

THE HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE MEXICAN ARISTOCRACY: 1519-1940

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Introduction

The purpose of this article is to present some preliminary results on a long-term research project that we expect to complete in seven or eight years. The project is concerned with the structure, ideology, and historical development of the Mexican *haute bourgeoisie*, centered on the aristocracy. Elsewhere (Nutini, Roberts and Cervantes n.d.), we have described and analyzed the expressive components of the processes of realignment and social mobility that the upper reaches of the Mexican stratification system has been undergoing since 1910. We discussed these processes in terms of acculturation, in which two fairly clearly defined social groups (the descendants of the old landed aristocracy and a new plutocracy) have been coalescing toward a new undifferentiated social class, the *haute bourgeoisie*, during the past forty years. In the historical account that follows, we expect to demonstrate the main principles of bourgeois stratification and aristocratic attainment in more than four centuries since the Spanish Conquest, a necessary condition in order to understand the contemporary formation of the *haute bourgeoisie*. Before undertaking this task, we shall briefly outline the structure and position of the Mexican aristocracy today (1).

Social scientists have been working in Mexico for more than sixty years. They have studied most of the significant classes, segments, and ethnic groups of Mexican society as well as an extensive array of problems. They have not studied, however, the Mexican aristocracy, the traditional ruling class of Mexico. This is a surprising phenomenon, given the fact that even after the

Mexican Revolution of 1910, the descendants of the original *encomendero* (land grantee) class in the XVI and XVII centuries and later the *hacendado* (*latifundia* owner) class in the XVIII and XIX centuries, have continued to play a significant role in the social and economic affairs of the nation, as Mexico evolved from a highly stratified oligarchy to a modern, fairly democratic nation. Indeed, it is not possible to understand the new social stratification and the realignment of the *haute bourgeoisie* that has been taking place in Mexico since the onset of the Revolution without a thorough study of how the aristocracy has evolved during the past seventy years.

Directly and indirectly, a good deal has been written about the ruling class of Mexico since the XVI century. Every three or four decades we learn about the fortunes, exploits, highhandedness, and sociopolitical stands of the landed, mining, and trading elites of Mexico: from formal essays describing the social, economic, and political conditions of particular periods (Las Casas 1966; Cervantes de Salazar 1957; Gómez de Cervantes 1944); from the accounts of administrators and government officials (Zorita 1968; Dorantes de Carranza 1954; Clavijero 1945); from accounts of travelers, *in situ* observers, and traveling scholars (Gage 1978; Humboldt 1966; McBride 1977; Calderón de la Barca 1954; Kolonitz 1976); and from modern historical and ethnohistorical reconstruction of the XVI to the XX centuries (Zavala 1948; Durand 1953; Mendizábal 1972; Ladd 1976; Urías 1978). But nothing has been written on the traditional aristocracy of Mexico and its descendants since the onset of the Mexican Revolution. Mexican, American, and European scholars have written about the changes in social stratification that have taken place in Mexico since the beginning of the Revolution and the new alignment of classes that has significantly altered Mexican society. But we know nothing about what has happened to the landed aristocracy and other elite groups that constituted a tightly knitted social class until 1910. There is no question that their descendants have survived and constitute a significant social segment — or subclass, if you will — of the Mexican *haute bourgeoisie* (2).

Mexican social stratification today has not yet crystallized into a stable, fairly well structured system. For nearly seventy years, segments of the old order, revolutionary elements, and the significant industrialization of the country during the past forty years, have produced a great deal of social turmoil and upward and

downward mobility across the total societal spectrum. It is difficult to present a clear picture of the social classes at the national-urban level and impossible when the rural regional contexts are taken into consideration. While ideologically and by extrapolation it may be a comparatively easy task to delineate the main social classes present at the national-urban level, it is structurally very difficult to draw the boundaries of social stratification in Mexico today. This is particularly true in the upper reaches of the stratification spectrum, where the social, economic, and political elites are still in the process of jockeying for power and status, and where the demarcation lines have not yet been drawn. The *haute bourgeoisie* of Mexico is comprised of a number of social elements of diverse origins: members of the old landed aristocracy; revolutionaries turned capitalists; politicians; and national and foreign industrialists and bankers, who have amassed their fortunes during the past fifty years. Those who claim membership in the social group that we have called the « Mexican aristocracy » must be viewed and conceptualized in the context of the *haute bourgeoisie*.

