[36] Archivo General del Ayuntamiento de Puebla (hereafter AGAP), Juzgados 1844—47, vol. 68, f. 110.

[37] Ibid., 111v.

[38] "News of the Week," *Christian Secretary,* July 7, 1848, no. 27, 18. American Periodicals Series Online, available from New York Public Library.

Domínguez was on his own to make a living; his services to the U.S. army were over. According to the memories of Hitchcock, Domínguez's family faced rough times trying to accommodate to their new lives in New Orleans. Confined to the outskirts of the city, the entire family, nine people altogether, lived in a crowded house with no furniture, "perfectly helpless," Hitchcock recalled.[39]

However, Domínguez made news again in the summer of 1849. With a certain Dr. Millet, the former chief of the Mexican Spy Company co-authored a plan for the independence of the "República de la Sierra Madre." This secessionist project proposed that the Mexican states of Nuevo León and Tamaulipas, among other northern territories, form a new and independent republic.[40] According to General Francisco Ávalos, military commander of the port-city of Matamoros in Tamaulipas, Millet and Domínguez planned to take over the *aduana* (customs house), rob the houses of prominent citizens of Matamoros, and declare the independence of the República de la Sierra Madre on June 16, 1849. However, their plan was frustrated by the hasty but efficient defense organized by General Ávalos.

The declaration of independence was dated in Matamoros, but Mexican newspapers believed that it had been published in Brownsville given that the document was in English. The "Unanimous Declaration of Independence of the Seven Northern States of the Sierra Madre of Mexico" was a nine-point plan that announced the dissolution of the political ties that united the peoples of the Sierra Madre with Mexico. The basis of the complaints was that "the history of the current and past governments of Mexico is a history of frequent insults and *usurpaciones* (political encroachments) which have aimed to establish an absolute tyranny over the States." The declaration stated that the peoples of the Sierra Made were "tired" of continuous political

[39] Hitchcock, *Fifty Years*, 341.
[40] *El Siglo XIX*, Mexico City, July 15, 1849, T. II, no. 196, 60; *El Siglo XIX*, Mexico City, August 16, 1849, T. II, no. 228, 187; *El Monitor Republicano*, Mexico City, July 10, 1849, Año 5, no. 1519, 4.

turns, in which power changed hands without ending oppression. They were also tired of the exactions of the central government. In its third point, the declaration attacked Mexican armies as destructive and oppressive, providing yet another reason to break free from the Mexico. The rest of the document cited other sources of dissatisfaction with the Mexican government, all socio-economic in nature. First, the declarants denounced that Mexico's politicians had not fulfilled the promise to respect the right to an education. "We are tired to see our elders being buried as ignorant people, with no expectations whatsoever."[41] The declaration also denounced poverty and inequality by signaling that while misery and indigence prevailed, those with power exhibited their riches. Lastly, the authors of the plan made a point to soundly reject of the tolerance of domestic service, which they deemed the equivalent to slavery.

The Mexican press reacted quickly to the news of the secessionist plan but downplayed the importance of the Sierra Madre project. The involvement of *El Chato* Domínguez, they claimed, was an unmistakable sign that the formation of the Republic of the Sierra Madre was no more than a robbery disguised as a political movement. Still, they expressed relief that the attack on Matamoros had been prevented. According to *El Monitor Republicano*, for instance, the fact that the followers of the movement were individuals of the "saddest appearance" (i.e. poorest appearance) confirmed that the real objective of the plan was pillage.[42] At the same time, the press categorized the movement as an *asonada* (rebellion), a *revolución* (revolt), a *pronunciamiento* and even as an anarchic movement. Likewise, Domínguez and Millet are called *cabecillas*, *caudillos* and seditious individuals. This language reveals that some Mexicans granted the movement for the independence of the Sierra Madre a political status.[43] In addition,

[41] The declaration of independence of the Republic of the Sierra Madre was translated from English and published in *El Monitor Republicano*, Mexico City, 11 July 1849, no. 1520, 1.
[42] *El Monitor Republicano*, Mexico City, 26 July 1849, no. 1535, 4.
[43] *El Monitor Republicano*, Mexico City, 16 July 1849, no. 1525, 4.

public opinion evinced alarm at the possibility that the announcement of a separatist movement could encourage generalized opposition to the government in other provinces.[44] In particular, the press expressed concern that the project of the Sierra Madre could worsen the situation in the Xichú rebellion, a zone of the Sierra Gorda, which had been at war with the Mexican Government since 1847. Above all, newspapers advised caution in relation to the secessionist plan, recalling the terrible consequences of the underestimation of the separatist intentions of Texas back in 1835.[45]

After the failed independence proclamation, Mexican authorities quickly arrested and imprisoned Millet in Matamoros, but Domínguez remained on the loose. In September 1849, a Brownsville newspaper reported that Domínguez had been murdered enroute to Corpus Christi, but this was soon proven false. Later in 1849 Domínguez was arrested and finally sentenced to two years in prison in Matamoros beginning March 1850.[46] Unfortunately there is no further information about Domínguez's last imprisonment. Whether he actually expiated this last sentence or not is unclear. In any case, Domínguez must have returned to the United States because his name appears as a claimant of bounty lands before the U.S. Congress in 1856.[47] Col. Hitchcock had tried to get Domínguez a stipend from Congress in 1849 as a reward for his services to the U.S. army, but failed. With his petition of 1856, Domínguez tried to take advantage of a new law passed in March 1855 which provided any soldier, volunteer, or ranger who had served in a war since 1790 title to bounty land. No records indicate whether this time

[44] "¡Alerta!" *El Universal*. Mexico, 12 July 1849, T. II, no. 239, 1.
[45] *El Siglo XIX*, Mexico City, 11 July 1849, II, no. 192, 4; and *El Fénix*, Campeche, Mexico, 1 September 1849, no. 61, 3; *El Universal*, Mexico City, 12 July 1849, II, no. 239, 1.
[46] Rumor," *El Monitor Republicano*, Mexico City, 26 October 1849, Año 5, no. 1627, 4; and *El Siglo XIX*, Mexico City, 18 March 1850, T. IV, no. 442, 1.
[47] *List of Private Claims U.S. Senate 34th-46th Congress A-L*, vol. 1.

Domínguez received a land warrant for his services to the United States. After 1856 no news of Domínguez has survived.

Roque Miranda

Roque Miranda was a native of Mexico City born around 1815. As an adult, he worked as a soldier of the *Escuadrón de Seguridad Pública* (Public Safety Squad) in 1835, shoemaker in 1839, and *correo* (courier) before 1847. Miranda was tall, dark- skinned, thin, and dark haired, but with scarce beard. He had a small mouth and a scar on his forehead.[48] Miranda was probably unmarried. Judicial records, at least, make no mention of his wife or children.

Most of what we know about Miranda comes from a judicial process that started in July 1848 when U.S. forces had already left Mexico's capital and Miranda was arrested on account of multiple crimes, not the least of which was "traición a la patria" (treason of the homeland) for his participation in the *contra-guerrilla* of Manuel Domínguez, which he joined in Mexico City.[49]

The investigations that followed the arrest of Miranda in July 1848 revealed that he had been in the public spotlight at least since 1835. That year, and while Miranda served as a soldier of the *Escuadrón de Seguridad Pública*, Miranda was arrested and judged in a military tribunal for the murder of Juan Patiño. The prosecutor in the case, Luis Salazar, investigated the murder and found out that Patiño had initiated the fight, and that, unlike his opponent, Miranda was not armed and therefore had acted in self-defense. Carrying out the investigation that brought Salazar to this conclusion was no easy task. He had to circumvent the efforts of Colonel Manuel

[48] "Filiación del reo Roque Miranda," *El Siglo XIX*, Mexico City, 2 August 1848, VII, no. 69, 2.
[49] In 1848, the *Eco del Comercio*, a Mexico City newspaper assured that Miranda was already part of the *contra-guerrilla* when it entered Mexico City and that he had already been sentenced to death in Puebla. However, there is consensus among people who testified in the case against Miranda that he enrolled the *contra-guerrilla* in Mexico City not before. See *Eco del Comercio*, Mexico City, 3 July 1848, II, no. 99, 4; and 14 July 1848, II, no. 109, 4.

