

## LIFE PATTERNS AND SOCIAL DIFFERENTIATION AMONG COMMON PEOPLE IN LATE COLONIAL MEXICO CITY

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Mexico City, in the fifty years between 1770 and 1820 was far and away the largest urban entity in the Americas, with a population ranging between about 80 000 and 120 000 people in this period.<sup>1</sup> As a center of both production and consumption and the headquarters of the numerous agencies in the political and religious hierarchies, the capital had a major impact on the social organization and economic activities of rural areas and regional centers throughout the colony of New Spain. In its capacity as a mercantile entrepôt of the most prosperous colony in the Spanish empire at this time, Mexico City's reach extended across half the globe, with its merchants directing operations and interchanges from at least Manila —and by extension China— to Spain —and by extension England.<sup>2</sup>

In earlier works I have sought to describe the composition and behavior of the city's elite and mercantile sectors in this era; now I wish to turn to the makeup and behavior of its middling and lower social elements.

If colonial Mexico was ever distinguished by the estate model of social organization, such was not the case in eighteenth-century Mexico City. Nor can the city be characterized as made up of a small hispanic sector and a large lower class, distinguished only by ethnic differences. The variegated middle sector was

<sup>1</sup> Richard E. Boyer and Keith A. Davis, *Urbanization in 19th Century Latin America: Statistics and Sources*, Los Angeles, UCLA Latin America Center, 1973, p. 41-44.

<sup>2</sup> John E. Kicza, *Colonial Entrepreneurs: Families and Business in Bourbon Mexico City*, Albuquerque, University of New Mexico Press, 1983, Chap. 3, *passim*. Mexican edition: *Empresarios coloniales. Familias y negocios en la ciudad de México durante los Borbones*, trad. José Luis Luna, México, Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1986, 288 p.

composed of some thousands of households that owned wealth, businesses, or posts that rendered sufficient income to allow for a modicum of comfort, consumption, and security and to afford the training of one's offspring in a business, craft, or profession that gave them the reasonable likelihood of status maintenance and possibly notable social ascent. These attributes, combined with a certain reputation and network of contacts with peers and betters, maintained middling families a distinct rank above the unskilled, poor, and typically dependent members of the lower class.

The middle class was made up of storeowners, mill and workshop owners, managers of commercial and processing establishments, the master craftsmen of the most highly skilled artisan crafts, and such professionals as lawyers, clerics, government functionaries, physicians and surgeons, architects, surveyors, and even some stage performers, artists, and private primary school teachers. Teachers at secondary schools and universities were typically themselves clerics, lawyers, and physicians. Adding up all the members of these diverse occupations indicates that between 30% and 40% of the city's households belonged to the middle class.

Notably missing in the capital's middle sector were people who were solely owners of medium-sized, market-oriented agricultural estates. They typically lived on their rural properties. Numerous storeowners and professionals of the city were also estate owners, but they would employ professional estate managers or members of their families to operate these enterprises. The honorific term of address "don", in the sixteenth century was generally applied to men who owned significant businesses, like retail stores, craft shops, and processing plants, and to members of the professions. Mere commercial clerks and artisan journeymen would normally not be so addressed. The vast majority of members of this social stratum described themselves and were accepted as Spaniards, although a strict accounting of their genealogy would have exposed many as being of mixed blood. The mutability of racial classification to reflect a family's social ascent was common practice in the eighteenth century. It was only this fluidity in ethnic categories that allowed the system of castes to remain officially in force in this era. However, the systems of castes was by then so discredited as a social ideology and as a reflection of the actual society, given the plethora

of exceptions, that with independence it was terminated virtually without protest.<sup>3</sup>

Few children of the Mexico City elite entered the legal profession, the church, or the government bureaucracy in this period, and these were assured lofty positions by their family's status more than by their individual capacities.<sup>4</sup> No members of the elite could be bound in the medical profession or in the fine or performing arts. Thus, with few exceptions, the liberal professions, the governmental and ecclesiastical bureaucracies, the arts, and education at every level were the preserves of the middle class.