As a working hypothesis, we assume that there are three basic components to the structure of the Mexican *haute bourgeoisie*: the surviving aristocracy who embody social status and some economic power; the political heirs of the Mexican Revolution (past high officials and officers of the ruling party, PRI) who wield political power and status; and the new banking-industrial elite who represent significant social status and a great deal of economic power. This is of course a simplified model, but there is no doubt that the Mexican *haute bourgeoisie* is evolving toward a conglomerate of forces and personnel by drawing from these different segments. There is already a significant merging of the aristocracy and the banking-industrial establishment in the area of social and economic interaction. But the political side of this triangle will probably take longer to be integrated effectively. For ideological as well as structural reasons, the high ranking members of the ruling political party, and high ranking politicians at large, are still identified with the masses of the population and the rising middle class. This presents certain difficulties for their coalescing effectively with the other two segments. It is our contention, however, that these three distinct segments of different provenance will eventually coalesce into a social class that we have referred to as the « new plutocracy ». Thus, the Mexican aristocracy will

disappear as a distinct social segment, as the arbiter of genteel and appropriate behavior, and as the group to emulate in the quest for social status.

Until the Porfirio Diaz regime, the landed, mining, and manufacturing ruling class of Mexico constituted a true aristocracy in the standard use of the term. But this is not the case with their descendants today. They have lost all their political power and much of their economic power, and what they have retained is only most of their social status. Therefore, it is with some hesitation that we refer to our focus of study as the "Mexican aristocracy". Our main justification for this is that to a large extent, the Mexican aristocracy today is comparable to the upper-upper class of Warner's Yankee City (Warner 1949: 215), taking into consideration the much higher estamental composition that Mexican social stratification has had until very recently.

What is the Mexican aristocracy today? Structurally, it is composed of some six or seven hundred nuclear and extended families, denoted by some two hundred or so patronimics, with a total membership of no more than six thousand adults and children. They reside mostly in Mexico City, although a few families are found in old Colonial cities such as Guadalajara, Morelia, San Luis Potosí, Guanajuato, and Querétaro. Politically, they have not participated in the life of the country since 1910, due to either a profound aversion to the new regime or by the natural proscriptions that were brought about by the Mexican Revolution and its aftermath. It is only during the past twenty years — and apparently with increasing frequency — that young members of the aristocracy are being drawn to participate in politics in relatively high positions. Economically, the aristocracy spans the whole spectrum of the Mexican bourgeoisie: from its impoverished families (strictly economic middle class), to the upper-middle class economic majority, to a relatively high number of members of the economic establishment (bankers, businessmen, and industrialists). Ideologically, what unites the members of the aristocracy into a well bounded, closely knit, and still viable segment of Mexican society is a strong collective consciousness of being the descendants of the political, economic, and social ruling class of Mexico until the Revolution. In varying degrees of intensity and antiquity, they regard themselves as the heirs of those who ruled the country since the Spanish Conquest until the fall of the Diaz regime. They are conscious of their loss of political and economic power,

and aware of the fact that their once universally and exalted social status and privileges are now significantly diminished and recognized only by the upwardly mobile segments in the upper reaches of the bourgeoisie. The members of the aristocracy still cling to a view of themselves as the arbiters of social gentility and as the carriers of a long subcultural tradition of learning and manners that will die with them. Regardless of economic position, the aristocracy acknowledges strong bonds of social affinity, marked by the patronimics borne by its members, a genealogy that must be traced at least to the *onset* of the Diaz regime (1875), and more subtle behavioral indicators including a long roster of expressive conduct and manners.