Reyes Vega who seemed to have a personal interest in convicting Miranda. Salazar recalled that while investigating the case against Miranda, Reyes Vega had caused him to inquire about supposed outstanding cases against Miranda in criminal courts, which turned out not to exist. Salazar also asserted that Reyes Vega "had the nerve to offer me money and connections with the family of Patiño so long as the case against Miranda be built so that he would suffer capital punishment."[50] The prosecutor also noted that the appearance and circulation of an anonymous pamphlet entitled "*Diario del ahorcado Roque Miranda*" ("Diary of the Hanged Man Roque Miranda.") which portrayed the 20-year-old Roque Miranda as a ruthless criminal and as an agent of social disease coincided, suspiciously, with Reyes Vega's interventions hinting that he was behind the publication of the document. In the course of his investigation, Salazar also found out that Reyes Vega had bribed the witnesses that would provide testimony in the case against Miranda. Salazar's investigation persuaded the tribunal that Miranda had killed in self-defense and dismissed the charges. Still, the *Comandancia* (Military Command) objected to the sentence and the case went to a higher tribunal for review.[51] Fortunately for Miranda, the second tribunal confirmed the initial verdict. He was let go and allowed to go back to his post in the *Escuadrón de Seguridad Pública*.[52]

Even though Salazar considered the accusations of the *Diario* had no basis, it is hard to believe that the details it includes were mere inventions. There must have been a reason for the aversion that Reyes, Patiño, and many others professed for Miranda, and for all its bias and possible exaggerations, the *Diario del ahorcado* sheds some light on the matter. The *Diario del ahorcado* imputed to Miranda various atrocities including homicides, attacks, and robberies, but

[50] "Orden al gobierno del Distrito Federal para que pida informe del estado de la causa del reo Roque Miranda al juez que conoce de ella," 1848, Archivo General de la Nación (hereafter AGN), Justicia 118, vol. 372, exp. 20, 123r-123v.
[51] "Orden al gobierno del Distrito Federal…," 1848, AGN, Justicia 118, vol. 372, exp. 20, 123r-123v.
[52] Ibid., 123v-124r.

the real motive for the public outrage voiced in the pamphlet seems to have been Miranda's impunity. Its author expresses anger at the fact that Miranda had dodged multiple accusations and arrests without ever serving time for his crimes. According to the *Diario*, while in prison for a homicide, Miranda received release "under the pretext that he was an *artillero cívico*" (artillery soldier), which implied that he had never paid for his crimes.[53] In collaboration with other murderers, robbers and fugitives, the pamphlet maintained, Miranda had killed María Dolores Rosas, but walked away after only a brief imprisonment. One of the strongest accusations made by the pamphlet's author was that Miranda carried out his excesses with the blessing of *Alcalde* (Mayor) Torres, "protector of the célèbre and famous delinquent."[54] The pamphlet maintained that Alcalde Torres had employed Miranda "to apprehend the delinquents he was said to know;" instead, Miranda and his accomplices harassed and arrested innocent men, who were unjustly taken away from their homes and workshops. Miranda's word, the pamphlet alleged, was good enough to incriminate innocent men. Conveying a sense of irritation, the author of the *Diario* concluded by appealing to the president of Mexico to end tolerance for Miranda's impunity and to forbid enlistment of outlaws into the armed forces. Signaling that Miranda's case was far from unique, the author of the pamphlet urged the authorities to put an end to the practices that made administration of justice so ineffective.[55] Despite its virulence, this denunciation seemed to have little effect on the well being of Miranda, who remained on the loose. The case of Miranda is an example of the generalized unresponsiveness of Mexican authorities to society's demands for effective law enforcement, which, in turn, deepened the problems in that regard. A poor administration of justice made the public increasingly distrustful of authorities and helped perpetuate the cycle of corruption. Given the incapacity of governmental institutions and

[53] Ibid., 109r.
[54] Ibidem.
[55] "Orden al gobierno del Distrito Federal…," 1848, AGN, Justicia 118, vol. 372, exp. 21, 110r.

personnel to enforce the law, people were pushed to use personal influence or money to do so. Distrust in authority and corruption were factors that significantly contributed to deepening social differences, which played against the government, especially when it was threatened by the war with the U.S. and was unable to invoke national unity.

There is no record, judicial or otherwise, of Miranda's activities between 1836 and 1847, the year that he came to the notice of Mexican authorities again. Soon after the U.S. army took the capital of Mexico in September, authorities knew Miranda belonged "to the cavalry known as the guerrilla of the poblanos."[56] During the U.S. occupation of Mexico City, Miranda was twice a suspect in robberies but on neither occasion was he brought to court. The fact that Miranda, as a *contra-guerrillero*, had the protection of the U.S. army seems to have dissuaded Mexican authorities from detaining him. Indeed, in November 1847 a Mexican court had called Miranda to testify in a case against a third party and his presence had to be delicately negotiated between Mexico City's governor Manuel Reyes Veramendi and U.S. military governor John A. Quitman.[57]

U.S. troops abandoned Mexico City in June 1848 but Miranda did not depart with them as other *contra-guerrilleros* chose to do. Unfortunately for Miranda, shortly after the departure of U.S forces, the police officer Bernardo Ayala denounced him to the authorities. Ayala accused Miranda of being an "assassin, a bandit and a traitor of the patria."[58] Miranda was arrested in July and the judge who heard the case, Gabriel Gómez de la Peña, confirmed all the accusations imputed to Miranda in the pamphlet *Diario del ahorcado*.[59] Judge Gómez de la Peña

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[56] Ibid., 104r.
[57] After an initial misunderstanding, a proviso that Roque would not be arrested by Mexican authorities was spelled out. Ibid., 105r.
[58] Enrique Flores, ed., *Unipersonal del arcabuceado* (Mexico City: Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes-Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana, 1988), 191-192.
[59] *Eco del Comercio*, Mexico City, August 2, 1848, II, no. 125, 4.

believed Miranda was in fact a bandit, a murderer and a traitor even if not all the crimes that the public imputed to Miranda had been verified. "There is evidence," maintained Gómez de la Peña, "that Miranda killed Juan Patiño […] and that he has been tried more than ten times for being a backsliding attacker and weapon carrier; for being a murderer and for scandalous lasciviousness; for suspected robbery, and for being a fugitive from prison." "All these facts," added Gómez de la Peña, "manifest the most perverse conduct and a continued proneness to criminality," which the judge deemed impossible to correct with moderate methods.[60]

In contrast, José María Perdigón y Garay, Miranda's defense attorney, insisted that the great majority of the crimes imputed to his client were unproven. Perdigón stressed that Miranda's murder of Patiño had already been resolved in the relevant tribunal. Furthermore, in his written defense of Miranda, which was published in a prominent newspaper, Perdigón made the case that Miranda was a "helpless" and "humble" man, the unfortunate victim of vicious calumny.[61] As an example, Perdigón used the latest accusations against Miranda, which had led to his arrest, but were, according to him, motivated by a desire for personal revenge by police officer Bernardo Ayala, with whom Miranda had had an inconsequential quarrel in the past. Despite the defense's efforts to protect Miranda, Judge Gómez de la Peña found Miranda's proven offenses grave enough to deserve capital punishment. Miranda's treason of the homeland was aggravated, according to Gómez de la Peña, by the fact that Miranda had seamlessly changed his Mexican military uniform for the ensigns of the *contra-guerrilla*. Thus, on July 18 1848, Gómez de la Peña sentenced Roque Miranda to be hanged in the plazuela of San Pablo, as it was the place "where the most recent homicide had been perpetrated, and where his betrayal of the homeland had been most evident." The sentence also stipulated that "from the moment of

[60] *Eco del Comercio*, Mexico City, 2 August 1848, II, no. 125, 4.
[61] *Eco del Comercio*, Mexico City, 14 July 1848, II, no. 109, 4.