Examination of the social background of lawyers, ecclesiastics, and functionaries shows that the vast majority emerged from one or another of two groups. Many of the substantial minority born in the capital itself were offspring of professionals employed there. Yet others were children of prosperous storekeepers and business managers. Few were from artisan or manufacturing families, with only several children of silversmith, carriage-makers, and millers to be found. The majority of lawyers were born in the provinces, usually in district capitals and marketing centers rather than in the countryside itself. Few from this group were themselves the sons of professionals. As a rule, they were from local business families, but here again, as in Mexico City, they were more commonly from established families with some combination of holdings in stores, estates, and mines rather than from the very wealthiest mining or estate-owning families.<sup>5</sup>

The law, the church, and the government seem to have provided the means to maintain a person's level of wealth and status rather than to enhance them considerably, though some notable exceptions could be listed. Professionals in these fields can be

<sup>3</sup> Dennis N. Valdés, "The Decline of the *Sociedad de Castas* in Mexico City", Ph. D. dissertation, University of Michigan, 1978; Patricia Seed, "Social Dimensions of Race: Mexico City, 1753", *Hispanic American Historical Review*, num. 62:4 (November 1982), p. 569-606.

<sup>4</sup> John E. Kicza, "The Great Families of Mexico: Elite Maintenance and Business Practices in Late Colonial Mexico City", *Hispanic American Historical Review*, num. 62:3 (August 1982), p. 429-457.

<sup>5</sup> John E. Kicza, "The Legal Community of Late Colonial Mexico: Social Composition and Career Patterns", in Ross Hassig and Ronald Spores, ed., *Five Centuries of Law and Politics in Central Mexico*, Nashville, Vanderbilt University Publications in Anthropology, 1984, p. 127-144.

readily encountered handling their properties and investments, but such holdings generally devolved from family inheritance rather than from active investment in the economy. But here again, exceptions might be noted. Some professionals assumed overall direction of their family's fortunes despite the presence of businessmen within the larger group. In at least one case, a priest supervised his family's commerce, though he had brothers and brothers-in-law who were themselves merchants.<sup>6</sup>

A fair number of professionals lived in genteel poverty, or at least reduced circumstances, after retiring. Nonetheless, they typically enjoyed an apartment of several rooms with furnishings, a servant woman, and, almost invariably, a personal library of some size.

Physicians, surgeons, artists, performers, and teachers were lesser members of the professions, with primary school teachers and pharmacists having only tenuous claim to such status. While the members of these groups supposedly had to be approved by some supervisory agency or possess special training, an advanced education was not always required and untrained interlopers were a continual problem. In each of these cases, only the most successful and prosperous gained much social prominence and respect, but still not the level of lawyers, priests, and government officials. In a number of instances though, their children would pass into these higher-ranked professional groups.

Whereas all lawyers and clerics invariably invoked their academic degrees and were similarly so addressed, physicians, even those with university training, would sometimes not note their degrees. Considerable differentiation between physicians and surgeons prevailed in the late colonial era, although the two groups were growing more alike in training and prestige. No members of either were from the elite or even from prominent families. Many physicians were sons of men who were themselves in some medical or technical field, but never of lawyers or government officials. Far more physicians than surgeons were natives of New Spain. As was characteristic of all professions in this era, those practitioners with academic degrees and from prestigious origins successfully affiliated themselves with one or more institutions like hospitals and schools. Those without such

<sup>6</sup> Archivo General de Notarías de la Ciudad de México (hereinafter cited AN), Juan Manuel Pozo, Aug. 27, 1793.

advantages were relegated to private practices. But even posts in established institutions carried only modest salaries; hence, physicians aspired to hold several. Only the most successful physicians garnered enough wealth through their practices or marriages to purchase small estates or other businesses. One physician did become a major dealer in the pulque trade, owning an outlet in the city and several pulque ranchos.<sup>7</sup> More typical of successful physicians was the Torres-Rosales de Velasco family, in which for at least three generations the marriage of daughters brought new physicians into the family, and all of the doctors rose to prominence in the professional guild. When a granddaughter married in 1800, she brought with her a very substantial dowry of over 4 000 pesos, but still she married a silversmith, a highranking artisan, rather than a merchant, estate owner, or a lawyer.<sup>8</sup>

Surgeons as a group held even lower public regard and economic standing, even when they had formal professional training. In this era many surgeons were still peninsular immigrants who had initially come to the colony attached to military units and had managed to separate themselves.

Both the career paths and limited social horizons of even the most successful surgeons are illustrated by the life of *licenciado* Manuel Antonio Moreno. A native of Valencia, Spain, Moreno attended the College of Surgery at Cádiz, served a period as a surgeon in the navy, and returned to his former school as rector before coming to Mexico City as the initial substitute *catedrático* of anatomy at the Royal Indian Hospital. A decade later he succeeded to the posts of *catedrático* of anatomy and head surgeon at that institution and shortly thereafter also became head surgeon at the hospital de San Andrés. While holding these positions in 1797, he empowered a merchant of Barcelona to ask the Royal College of Surgery there to grant him a doctorate without his having to take the written exams, as he already held his licentiate and had occupied posts of responsibility.