Miranda's arrival to the gallows, a banner –made large enough to be legible from afar— that read 'For murderer and traitor of his homeland' was to be placed and fixed at the top of it." Hanging underneath the banner, Miranda's body was supposed to "terrorize other traitors and satisfy the offended public."[62]

To the surprise of Gómez de la Peña and of most of the public following the affair, the supreme tribunal that reviewed the case revoked the sentence. The three magistrates that examined the case could not find evidence clear enough to incriminate Miranda. Much in line with what Perdigón had expressed, the higher tribunal deemed Miranda more a victim of defamation and public hatred than a relentless criminal. The magistrates who reviewed the case against Miranda only recognized as verifiable two of his alleged crimes; his escape from prison while being tried for street fighting, and the murder of Evaristo Ortiz. As shocking as it was, the tribunal found the charge of high treason not to merit legal prosecution given that Mexico and the U.S. had already signed a peace treaty that restored the friendship between the two countries. The supreme tribunal decided to commute Miranda's sentence to ten years imprisonment. However, the case would remain open so that Miranda could be brought to justice if accused of crimes committed while he had been a *contra-guerrillero*.[63]

The heated response that followed the commutation of Miranda's sentence reveals that sensitivities had been touched. The *Eco del Comercio*, for instance, was very vocal about its concern that judicial authorities were dismissive of public outrage regarding Miranda's offenses. The surprise and anxiety about the tribunal's decision even reached the central government. The presidency demanded that the magistrates who examined the case against Miranda explain their

[62] *Eco del Comercio*, Mexico City, 2 August 1848, II, no. 125, 3.
[63] *El Eco del Comercio*, Mexico City, 27 July 1848, II, no. 120, 4.

reasons for revoking the sentence of Judge Gómez de la Peña.[64] The generalized uproar seems logical and justifiable. With the memory of the military defeat still very fresh (the Americans had just left), Mexico City's residents saw the case against Roque Miranda as an opportunity to redress the humiliation. The commutation of Miranda's sentence elicited anger. In addition, it indirectly sanctioned previous judicial decisions that had paid no heed to popular wisdom about Miranda. As far as the available documents show, the Supreme Court did not investigate whether Miranda received protection from someone influential within the military or judicial authorities, as rumor had it for so long. This was probably unbearable for an already exasperated public resentful that Miranda systematically evaded responsibility for his crimes and fed up with the corrupt administration of justice.

On July 31 1848, Miranda was en route to San Juan de Ulúa's castle, the dreaded *presidio* on the coast of Veracruz to serve his ten-year sentence. Upon arrival he fell sick. The presidio provided doctor visits, *sangrías* (bloodletting), and other curative methods and Miranda eventually recovered.[65] After some time, San Juan de Ulúa stopped being a wholly hostile environment for Miranda. As we know from the many recommendations that constituted the basis for his appeals for an abbreviation of his sentence, Miranda soon gained the trust and sympathy of some of the officials that ran the presidio because "since he arrived to the fortress, [Miranda] has observed an irreproachable conduct" and because of his enthusiasm and commitment at the shoemaking workshop. However, it was not until October 1855, during a short-lived mutiny in the *presidio*, that Miranda had a perfect opportunity to gain the confidence of the authorities by giving signs of reformation and repentance. According to the recollection of

[64] *El Eco del Comercio*, Mexico City, 26 July, II, no. 119, 4.
[65] We know of Miranda's illness from documents regarding the covering of medical expenses. See, "Sobre pago de los gastos erogados en la acusación del Reo Roque Miranda," 1849, AGN, Justicia 118, vol. 373, exp. 45, 432r-436r.

officer Antonio Ortiz, "a section of the Ulúa's guard rebelled on October 28 1855. During the mutiny, however, [Miranda] conduced himself with good judgment, thereby giving testimony of courage, obedience and submission to the supreme government."[66] It appears that from that moment on, as far as the authorities of the presidio were concerned, Miranda had given solid proof of reliability, so much so, that by December he was working as a spy within the fortress of Ulúa. In a recommendation that Ignacio de la Llave, Veracruz's governor and military commander, wrote on behalf of Miranda on occasion of his request for official pardon, de la Llave stated that Miranda had provided "interesting services" in Ulúa. The governor further specified that, "the reports Miranda had provided contributed efficiently to impede a *pronunciamiento* against the fortress's authorities in December 1855."[67] Colonel Fernando Urriza, the former governor of Ulúa, confirmed de la Llave's account about Miranda's collaboration, and praised Miranda's "fidelity" which, as Urriza put it, had made him trust the prisoner a great deal. The last testimony that accompanied Miranda's appeal for pardon was by Juan B. Espejo, colonel of the Engineers Corps in 1856. Espejo confirmed to have received useful reports about "whatever Miranda observed among the garrison," and endorsed the recommendation for Miranda saying that he had "never noticed the ferocious instincts imputed to the prisoner." "On the contrary, according to my observation," Espejo continued, "[Miranda] has recommendable qualities, among which loyalty is the principal."[68] Considering that Miranda was a former *contra-guerrillero* who had been sentenced to death for treason of his homeland in 1848, it is rather ironic that these officers especially praised Miranda's "fidelity" and "loyalty." In fact, this constitutes a very good example that the very same spying action, deemed criminal in the past now demonstrated his adherence to legitimate authority. Manuel Domínguez would

[66] "Solicitud del indulto de Roque Miranda," 1855, AGN, Justicia 118, vol. 540, exp. 4, 27r.
[67] Ibid., 34r.
[68] Ibid., 36r.

have found himself in a similar situation had he accepted the official pardon offered first by the government of Puebla and later by Mexico's president. A very fine line distinguished between a villain and a hero. Fitting into one category or the other was a rather subjective matter.

The recommendations that Miranda obtained from the authorities at San Juan de Ulúa are significant as evidence of his political abilities. Miranda cultivated the sympathy of the prison's authorities and eventually gained their trust to the point that the authorities turned him into a collaborator and promised to recommend him to the president, which is no small testament to his talent at negotiating with and for power. However, what is paramount is that the recommendations promised to Miranda in exchange for his spying services suggests the extent to which bribery was ingrained in the workings of law enforcement institutions. It is also a good example of how government officials overstepped their powers in pursuit of a desired result. In Miranda's case, it is not clear why the governor of Veracruz, who had political but not judicial authority was the one offering Miranda a recommendation to the president. [69]

Unfortunately for Miranda, the recommendations he obtained failed to persuade the authorities that he should be spared the remaining time of his prison term. However, in view of his irreproachable behavior and collaboration with the authorities at San Juan de Ulúa, the supreme government removed the condition of "retention," that had been stipulated in his sentence. This meant that when the ten years of imprisonment were finally up, Miranda could go home.[70] It is probable that after serving the full sentence in San Juan de Ulúa, Miranda was finally released in 1858.

The evidence demonstrates that both Manuel Domínguez and Roque Miranda were well-known outlaws for a good part of their lives. Neither, however, turned to robbery (or any other

[69] Ibid., 35r and 35v.
[70] Ibid, 38r.

crime) out of necessity. Domínguez and Miranda were not poor, and theft did not constitute a means of survival. As members of the middle sectors of society they were, nonetheless, vulnerable to the pressure of economic stagnation and social exclusions. Their shared ambitions of upward mobility led them to enroll in armed corps (the civil guard and the army respectively) which in nineteenth century Mexico provided a common route to gain status in addition to earning a salary.

The involvement of Domínguez and Miranda in banditry seems to have grown from that same desire for upward mobility. It is unlikely that acquiring money was their ultimate goal, but rather that riches and outlawry itself could make them respected and feared. In other words, that riches could conquer for them a higher place in society. Following closely what Anton Blok has pointed out, Domínguez's and Miranda's engagement in banditry was to a large extent an individualist drive to access a privileged situation. Domínguez and Miranda were nonconformists and they did not have the position they wanted in society, but they did not articulate their complaints or their frustrations by promoting any kind of social agenda. They did not intend to oppose a socio-political system which sanctioned preferential treatment for richer and whiter members of society, and which was famously corrupt. In fact, Domínguez and Miranda participated in such system for a long time. Domínguez and Miranda were able to secure the protection of certain authorities and consequently evade justice on a regular basis. Their stories were the epitome of impunity, one of the most severe and deep-rooted problems in the administration of justice.

Although it lacked an explicit and preconceived social agenda, nineteenth-century Mexican banditry had the potential to become politicized (become part of larger expressions of political violence against established authority) mainly because of the perennial precariousness

of central authority. While the actions of individual bandits rarely constituted an act of political defiance, important fissures undermining the stability of the state's institutions allowed bandits to acquire power among people who had their own reasons for restlessness. Then, as a collectivity revolving around the figure of a famous bandit/outlaw, the group was likely to claim a mix of causes. These were as varied as personal greed, social redress, political opposition, personal revenge, which often overlapped. The *contra-guerrilla* that Manuel Domínguez commanded was a case in point.

Nicanor Martínez

The story of Martínez offers a contrast with Domínguez and Miranda. Martínez was a rural worker, a *jornalero*, with a modest existence. Unlike Domínguez or Miranda, Martínez was not a troublemaker and he had no criminal record before his involvement in the *contra-guerrilla*. Despite the fact that historians continue to think of the contra-guerrilla as a bandits' organization exclusively, evidence suggests that the case of Nicanor Martínez was not unusual.[71]

The afternoon of September 15, 1853, Nicanor Martínez was taken before judicial authorities in Tacubaya accused of having attacked and dangerously wounded José Correa in a shop of the town of Chapultepec.[72] From his response in the first interrogation by the authorities, we know that Nicanor Martínez was 31 years old, a native of the town of Cuautitlán but had been

[71] For instance the cases against of Lázaro Pérez and Domingo Jiménez, who had no criminal record before 1847. See, "Sobre que los contraguerrilleros deben ser juzgados por la autoridad militar conforme a las leyes vigentes," 1858, AGN, Justicia 118, vol. 606, exp. 46; and "Criminal instruída contra Domingo Jiménez acusado de contraguerrillero por el capitán Don Eulalio Villa." Yale Manuscript Collection, Puebla collection, part III, group 307, series II, box 19, folder 440.

[72] The village of Chapultepec, only a few miles away from Mexico City and famous for the hill that gave it its name, had had strategic importance since pre-Hispanic times because of its panoramic view of the valley of Mexico. Built at the top of the hill, the "castle" of Chapultepec served as Military Academy in 1847, which was attacked by the American army in September 13, 1847.

raised in Chapultepec, "since the times of Independence."[73] This temporal reference may have been wrong. If at the time of his detention Martínez was 31 years old, he must have been born in 1822 and by that time the Independence wars were over. Of course, there is the possibility that he did not know his real and was actually older, which would match the date of his early upbringing to the times of Independence.[74] Martínez was married to Micaela Flores. Besides an aunt who, according to Martínez lived in Tacubaya, there is no mention of other relatives. All the available information agrees that he was an unskilled laborer. He worked as a *jornalero* (day laborer) except during the periods that the field did not require much work. During those times, Martínez used to go into the country looking for wood, *nopales* or *tunas* to sell in town.[75] His occupation and the fact that Martínez did not know how to sign his name indicate a humble socio-economic origin. He served in the Mexican army during the war with the United States, but from his own testimony it appears that enrolling in the military was not a personal choice. Although interrogated about it several times, Martínez was practically unable to give a reasonable account of his military service. With few exceptions, he failed to provide accurate names of the corps in which he served and of the top officials who commanded them. He was thoroughly confused about dates and events too. This obvious lack of understanding of military events suggests that Martínez was probably drawn into service involuntarily, or that having made the decision to serve in the military because of the promise of a good salary, he became

[73] "Criminal contra Nicanor Martínez, por contraguerrillero Poblano, desertor del Ejercito Mejicano, heridor y asesino, habiéndole inferido herida alevosa sin motivo alguno al Jornalero José Correa al comenzar a obscurecer y en una tienda tendejos de Chapultepec, el día 14 de Septiembre del corriente año," 1853, Archivo Histórico del Distrito Federal (hereafter AHDF), Fondo: Municipalidades, Sección: Tacubaya, Justicia y Juzgados, box 13, exp. 24, 17r.

[74] Nicanor Martínez first said to be 31 years old and days later he said 32. So, it is possible that he did not know his precise age.

[75] "Criminal contra Nicanor Martínez, por contraguerrillero Poblano…," 1853, AHDF, Fondo: Municipalidades, Sección: Tacubaya, Justicia y Juzgados, box 13, exp. 24, 44r. *Nopal* is an edible cactus and *tuna* is the fruit of the same cactus.

disenchanted after seeing no sign of pay for several months. In fact, he mentioned that one of the causes of his desertion was lack of payment.[76]

Unluckily for Martínez, while in detention for attacking and injuring José Correa, one of the precinct's guards recognized him as a former *contra-guerrillero*. Timing played against Martínez for in 1853, the year of his detention, the story of the *contra-guerrilleros* received renewed importance. Santa Anna decreed the prosecution of former *contra-guerrilleros* and the transfer of their cases from civil tribunals to military ones to expedite their punishment. Given the magnitude of the accusation against Martínez, the guard Bernabé González was asked to give full testimony on the spot.

Under oath and after providing the essentials about himself, Bernabé González proceeded to tell the story of how he knew Nicanor Martínez. During the time that American troops were stationed in Tacubaya, Martínez had appeared in his house wearing the red band that distinguished the *contra-guerrilleros*, and "commanding others of his class, broke into the house slashing down the *nopales* and robbing a *chiquihuite* (small basket) filled with *tortillas*."[77] Nicanor Martínez denied González's accusation and oddly enough, tried to defend himself by noting that for a while he had served in the Mexican army but later deserted. Thus, instead of clearing his reputation, Martínez brought upon himself the new accusation of desertion in addition to the charge of having been a *contra-guerrillero* in the war with the United States.

One more person recognized Martínez as a former *contra-guerrillero*. That was Don Francisco Martínez, secretary of the Ayuntamiento and prefecture of Tacubaya, who assured the authorities he was able to identify Martínez "because of a scar that he had next to the nose" which he had first noticed in 1847. According to the testimony of Don Francisco, he had seen

[76] Ibid, 9r.
[77] "Criminal contra Nicanor Martínez, por contraguerrillero Poblano…," 1853, AHDF, Fondo: Municipalidades, Sección: Tacubaya, Justicia y Juzgados, box 13, exp. 24, 9r.

Nicanor Martínez "holding a horse, a lance, and a military jacket in his hands bragging about having harmed the original possessor [of those goods, and] expressing himself with shameless words."[78] The incident, Don Francisco stated, had taken place at the time of the American invasion of Tacubaya when Nicanor Martínez was among the *contra-guerrilleros*.[79] Soon after his declaration, Don Francisco Martínez returned to the *juzgado* to expand his previous testimony by adding that the day he had seen Martínez in the circumstances he had described was September 8, 1847.[80] If Don Francisco was correct, Nicanor must have joined the contra-guerrilla at some point between August 21 and September 8, 1847. This period not only coincides with the stay of the Americans and the *contra-guerrilleros* in Tacubaya, but also with a short-lived armistice, that could have been a propitious time for Manuel Domínguez and his *contra-guerrilleros* to recruit new members.

One person gave testimony to defend Martínez. Leonardo González was a *labrador* (tiller) and merchant, who was brought to court by Martínez's wife. González expressed doubt that Martínez could have enrolled in the *contra-guerrilla poblana* and portrayed him as a tender and caring person who had carried González around when he was a little child. Doubtlessly prompted by questions from the authorities, González added that he did not know whether Martínez had been robber or whether he was guilty of "bad conduct" in the past; what he did know, however, was that the accused was "a bit of a drunk."[81]

At the end of September 1853, in observance of the presidential decree mandating the immediate transfer of judicial cases against former *contra-guerrilleros* to military tribunals, the judge of Tacubaya dispatched the case against Nicanor Martínez to the Military Command in

[78] Ibid., 9v.
[79] Ibid., 9v and 10r.
[80] Ibid., 11v.
[81] Ibid, 44r.

Mexico City where investigations continued. Once in Mexico City and interrogated about his military service, Nicanor put together a confusing account that shed little light on the case, but gave concrete information about his whereabouts in September 1847. He was particularly emphatic that near the time of the American attack on the castle of Chapultepec (September 13, 1847), he was employed in the *fogatas* (bonfires) under the command of General Mariano Monterde and Sergeant Marcos Escutia. Martínez also said that, because Escutia abandoned his post at Chapultepec and left the troops alone, everybody ran away and dispersed. He, for instance, had gone to Tacubaya to his aunt's house.[82] When asked if, while in Tacubaya, he had served the Americans in any way, Martínez maintained his version that he never worked for the Americans nor enrolled in the *contra-guerrilla.* If Martínez's account was already difficult to believe by virtue of its inconsistencies, his innocence became really questionable when he said that after the Americans left Tacubaya (at the end of the armistice, September 8, 1847), he went to Mexico City, which just happened to be the next stop of the *contra-guerrilleros* too.