After becoming a widower, Moreno married a relative, perhaps a daughter, of the head of the Protomedicato. But despite such success, upon his death in 1803, he left his widow and six

<sup>7</sup> John E. Kicza, "The Pulque Trade of Late Colonial Mexico City", *The Americas*, núm. 37:2 (October 1980), p. 207.

<sup>8</sup> AN, Joaquín Barrientos, Sept. 10, 1790, Feb. 18, 1791, and Nov. 2 1802.

children impoverished and dependent on charity. In his will, dated not a month before his death, Moreno could not refer to a single item of real property or an investment. The family was saved from destitution by the generosity of *doctor* Antonio Serrano, who succeeded Moreno as *catedrático* of the Royal Amphitheater and head surgeon of the Royal Indian Hospital. He was unmarried, a *compadre* of the widow, and godfather for three of the six children. Moved by the family's plight, he pledged it an income of 325 pesos annually, half of his salary as head surgeon. Serrano, like Moreno, was a peninsular educated at the College of Surgery at Cádiz, and served as a naval surgeon before coming to Mexico.<sup>9</sup>

While little can be said about the social background of Spanish-born surgeons, those born in New Spain were sometimes of mixed blood rather than Spanish and were often sons of small shopkeepers, artisans, or low-ranked professionals.

As the largest and most prosperous city of Latin America in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, Mexico City supported an elaborate artistic community. The Real Coliseo, as the center of the performing arts, during the 1805-1806 season paid over 47 000 pesos in salaries to over 60 performers and staff. The leading male and female actors, singers, and dancers each earned between 3 000 and 4 000 pesos, about half the salary of a judge on the colonial high court. In 1808, when a leading singer and comic refused to come to Mexico City from Veracruz for a salary of 4 000 pesos, describing the offer as limited, Viceroy Iturrigaray sent a detachment of lancers to fetch her. When she claimed that illness prevented her from moving, the Viceroy decreed that the Veracruz theater could not open until she arrived in the capital.<sup>10</sup>

Perhaps the lowest ranking of all the professional were the primary school teachers, who were organized into a guild with a royal charter. There were male teachers for schools for boys and females for those for girls, but the guild only officially included males. It nonetheless repeatedly sought to extend its

<sup>9</sup> AN, J. Barrientos, Dec. 1, 1797, April 27, 1803, and May 20, 1803. David A. Howard, *The Royal Indian Hospital of Mexico City*, Tempe, Arizona State University Center for Latin American Studies, 1980, p. 59-61.

<sup>10</sup> Archivo General de la Nación, México (hereinafter cited as AGN), *Historia*, t. 468, N.P., *passim*.

authority over the women also. The remarkably well-documented life of Rafael Jimeno, the long-term master of the guild, is revealing about the ambiguities of ethnic identity in this era and the scope of career possibilities and switches available, or perhaps necessary, at this level of society.

Rafael Jimeno was born in the capital in 1749 to a father who was a comic in the theater and who Jimeno's enemies asserted was an Indian. The same people asserted that his mother was a mulatta. Jimeno averred that both were Spanish and challenged his antagonists to prove that they were not. There is no doubt, however, that his parents were never addressed with an honorific. As a youth, Rafael himself worked in the theater. His enemies maintained that he was a comic in an act with his brother and sister; Jimeno rebutted that he served as their prompter, not as a comic. He subsequently became the administrator of a school in the city, but left to become a scribe in the colonial treasury office and then four years in the service of a prominent government official. He moved to the secretary of the viceroy's office and ended his government career as an official in the treasury office in Acapulco. Approved as a primary school teacher in Mexico City in 1781 at about the age of thirty-two, Jimeno quickly opened up a school in one of the best neighborhoods in the city. By at least 1787 he was master of the teacher's guild and stayed as such until his death in 1812, despite the controversy that surrounded him. During his career as head of the guild, he was accused of sexual misconduct with his daughter, consorting with disreputable women, and repeatedly of extorting money from members of the guild.<sup>11</sup>