The case against Nicanor Martínez came to an impasse because of the difficulties of scheduling and budgeting a trip to Tacubaya to continue the investigations. On November 8, 1853 perhaps losing patience with the court's inactivity, Micaela Flores sent a letter to the Military Command in Mexico City in which she claimed that her husband had been falsely and unjustly accused of partaking in the *contra-guerrilla poblana* during the American occupation. She strove to persuade the authorities that Martínez was innocent assuring that far from "betraying his patria" Martínez had actually been very engaged in its defense working on the fortification of Chapultepec in September 1847.[83] Micaela vowed to bring new witnesses to court whose testimony would support her account. By December 1853, however, no new

[82] Ibid., 17v -18v.
[83] Ibid., 22r.

witnesses had appeared to testify before the authorities. In response to Micaela's insinuation that Martínez was being unjustly hunted down, Bernabé González, the guard who had first exposed Martínez, stood by his earlier version of the facts and assured the authorities that he would never give false testimony "just to harm" Martínez. Addressing the question of whether he was certain that Martínez was the same person who had taken his tortillas six years before, González was resolute; he could not have forgotten Nicanor: "his remarkable figure and hideousness had stuck in his mind."[84] To buttress his declaration, González provided the names of two people who resided in Tacubaya since before the American invasion and could possibly identify Martínez. The potential witnesses were Don Manuel Martínez, who owned a shop in Tacubaya and Don Guillermo Zalazar, the owner of the hostel where the *contra-guerrilleros* established their barracks. Both gave their testimony and even provided details of a series of horrors perpetrated by the *poblanos* during their encampment in Tacubaya; but the name of Nicanor Martínez did not ring a bell and neither Don Manuel nor Don Guillermo recognized Nicanor physically.

Having made little progress with the inquiries at Tacubaya, the judge summoned military officers whom Martínez had cited to elucidate the extent of his service in the armed forces. As per the surviving documents, beginning in late January 1854, a couple of Tacubayans appeared to testify in the case of Nicanor Martínez. The first was Don Tomás Vargas, the Mayor of Chapultepec who had also been mayor during the American invasion; the other was Don José María Lara *labrador*, who had known Martínez for twenty-five years. Both had employed Martínez as a *peón* in the past and both confirmed that he had worked in the *fogatas* just before the battle of Chapultepec. At the end of his testimony, Vargas said that he had lost sight of the

[84] Ibid., 32r.

accused until 1850 or 1851 when Martínez returned to work in the fields of Chapultepec.[85] Lara specified that he doubted that Martínez had been involved in the *contra-guerrilla*, but had no means to prove it.[86]

Witness accounts did little to advance the trial, which seemed to go nowhere. Beginning in February 1854 the judge received replies from various military officers who Martínez had reportedly served under, but they failed to shed light on the case. Nevertheless, in April 1854, the General Military Commander ordered the continuation of the case against Martínez and demanded that the judge inquire about Nicanor's desertion from the Mexican army. The commander also suggested that former police guards who had been on duty during the American occupation of Mexico City be summoned to identify Martínez as a former *contra-guerrillero*.[87] The judge sent dispatches to four individuals who had been employed in the capital's police during the American occupation ordering their presence to provide testimony and to identify Nicanor Martínez. Two months later two individuals responded and appeared before the authorities, but none recognized Nicanor as a *contra-guerrillero*. The efforts of the judge to elucidate the details of Nicanor's military service and his eventual desertion proved equally useless. According to some military officers, Nicanor Martínez had never been on their rolls, but given the irremediable loss of documents due to the war with the United States there was no way to say for sure, they said.

By June 9 1854, the judge had not seen definite evidence of Martínez's desertion or of his participation in the *contra-guerrilla.* The case should therefore have gone to a civil court in Tacubaya where Martínez would be tried for his offense against José Correa. In August 1854, almost a year after Martínez had been detained, the judge in Tacubaya let him go on bail,

[85] Ibid., 40r-41r.
[86] Ibid., 41v-42r.
[87] Ibid., 51r.

considering that he had already paid for the assault against José Correa with time spent in prison. The trial of Martínez is a good example of some of the issues that made an expeditious administration of justice very difficult: from lack of resources to investigate a crime, to ignored subpoenas, to bureaucratic misunderstandings which, in the case of Martínez, caused the transfer of the wrong prisoner from Mexico City to Tacubaya.

Martínez's enrollment in the *contra-guerrilla* was never confirmed during the trial, but it seems unlikely that the accusation was unfounded. There is nothing indicating that Bernabé González or Francisco Martínez, who sustained that Martínez had joined the *contra-guerrilla*, had a motive to provide false testimony against him. On the contrary, the spontaneity with which first González and then Martínez identified Nicanor make it credible that he had, indeed, belonged to the *contra-guerrilla poblana*. Another suspicious factor was his prolonged absence from his hometown after the war ended.

Desertion seems to have been common among men who decided to join the *contra-guerrilla*. It is possible that they considered it a safe haven from Mexican authority, but joining the *contra-guerrilla* was hardly the only option available to deserters. The Mexican government offered *indultos* repeatedly to anyone who had abandoned the military corps. There was also the possibility of joining a guerrilla, or of simply going back home. In the midst of the war, it was evident that the Mexican army had no means to effectively prosecute and punish deserters. Still, it is perplexing that men who, like Nicanor Martínez, had failed to show interest in military activities abandoned the Mexican army only to soon join the *contra-guerrilla.* The evidence is not enough to draw a definite conclusion, but it is possible that joining the *contra-guerrilla* became a way to protest the hated *leva* (draft), which conscripted men to the military unwillingly.

Given Martínez's socioeconomic condition it is easy to conclude that economic necessity drove him to enter the *contra-guerrilla.* In fact, compared to Manuel Domínguez and Roque Miranda, it is Martínez who better fits the classic profile of the nineteenth century bandit: a rural, poor, unskilled worker driven to criminality as a way out of poverty. Yet, the available information about Martínez's robberies suggests that they were not particularly profitable. Rather, the abuses which Nicanor Martínez committed featured an important component of power display. What is remarkable with respect to Nicanor's robbery at the house of Bernabé González is that the victim was not rich and although Martínez stole only a basket of tortillas, he showily slashed González's *nopales* down with a machete.[88] González was a *jornalero* (day laborer) like Martínez and, as far as his testimony reveals, they had no accounts to settle. In light of this, the robbery was not motivated by either personal revenge or the promise of a substantial material reward. Puzzling as this may seem, the assault on González's house makes sense if we consider that its purpose may have been a mere display of force. Similarly, Martínez's killing of a Mexican military officer, according to the witness' account, offered him loud bragging rights; making a power statement seems to have been as important to Martínez as acquiring the victim's property.

The *contra-guerrilla* of Manuel Domínguez, which at times may have mobilized up to a couple thousand men, must have included many members with a story similar to that of Nicanor Martínez. Throughout the first half of the nineteenth century but more so during the time that Mexico was at war with the US, the life of the majority of Mexicans was marked by limited economic resources and no real access to formal political participation. Their modus vivendi was often threatened by the *leva*, and even those who avoided conscription saw their subsistence threatened by war in 1847 and 1848. Thus, most Mexicans experienced considerable

[88] In rural Mexico, *nopales* (a tall cactus species) are commonly used in lieu of fences.

powerlessness. Powerlessness, however, should not be reduced to poverty. It is a wider and more complex category that encompasses social, political, and personal/psychological, as well as economic factors. It was this more broadly felt powerlessness what seems to have encouraged men like Nicanor Martínez to join the *contra-guerrilla*.

Conclusion

The formation of the *contra-guerrilla poblana* was possibly due to both personal decision-making and a set of social, political and judicial circumstances. The available evidence shows that some of the personal motives that drove these men to join the *contra-guerrilla* were ambition, personal revenge, the need to escape the *leva* and/or punishment for desertion, and the desire of material gain. However, the entire repertoire of personal motives that propelled many men to become *contra-guerrilleros poblanos* will probably remain indefinable. As Eric Van Young has argued in the case of the wars of independence, common peoples' motives to join a rebellion seem to have been "complex, overdetermined, and remarkably non-ideological in any overt way, corresponding closely to the particular life circumstances and histories of individuals."[89]

The social, political and judicial circumstances that contributed to the formation of the *contra-guerrilla* are easier to pinpoint. Manuel Domínguez and Roque Miranda, public enemies and outcasts, neither recognized a national cause nor embraced a spirit of unity and solidarity with their fellow citizens in face of threat by a foreign army. The nation was an abstract concept, far removed from the reality of most Mexicans at the time. Since the nation was still very young, the sense of unity across the gaping social divide and geographical boundaries was barely

[89] Eric Van Young, *The Other Rebellion: Popular Violence, Ideology, and the Mexican Struggle for Independence, 1810—1821* (Stanford University Press, 2001), 499.

existent. If harboring nationalist sentiments was difficult for the few educated Mexicans who had already benefited from the existence of the nation, it was largely irrelevant for people for whom the state provided little but harassment.

Significantly, a context characterized by rigid social hierarchies, opportunism, political instability and violence, such as the one in which Domínguez, Miranda and Martínez lived did not produce "champions of the poor," so to speak, but rather nurtured ambitions of individual advancement within and conforming to a framework of inequality and violence. Thus, while banditry in nineteenth century Mexico was seldom an expression of class struggle, it is difficult to fundamentally separate socially motivated from profit driven banditry as the scholarly debate on this phenomena tends to do.

Extensive socio-political inequality contributed to the formation of the *contra-guerrilla* by propelling people to take advantage of the chaos generated by the war to climb to a position from which they could exercise power, however temporarily. In this, the deficient administration of justice played a significant role. Frequently biased and corrupt administration of justice engendered resentment and nurtured desire for revenge. In addition, failures of law enforcement encouraged people across the social spectrum to use extra-judicial methods to settle their conflicts, which perpetuated violence and nurtured the cycle of corruption. Both factors were key in making Manuel Domínguez and Roque Miranda outcasts, and in facilitating their collaboration with the U.S. army.

Conclusions

The collaboration of Mexicans with U.S. invading forces during the Mexican-American War (1846—1848) was not uncommon, especially in provinces farther away from Mexico's political core and among Mexican elites.[1] In some instances collaboration consisted of open cooperation with U.S. forces as well as advocacy for annexation. In other cases, collaboration was a passive matter involving, for example, sale of provisions to the invading army, sharing of public and private spaces, and social interaction with the foreigners.

The particular case of Puebla, which has occupied us in this study, is an important exception to the general pattern of Mexican collaboration during the war. Although Puebla competed economically with the capital and with the federal government, it was not a frontier province; in fact, its political and economic life could not have been more interconnected with Mexico City. Moreover, *poblano* collaborators did not include just the elite but, prominently, a group within the plebeian population: a band of former bandits under the leadership of the famous highwayman Manuel Domínguez.

A key component of the tensions between Mexico's central government and Puebla was the conflict between federalist politicians and the bishop of Puebla. As the wealthiest bishopric in all of Mexico, Puebla strongly opposed the federalists' attempt to disentail Church property in order to sustain national finances. Even though the federalist plan was revoked, political and military authorities in Mexico City never recovered Puebla's trust. Provincial elites withdrew

[1] Douglas W. Richmond, "A view of the Periphery: Regional Factors and Collaboration During the U.S.-Mexico Conflict, 1845—1848," in *Dueling Eagles. Reinterpreting the U.S.-Mexican War, 1846—1848,* ed., Douglas Richmond (Fort Worth: Texas Christian University Press, 2000.)

their support for national defense and focused instead on maintaining control over the popular sectors. In that pursuit Puebla's authorities were only partially successful. The Ayuntamiento was able to arrange a peaceful U.S. occupation despite popular demonstrations of restlessness. The presence of U.S. forces in the city of Puebla, however, brought several unexpected consequences. Perhaps one of the most surprising and worrisome, from the point of view of Puebla's authorities, was the emerging friendship between the invaders and well-known local bandits. For Manuel Domínguez, joining forces with the United States army presented an opportunity, at the very least, to frustrate the hopes of detractors who wished to see him behind bars. For other members of his band, to enroll as allies of the United States was a ticket out of prison, an opportunity that was hard to refuse. There was a crucial difference between the collaboration of Puebla's elite and that of Domínguez and his associates. The elite continuously denied direct assistance to the U.S. forces, arguing instead that the surrender of the city was a patriotic sacrifice. In contrast, the members of the *contra-guerrilla poblana* did not hide or downplay the significance of their alliance with the Americans.

The *contra-guerrilla* was one of the most palpable reminders that social resentment and internal divisions ran deep among Mexicans. Just as the impressive number of desertions and the "selfishness" of the affluent classes during the war suggested, the emergence of the *contra-guerrilla* was a sign that three decades after independence no definite sense of nationhood existed. Before and during the war, different social and regional groups perceived one another as enemies. The ever-changing governments that exercised central authority rarely served as a consolidating, neutralizing, or mediating force. As a result, the general population did not perceive the central authorities as representative of the interests of the majority. The war with the United States further exacerbated distrust in the authorities and, consequently, Mexicans

across the social spectrum were more concerned with protecting or advancing their own interests than with making any sacrifices for the sake of an abstract nation.

Nevertheless, contemporaries claimed that the alliance of Manuel Domínguez's associates with the United States army was an aberration, an exception to Mexican behavior during the war. Today we know that the *contra-guerrilleros poblanos* were by no means the only direct collaborators with the enemy. However, the case is certainly a remarkable one given the large number of individuals involved, and because it took the form of organized military activity. So far, there are no other known examples of Mexican collaboration that went as far as risking lives in warfare for the sake of the United States' victory.[2] But what can we say about the case of the group captained by Manuel Domínguez in relation to the larger social and political context? Is the case of the *contra-guerrilla poblana* a historical oddity? Not really. For one thing, the participation of Domínguez's band in the war does not seem to depart much from an inherited tradition by which non-elite sectors of the population exerted political influence by means of engaging in collective violence during the first half of the nineteenth century. Since the wars of independence, bandits were frequently and voluminously incorporated to the armed forces fighting for multiple political causes, obtaining provisions, protecting the lives of friends and allies, and attacking rivals. In a similar way, plundering became an essential component of some popular mobilizations both rural and urban. In post-independent Mexico, political violence and banditry became intertwined to a significant extent and no clear distinction between rebels, guerrilleros, and bandits or bandoleros can be made.

[2] Eleuterio Quiroz, a bandit/guerrillero/peasant leader of the Sierra Gorda established a short-lived alliance with the United States army in August 1847. However, his collaboration was mostly a way to blackmail Mexican authorities rather than an example of sustained military assistance to the United States. See Leticia Reina, "The Sierra Gorda Peasant Rebellion, 1847—1850," in *Riot, Rebellion and Revolution. Rural Social Conflict in Mexico*, ed. Friedrich Katz (Princeton University Press, 1988.)

More importantly, I have argued that the *contra-guerrilla* can be seen as an example of popular political action and the present study has shown that such assertion is viable. Evidence strongly suggests that, on the one had, the activity of the *contra-guerrilla* seems to have been anchored in a desire to exercise power. On the other, the *contra-guerrilla* deliberately challenged governmental authority.

When Domínguez became a pro-U.S. *guerrillero,* he moved from highwayman to a more institutionalized position as the leader of an organized armed group linked to a professional army. Domínguez used this position to encourage political sedition, as he did when he wrote to the *Alcalde primero* in Perote asking him to reject the authority of the prefect and of the police commander.[3] After the war, Domínguez made a more clear cut seditious effort when he co-authored a plan for the *República de la Sierra Madre*, which entailed the separation of various states or parts of states in the north of Mexico. The declaration of independence included an account of grievances against the Mexican government and emphasized its incapacity to provide the population with education, security and equality, frequent complaints among popular sectors. Since this separatist movement failed, we can only speculate whether Domínguez would have become a politician if it had succeeded. But it seems clear that in his participation in the separatist movement, Domínguez was expanding his role as a rebel and posed a formal threat to the Mexican government.