Late colonial Mexico City contained a vast number and variety of small shopkeepers, artisans, and commercial and industrial managers and foremen. A select group among them assembled sufficient capital to own more than one enterprise, to buy a small house or rural estate, or to lend small amounts at interest. But the greater number aspired to earn 300 pesos or more a year, the income needed to maintain oneself out of poverty. In retail commerce there was a sharp distinction between storeowners and their managers and shopboys, though the expertise of certain managers was prized and well compensated, with some of them eventually becoming shopkeepers themselves. Similar social and

<sup>11</sup> AGN. *Historia*. t. 497. N.P., *passim*

economic distinctions prevailed in the artisan crafts, where masters who owned shops often lived comfortable lives, sometimes even employing other master craftsmen. Journeymen, however, enjoyed no social prestige and received very low wages. Apprentices lived as virtual wards of their masters, with some living much like prisoners.<sup>12</sup>

It was in these spheres of small shopkeeping artisanry that ethnic mobility was most visible. Here Spaniards, mixed bloods, blacks, and Indians worked in close proximity, often performing the same tasks. Numerous non Spaniards assembled the skills and resources to become masters and shopkeepers. Once this step was achieved they might attempt to pass themselves off as belonging to a higher-ranked ethnic classification, with the reasonable expectation of success.

Of course, women could be found at every social level, belonging to the different ethnic groups, and in each of the marital categories. Each of these factors greatly affected a woman's life possibilities. Numerous women, usually classified as Spanish, owned neighborhood grocery stores and small eating establishments, with the storekeepers sometimes utilizing their daughters as managers and shopgirls. Women also had a significant presence in certain craft guilds, especially those associated with weaving and clothworking. Female silkspinnners had their own guild of 250 members. Women also had a presence in the weaving guilds. Widows of master weavers often continued their late husband's businesses, but even some single and married women were active as well.<sup>13</sup>

Single adult women were readily accepted by the society, and only a very small minority ever entered convents. Many married women worked outside of their households, often in small enterprises owned by themselves or by their families. Many widows seem to have faced dramatic deterioration in their economic circumstances. Numerous widows were owners or managers of small businesses. However, many more were left without significant assets and had to turn to employment as seamstresses, laundresses, and clothmill workers.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Kicza, *Colonial Entrepreneurs*, chapters 5 and 9.

<sup>13</sup> Kicza, *Colonial Entrepreneurs*, p. 209 and 223; Silvia M. Arrom, *The Women of Mexico City, 1790-1857*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1985.

<sup>14</sup> John E. Kicza, "La mujer y la vida comercial en la Ciudad de México

Mexico City maintained a community of perhaps one hundred resident immigrants from non-Spanish Europe. The social and business relations between these foreigners and the city's hispanic sector, whether creole or peninsular, reveal that these immigrants were regarded as distinctive outsiders suitable only for certain activities in which hispanics could not normally compete, and had delimited social horizons. But these European immigrants in no way constituted an externally imposed community. Foreigners rarely associated with each other; they did not generally group together in occupations, places of residence, or social or fraternal organizations.

Far and away the largest immigrant groups were the Italians and the French. In 1809, Italians made up nearly 60% of the immigrant population and the French nearly 30%, but there seems to have been considerable variation from year to year. This population was virtually entirely male. The only foreign female encountered was the German wife of a Flemish machinist active in mining.

Most immigrants came to Mexico as youths, often after having spent a period in Spain, usually as servants or commercial apprentices. Commonly, foreign immigrants came to Mexico City as servants or cooks to high-level government, church, or military officials; a far smaller number came as representatives of merchant houses. Very few came to Mexico City with the intention of settling there. Many who came to the capital as servants moved on when their employers did, and merchants likewise generally moved when reassigned. But some from each group always chose to remain, the vast majority becoming independent small businessmen, with only a few working for other people. By one means or another, they established themselves as restaurateurs, hairdressers, or fashion designers, doing (now on their own and for their own benefit) what they had been doing previously in private households. The services that these people provided were both desired and available only from them, that is, access to contemporary European high fashion and cuisine. Locally born cooks, designers, and hairdressers simply could not

provide these services and did not feel their livelihoods threatened by these few purveyors of foreign style.