The personal stories of Roque Miranda and Nicanor Martínez indicate that, by and large, the *contra-guerrilleros* did not seem interested in holding on to power but to seize the opportunity opened by a socio-political crisis to assert a degree (however small or temporary) of

[3] Letter addressed to Col. Seymour, governor of Perote. Office of the Adjutant General, Record group 94, Mexican War Army of Occupation Miscellaneous Papers, box no. 2. National Archives, Washington DC.

power to settle accounts, take revenge over governmental authorities, and/or to redress disenfranchisement.

Although in the official memory of the war the alliance of the Domínguez's band to the U.S. army has been considered sacrilegious, the alliance is comparable to numerous "complex and bewildering" coalitions that characterized political mobilization in Mexico during the early nineteenth century, such as cross-class alliances, in which unlikely partners joined forces to accomplish their particular goals.[4] What is more, nearly at the same time as the *contra-guerrilla*, the movement of Eleuterio Quiroz, a bandit/rebel of the Sierra Gorda allied with the U.S. Peasants of Namiquipa, Chihuahua also joined forces with the U.S. army against the Mexican government during the brief U.S. intervention in the Mexican Revolution in 1916—17.[5] Significantly, these events call into question the idea that the mobilization of popular sectors, including instances of popular outlawry, consistently featured an important element of xenophobia and proto-nationalism as some historians including Eric Hobsbawm and Silvia Arrom have suggested. In fact, the case of the *contra-guerrilla poblana* can be seen as a popular manifestation of "anti-national" movements that were common and a crucial aspect of the Mexican political panorama during the 1830s and 1840s, akin to the secessionist movements in Texas and the Yucatán, to name only two. In short, far from being an oddity, the case of the Mexican Spy Company, reflects features of popular political engagement that characterized a very chaotic period in Mexico's history.

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[4] Torcuato Di Tella, *National Popular Politics in Early Independent Mexico, 1820—1847* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1996), viii.

[5] Leticia Reina, "The Sierra Gorda Peasant Rebellion, 1847—1850," in *Riot, Rebellion and Revolution: Rural Social Conflict in Mexico*, ed. Friedrich Katz, 269-294 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988); Ana Maria Alonso, "U.S. Military Intervention, Revolutionary Mobilization, and Popular Ideology in the Chihuahuan Sierra, 1916-1917," in *Rural Revolt in Mexico and U.S. Intervention,* ed. Daniel Nugent, 199-228 (San Diego: University of California, 1988).

When historians cite the *contra-guerrilla poblana* as an example of opportunism, they are correct. Indeed, without the governing crisis brought about by war with the United States, the *contra-guerrilla* could not become a force with the leverage and destructive capacity that it had. Acknowledging this, however, should not lead (as it has) to ignoring or overlooking evidence that the *contra-guerrilla* addressed broader issues of social and political inequality. Part of the problem in characterizing the *contra-guerrilla* as something more than opportunism is that the claims of the *contra-guerrilleros* often materialized in attacking or stealing property, or terrorizing and abusing power. Historically, envy and ambition have seldom been regarded as legitimate reasons to express nonconformity, less so if done by violent means. In fact, use of violence to express social resentment is usually defined as vandalism or criminality, and therefore outside the realm of political struggles altogether. However, since social rancor and other feelings akin to envy and alienation were connected to deep historical economic insecurities, inequality, and scarcity of opportunities for social advancement in Mexico, they are inseparable from politics. Does this make Manuel Domínguez and his comrades some sort of social justice advocates? Clearly not. The case of Manuel Domínguez and his band departs from the Hobsbawmian characterization of banditry as the attempt to reestablish traditional asymmetric power relationships, or in other words, to reestablish legitimate forms of domination.

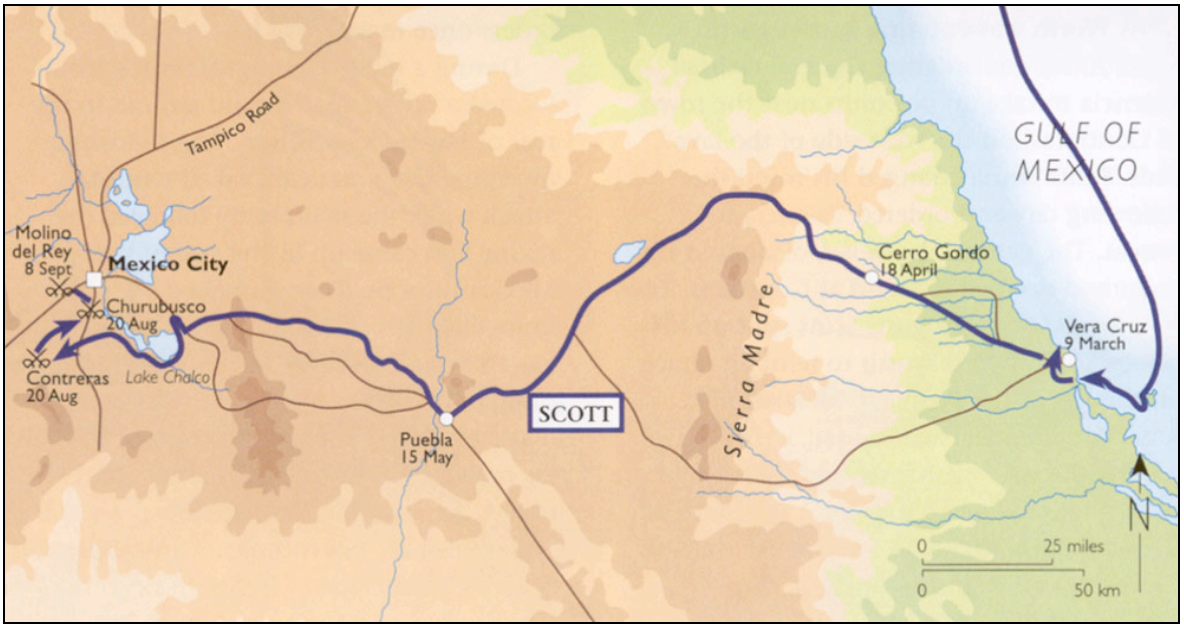
The ambitions of brigands such a Domínguez and associates clearly exceeded mere subsistence, which makes them unlike other brigands. Contrary to what historian Laura Solares has concluded for the majority of nineteenth-century bandits in the state of Michoacán, banditry in the case of Domínguez and company did not constitute a way out of misery. Like the bandits studied by Blok or Vanderwood, people like Domínguez and his followers coveted what belonged to others not so much for mere economic gain, but as means to access a degree of

power. Particularly in the Mexican nineteenth century, access to resources facilitated better connections to power brokers, which provided, in turn, better chances to navigate a political system that was corrupt and in which patronage was crucial. The aspirations of Domínguez and the other bandits in this case study underscore their connection to an urban milieu where they faced entrenched inequality and where the payoff of social and economic privilege was immediately tangible. It is clear that far from seeking the end of social inequality, the members of the Spy Company aimed at placing themselves, albeit temporarily, in a position to exert power. As long as their participation in the war lasted, the *contra-guerrilleros* were able to invert to some extent social relations. Having been pursued by the law, prosecuted and denigrated, this was their chance to get back. As their actions amply indicated, they turned the tables by becoming the persecutors and intimidators. They took pleasure in humiliating their victims and imposing their will by violent means, including over those who they felt had persecuted them. While this was not a "progressive" social agenda, the *contra-guerrilla* was not a purely mercenary and treacherous collaboration with the United States. It reflects the nature of social and political nonconformity among popular sectors in Mexico during the first half of the nineteenth century.

Scholarship is only beginning to reexamine the role of popular sectors in the war with the U.S in 1847, but research suggests that popular discontent contributed significantly to national weakness. The history of *poblano* attitudes toward the U.S. invasion and the story of the Mexican Spy Company are vital to better understanding the strengths and weaknesses of the Mexican state and the centrifugal forces it continues to confront, which are rooted in high levels of socioeconomic inequality and exclusion.