The careers of two Italians illustrate the amount of travel undertaken and types of posts held by immigrants of Mexico City. José Casani, from Lombardy, came to Barcelona as a personal servant for a naval lieutenant and travelled with him for two years. In 1795 he left him and went to Peru as the tailor of a commander of a naval squadron. He was in Lima for only six months before going to Manila, where he stayed until 1798. His master then dispatched him to Mexico City to serve a nephew stationed there as a naval lieutenant. But when this new master was scheduled to transfer back to Spain, Casani decided to remain in the capital, believing he could make a better living there and set himself up in a tailor shop in one of the best streets in the city.<sup>15</sup> Francisco Clivio was born in Milan, but he journeyed to Genoa at the age of thirteen and soon thereafter to Spain. There he first worked in a private household for several years and then travelled to Lisbon as majordomo for a group of Italians, remaining there for four years. He then sailed to Peru, Manila, the Canary Islands, and finally Havana, where he served the bishop for a brief time. From there he journeyed to Veracruz as a member of the retinue of the new Intendant. After three years, he moved by himself to Mexico City and there rented a *fonda* in a company agreement with another former servant.<sup>16</sup>

Being one of the few immigrants with relatives in the colony was no guarantee of success, as shown in the career of Pedro Miramón, who came to Mexico from France in 1775 and for a short while helped his brother ship tobacco. But in 1809, despite being able to assert that he had relatives in respectable positions in both Mexico and Spain, Miramón could only relate what had been a generally unsuccessful life. He had left his brother's employment to become a miner, but failed in that endeavor. He then obtained a low-level position with the Royal Treasury, but left that post to become a farmer in the outskirts of Mexico City. Subsequently, his brother assisted him once again, hiring him to manage a mill he had rented from the Royal Treasury in the same town. Miramón then repeatedly but unsuccessfully

<sup>15</sup> AGN, *Historia*, t. 452, 1809.

<sup>16</sup> AGN, *Historia*, t. 452, 1809.

pursued a post as a *subdelegado*. In 1809 he reported that he had sustained himself in recent years by selling goods that were given to him in Cádiz and which other people extended to him on credit. In his statement he stressed how much his health and fortunes had suffered during his years in Mexico.<sup>17</sup>

While European immigrants generally gained comfortable niches in the society, they enjoyed little upward mobility or prestige. Few were addressed with an honorific, and they were unable to accumulate the capital, establish the network of contacts, or contract a marriage that would elevate them significantly up the social ladder. The very separateness and skills that afforded them a spot in the society also worked to limit their possibilities. And their children, born to a local woman and local culture, did not inherit any of their father's distinctiveness, but could make use of their positions and connections in ways that had been denied to their fathers.

The capital never contained a numerous population of people of black extraction. The 1790 census counted almost 7 000 mulattoes, 60% of whom were female, and virtually all of whom were free. The same census located only 269 blacks. These two groups collectively made up just under 7% of the city's population, as they would again in an 1805 breakdown of the city's inhabitants.<sup>18</sup> By the eighteenth century, and probably well before, the majority of blacks and mulattoes in the city were free and by the late eighteenth century, only a small number were still enslaved. The manufacturing, processing, and artisanry sectors of the city's economy by now had no great need for slaves and the city was not located within a plantation zone, which might have promoted many slave purchases. Further, as the center of hispanic culture in a large and prosperous colony and located amidst a rapidly increasing Indian population, the capital had, in general, an ample work force to draw upon. The city also was unlike the large urban centers in Europe at this time, which needed continual immigration to maintain their population. All indications

<sup>17</sup> AGN, *Historia*, t. 452, 1809.

<sup>18</sup> Biblioteca Nacional, ms. 458 (1395), f. 16. "Estado reducido de los habitantes de México empadronados en el año de 1790"; "Noticias de Nueva España en 1805", in Enrique Florescano and Isabel Gil, eds., *Descripciones económicas generales de Nueva España, 1784-1817*, México, Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, 1973, p. 180.

are that, as an entity, Mexico City enjoyed a positive natural growth rate, punctuated only occasionally by epidemics.<sup>19</sup>

The free mulatto population derived from two sources. Some migrated to the city from the sugar and coffee plantations to the south and the east of the city, either as freemen or as runaways. Others were born in the city as slaves who were later manumitted or as their free children. Only a few of the blacks in this society, slave or free, were natives of Africa. However, numerous slaves were bought in other parts of the Spanish American empire by officials or merchants and then brought to Mexico City. In fact, the evidence indicates that while the majority of the larger black population was native to Mexico City, virtually no adult slaves had been born there. Children born to slave women in the capital stood a good chance of buying or being granted their freedom while still young. Few slaves were bought and sold in Mexico City proper in this era, so few prices are available for comparison. In the five cases encountered, two young adult black women were each sold for 250 pesos. A young mulatto male brought 170 pesos, and a 14-year old Negro *bozal*, or African-born slave, was sold for 100 pesos. A Negro male, otherwise undescribed, was sold for only 40 pesos in 1801.<sup>20</sup>

Whether slave or free, black or mulatto, people of black extraction could be found in one or another of three categories of work. Most were household servants, with the males greatly desired as coachmen. It is difficult to find evidence in this period of any coachman, public or private, who was not of black extraction. In fact, mulatto coachmen were sufficiently numerous and conscious of themselves as a group to organize their own confraternity. Others labored in bakeries, weaving mills, or similar processing or construction industries, where coercion and enclosure of workers was often legally or tacitly accepted. Finally, some were employed as skilled artisans, with some of the freemen rising to become masters within their guilds. Most gained positions in the larger and less exclusive and remunerative crafts,

<sup>19</sup> Woodrow Borah and Sherburne F. Cook, "El centro urbano como foco para la migración en la Nueva España", in Jorge E. Hardoy and Richard P. Schaedel, eds., *La ciudad de América Latina y sus áreas de influencia*, Buenos Aires, Ediciones SIAP, 1975, p. 127-128.

<sup>20</sup> AN, J. Barrientos, Nov. 19, 1790, April 24, 1795, and Oct. 2, 1795; Tomás Hidalgo de los Reyes, Aug. 6, 1801; Nicolás Vega, March 23, 1811.

such as blacksmiths, tailors, and cobblers, but some did become masters in the silver and goldsmiths guilds, even though their own regulations limited membership to persons of Spanish extraction.<sup>21</sup>

Manumission, either by free gift from one's owner or through purchase, was common in this society in this epoch. It was so institutionalized that when don Manuel Mariano de Blaya y Blaya donated a young slave woman and her child to the hospital of the Order of San Juan de Dios, he specified that prior could grant her freedom only if she paid her full purchase price with money honestly obtained.<sup>22</sup> Slaves of both sexes were manumitted through both grant and purchase at surprisingly young ages. Vicenta Ignacia paid the entire purchase price for her freedom at the age of twenty-eight, only four years after having been acquired.<sup>23</sup> Francisco, also twenty-eight, and, like Vicenta Ignacia, African-born, was purchased in Buenos Aires at the age of fourteen for 300 pesos. Just fourteen years later, when at his prime in terms of market value and productivity, he was granted his freedom without any payment or conditions.<sup>24</sup>

The latitude that some slaves were able to achieve even under formal bondage and how this could be translated to more formal freedom is illustrated by the lives of Gregoria Otal and her daughter. Gregoria belonged to don Juan Francisco Garrido, a merchant of the city of no special prominence, and apparently worked as a house servant. She nonetheless married a Spaniard, Antonio Silva, and had a daughter by him, María Joaquina, who was of course also a slave. At some point Gregoria went to work as a servant in the household of don Baltasar Ladrón de Guevara, *Decano* of the Audiencia of Mexico, earning a salary. In 1791 Garrido granted freedom to one-year-old María Joaquina, who was living with her mother in this other household, because she was unwell, provided that she remain within that household until she was twenty-five.<sup>25</sup>

Two former slaves who accumulated a little money and property in their lives showed continued loyalty to their former

<sup>21</sup> Kicza, *Colonial Entrepreneurs*, p. 208.

<sup>22</sup> AN, N. Vega, March 23, 1811.

<sup>23</sup> AN, J. Barrientos, Nov. 19, 1790.

<sup>24</sup> AN, Francisco de Madariaga, May 28, 1817.

<sup>25</sup> AN, J. Barrientos, Nov. 7, 1791.

owners. María Antonia Molinar recorded in her testament that she was over fifty years of age, of African birth, and did not remember her parents because she was taken away when about ten years of age. She was owned by a prominent family of Mexico City, whose name she retained as her own, until the death of the husband, when the widow granted her freedom. She never married and after her manumission managed to build a small house for herself on a lot she purchased in the outskirts of the city. She also had 480 pesos, which she maintained in the control of her former mistress. In her testament she gave her clothes to the other servants, her jewelry, including a string of pearls and diamond earrings, to her former mistress, who she named as her executor, and her house to the church. She recorded that she had no debts and forgave 50 pesos owed to her by her *compadre*.<sup>26</sup>