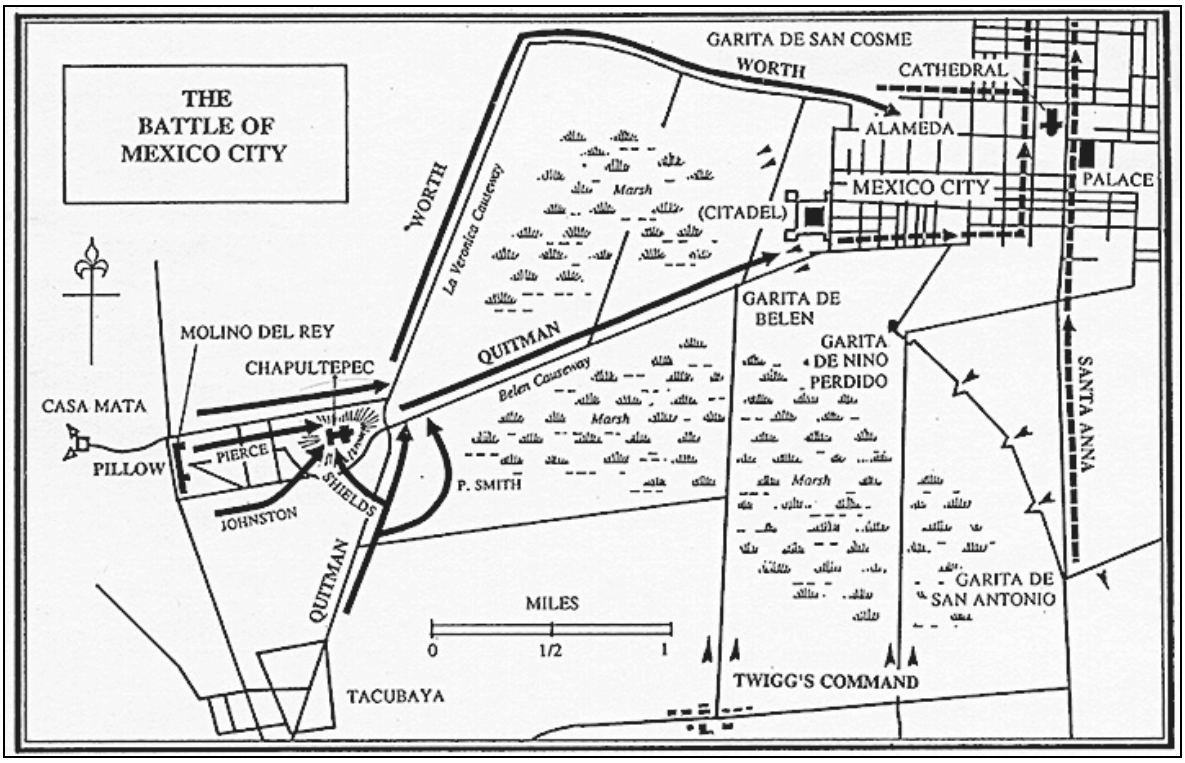
Maps and Images

Map 1. General Scott's Campaign to Mexico City



Map downloaded from http://www.latinamericanstudies.org/mexican-war-maps.htm

Map 2. Last Battles in the Valley of Mexico (September 1847)

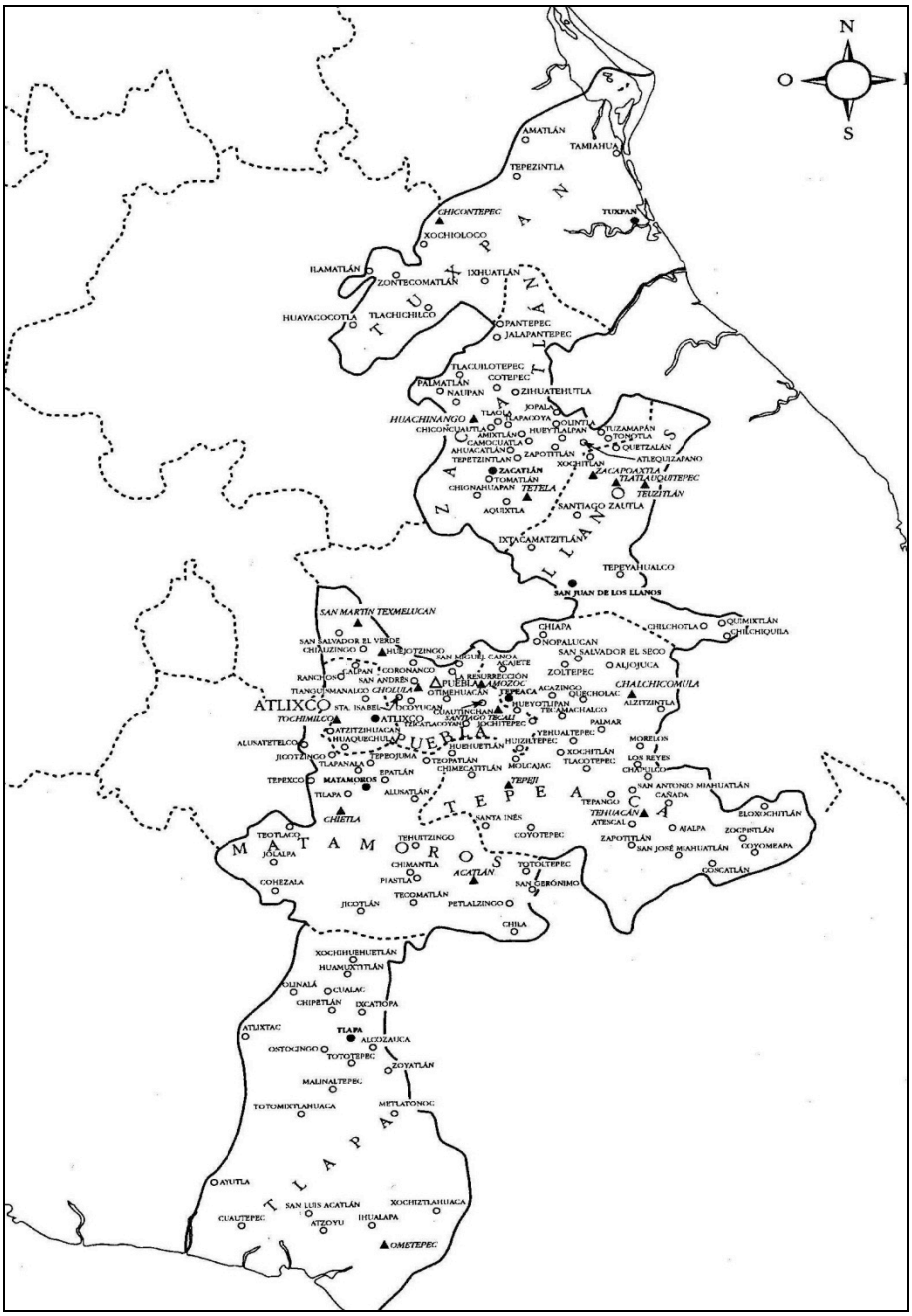


Map downloaded from http://www.latinamericanstudies.org/mexican-war2.htm

Map 3.1 Territorial Division of New Spain, eighteenth century

Map taken from Enrique Florescano, coord. *Atlas histórico de México* (Mexico: Siglo XXI Editores, 1983), 69.

Map 3.2 The Province of Puebla 1824-1849.



Taken from Leonardo Lomelí Vanegas. *Breve historia de Puebla* (Mexico: Fondo de Cultura Económica-El Colegio de México, 2001). Courtesy of Fondo de Cultura Económica.

Figure 1. In April 2010 this image was posted on a private blog called "Mexico Bicenternario. Mirar a Fondo. La verdadera Historia (Mexico Bicentenary. Looking deep inside. The true history.) The poster reads: "Wanted. The Mexican Spy Company for Treason. A Divided Country is an easy prey."

Image downloaded from http://mexbi.blogspot.com/2010/04/la-guerra-vs-estados-unidos-1846_8098.html

Figure 2. Engraving of Manuel Domínguez. Unknown artist.

Image taken from *Puebla a través de los siglos. Panorama histórico de la ciudad.* Ediciones Culturales García Valesca vol. 1. (Puebla: El Sol de Puebla, 1962), 94.

Figure 3. Uniform of the Mexican Spy Company

Detail from "Corps of Engineers and Mexican Spy Company." Unknown artist. Image downloaded from http://www.art.com

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- Archivo Histórico del Distrito Federal
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- Archivo de la Secretaría de la Defensa Nacional
- Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library (Yale University)
- Biblioteca del Museo Nacional de Antropología e Historia
- Centro de Estudios de Historia de México CARSO (previously Condumex), Puebla Collection
- Fondo Reservado (Biblioteca Nacional, Mexico City, Mexico)
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