José Manuel Guzmán de Santoyo was also about fifty years of age when he made out his testament, but was a native of Havana, Cuba, and a legitimate child who showed considerable pride in his family name. He was now affiliated with the friars of the Order of San Juan de Dios and seemingly had worked in their hospital. He owned the house where he lived behind the church of the Order. Three women and a young man, who bore his maternal surname, lived with him. This surname was also that of a former mistress of his. He left the house to the use of his companions for as long as they lived, whereupon it was to pass to the Order of San Juan de Dios. In return, the Order was to say three masses annually, two for his soul and one for that of his former mistress.<sup>27</sup>

But resistance and insolence were as much a reality of black slavery in late colonial Mexico City. Flight seems to have been a recurrent phenomenon to judge from the advertisements for runaways placed as notices in the newspapers of the capital at the time. These runaways seem to have been servants. In some cases rewards were offered, in one instance 50 pesos, which must have been a fourth or a fifth of the slave's market value. Sale to a new owner seems to have triggered at least one flight, for the owner noted that the slave disappeared just hours before

<sup>26</sup> AN, J. Barrientos, Dec. 17, 1803.

<sup>27</sup> AN, N. Vega, May 9, 1808.

moving to a new household, taking silverware and a shawl with her.<sup>28</sup>

Slaves enclosed within bakeries and textile mills had less opportunity to flee, but they too resisted, sometimes violently. Officials noted a number of disturbances within such enterprises, and Matías Torres, a slave born in Guinea, was held as a prisoner in Veracruz for having killed the majordomo at the bakery where he labored.

The independence of mind of the slave María Petrona de Vera caused recurrent problems for her owner, a government fiscal officer. He recorded that she was a native of Havana, Cuba, where he purchased her, but that since they had come to Mexico, she had repeatedly sought to beg money from people to be able to return to Cuba to live with her mother. Then in 1799, he had her imprisoned for trying to marry with another slave without his permission. She then requested the court to place her in the house of another official, who, she claimed, wished to purchase her. The resolutions of the case is unknown.<sup>29</sup>

Indians made up between 22% and 24% of the city's population in this period, with mestizos and other mixed bloods of Indian extraction composing another 19% to 21%.<sup>30</sup> Great numbers lived in the two large Indian districts, *parcialidades*, that lay to the north and the west of the city center. But even the center contained some thousands of permanent Indian residents, some as servants in Spanish households, but also many in apartments and roominghouses and in their own small houses. Great numbers of Indians and *castas* worked as unskilled laborers, but over the course of the colonial period, increasing numbers from these groups entered into artisan guilds and small shop-keeping, with some even entering into the professions.

The Indians maintained their ancient social division between nobles—*caciques* and *principales*—and commoners—*macehuales*—, but generally referred to as “indios tributarios.” The social difference was actively promoted, with Indian nobles of either sex being extremely reluctant to marry with Indian commoners. Their marriages were generally within their own group or with mestizos, or Spaniards, even from the peninsula. The two tra-

<sup>28</sup> *Diario de México*, Feb. 15, 1806; Nov. 8, 1808, and July 9, 1810.

<sup>29</sup> AGN, *Civil*, leg. 1519, exp. 19, June 2, 1799.

<sup>30</sup> See note #15.

ditional Indian districts of San Juan Tenochtitlan and Santiago Tlatelolco each had their own councils, although they had little authority or wealth and were seemingly easily manipulated by Spanish officials.<sup>31</sup> The same families, among them Aguila, Cano Moctezuma, Escalona, de la Peña, and Zacarias, dominated the leadership posts year after year, with some alternation in posts and even in holding the same post but in different barrios. But such posts, though of little importance in the larger framework of the municipal system, could still yield benefits licitly or illicitly. Juan Simón Zacarias was a *cacique* of the Barrio of San Sebastián of the Parcialidad de San Juan Tenochtitlan who reported having held five different posts in the Indian municipal system and having been rewarded with a small lot worth 25 pesos in appreciation. But when he sought to sell the lot, he found its title and others had been seized by an *alcalde* of the *parcialidad* who sought to claim them for himself and who also had rented out a pasture belonging to the district for his own profit.<sup>32</sup>

A far greater variety of occupations and social standing existed among the *caciques* than among the commoners. Some *caciques* were wealthy businessmen who functioned with ease within the Spanish colonial economy and derived little of their wealth or power from positions within the Indian world. Yet others were street performers or dependent on charity from friends or family. Although some commoners lived comfortably in their own houses and had successful small businesses or desired skills, most were unskilled, with minimal property, and lived at a very rudimentary if not destitute level. A possible explanation for the very small number of Indian commoners who enjoyed success in the Spanish sector of the economy may be that those who did in fact succeed did not wish to continue being identified as Indians, with the social stigma and obligation of tribute payment that the label carried, and therefore passed themselves off as mestizos or some other such mixed-blood classification, where their new wealth could more easily, if indirectly, translate itself into social ascent. On the other hand, Indian nobles, whose ascribed status depended on continued identification with their

<sup>31</sup> Andrés Lira, *Comunidades indígenas frente a la Ciudad de México, Tenochtitlan y Tlatelolco, sus pueblos y barrios, 1812-1919*, Zamora, El Colegio de Michoacán, 1983, 428 p.

<sup>32</sup> AGN, *Tierras*, leg. 1384, exp. 5.

native societies, who already enjoyed exemption from tribute payment, and whose titles were often respected by Spaniards, who might themselves even aspire to marriage with the indigenous aristocracy, felt no comparable need to abandon their ethnicity to rise in colonial society.

Some examples of the types of career paths found among successful *caciques* include don José Anastasio Cuellar, who owned a store dealing in ironware in one of the main plazas of the city and who managed it through a company with its administrator.<sup>33</sup> In 1789 don Andrés Escalona, then governor of the *parcialidad* of San Juan Tenochtitlan, applied unsuccessfully to become general interpreter of the Audiencia, but the next year began a company with a Spanish lawyer in the production of *tezontle* stone, canoes, and cattle on a rancho to the south of Mexico City. When they dissolved the company nine years later, the *cacique* took over operation of the business from his former partner and paid him instead a fixed rent.<sup>34</sup> Don José Antonio de Sales late in his life owned three houses, a store, and 70 *chinampas*, or canalside gardens. In his testament he distributed these gardens among his many godchildren.<sup>35</sup> *Bachiller* don Manuel Gómez Sánchez de Mendoza, though orphaned soon after birth, attended the Royal Seminary of the capital for twelve years on scholarship, become an ecclesiastic, and held the chair in Otomí at the university. He later left his path toward priesthood and married.<sup>36</sup> Don Anastasio Acevedo Hernández de Mendoza bought the meat from the annual slaughter on one of the estates of the Marqués de Aguayo and marketed it throughout the colony.<sup>37</sup>

Indian commoners also owned *chinampas*, though generally just one or two along the canals running to the city, and also owned bathhouses and laundryspots along these waterways. Others had small stands. One family recorded that it manufactured salt, and another commoner related how he rented a corral for eight years before buying it for nearly 1 300 pesos.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>33</sup> AGN, *Consulado*, leg. 166, exp. 3, Sept. 26, 1804.

<sup>34</sup> AGN, *Civil*, leg. 1491, exp. 3, May 11, 1789; AN, Barrientos, July 20, 1791.

<sup>35</sup> AN, Francisco de la Torre, Feb. 23, 1808.

<sup>36</sup> AGN, *Civil*, leg. 1491, exp. 3, March 3, 1789.

<sup>37</sup> AGN, *Civil*, leg. 875, exp. 8, March 11, 1816.

<sup>38</sup> AGN, *Tierras*, leg. 1960, exp. 2, June 6, 1781; AN, Tomás Hidalgo de los Reyes, Oct. 8, 1804.

Commoners were often very attached to the small houses and even shacks that they owned, unlike lower-class Spaniards, who often lived in crowded roominghouses without showing any driving need to remove themselves. Some Indians nonetheless sold or mortgaged their houses to raise a little capital to live on or sometimes to invest in their small shops and businesses.

No special harmony or unity seemed to mark urban Indian society or even the individual family. The documentation includes multiple instances of disputes and illfeeling. Rights to income, property, and inheritances could be bitterly fought over.<sup>89</sup>

Both the middle and lower classes of late colonial Mexico City were large and differentiated by ethnicity, occupation, wealth, and webs of connections. By examining the larger gamut of groups, interests, and life and career patterns among them, we can appreciate the range of distinctions and characteristics that prevailed and note both the norm and the anomaly. To fail to do so is to risk overstating the importance and uniqueness of any single group in the society and also to adopt the uninformed view of elite commentators of the time who argued the uniformity and base level of conduct of these less prestigious and prosperous segments of Mexico City society.

<sup>89</sup> See, for example, AGN, *Tierras*, leg. 999, exp. 6, Sept. 9, 1776 and AN, Vicente Hidalgo de los Reyes, Sept. 13, 1809.