Formally speaking, the Mexican aristocracy is a social class in the standard use of the term by American sociologists (Davis & Moore 1945: 242-245). But the aristocracy is also a class in the subjective, ideological Marxist sense (Laurin-Frenette 1974: 252-257), since it is a historical reality, has a collective consciousness, and has a definite view of itself and of the global society. The aristocracy, however, is not a class in the objective, structural Marxist sense, in that it no longer exclusively owns the means of production or is tied to a specific means of production, except insofar as it is part of the Mexican bourgeoisie. Given this particular juncture, the Mexican aristocracy must be conceptualized both as a segment of the Mexican stratification system and as a class in the Marxist ideological definition of the term (3). In the latter sense it will help to explain the formation of the new plutocracy and the general alignment of the Mexican bourgeoisie today. In the former sense it will help to explain the new mechanisms of social stratification and upward mobility which have affected the bourgeoisie during the past half century. Thus, structurally we expect to show economic and political underpinnings of bourgeois stratifications, while expressively we hope to demonstrate that the aristocracy has survived as a viable social segment because it has come to validate a system (the new developing plutocracy) without the proper ideological momentum of its own. Given the nature and direction of our ongoing research, it is necessary to place the aristocracy, as the traditional ruling class of Mexico, in its proper historical account of how the aristocracy was forged and developed since the Spanish Conquest.

Despite the extensive mining that went on during Colonial and Republican times, Mexico has always been an agrarian society

until very recently, and one of its most salient characteristics has been a high degree of social stratification. Its ruling class may be termed a "landed aristocracy", and its inception goes back to the beginning of Colonial times. From the early XVIII century, when mercantile, trading, and manufacturing operations became the source of great wealth, the *nouveaux riches* would invariably validate new status by the acquisition of land, and not infrequently entailing it (the *mayorazgo* system) for future generations. The Mexican aristocracy was forged in relation to the land and its exploitation, and acquired its most elaborate expression in the latter part of the XIX century.

The conquest and early colonial period: 1519-1650

The Spanish colonization of Mexico and Central America (the Vice-royalty of New Spain) had two main purposes: economic exploitation of the Indians and their conversion to Catholicism. In achieving these purposes, the Spanish Crown relied primarily on two institutions: the establishment of cities and towns, and the *encomienda* system. Since the Spanish Crown did not have cash, the usual method of rewarding the conquistadors was to give them land in trust which included a corresponding number of Indians. This was the system of *encomienda*, and the possessor of an *encomienda* was termed the *encomendero*. In brief, the *encomendero* through the *repartimiento* (allotment of laborers) was given the responsibility of civilizing the Indians — that is, he had to teach them the Catholic faith and protect them. In turn, it was the duty of the Indians to work for the *encomendero* as farmers and house workers (Nutini 1963).

The details cannot be presented here, but it should be realized that the *encomienda* system of the early and mature Colonial periods (that is, approximately until the end of the XVII century) gave rise to the *hacienda* system that was to play such an important role in the social, economic, and political life of the late Colonial and Republican periods. It should also be realized that from the very beginning the Crown tried to abolish the *encomienda*, for the obvious reason that it gave too much power to individuals. The problem of the Crown was to hold and control the newly acquired provinces, but since it had only the Spanish settlers to rely upon in an emergency, it had to compromise be-

tween granting them certain rights, and at the same time retaining as much control as possible (Nutini 1963).

The establishment of cities and towns was fully as important as the *encomienda* system in holding and exploiting the territories of New Spain. The Spanish Crown was acutely aware of the importance of towns and cities as centers of trade, mining exploitation, manufacture, and administration. It took every opportunity to instruct, first the conquistadors, and then Crown officials and private entrepreneurs, to identify propitious locations on which to establish towns and concentrate Indian populations. This insistence on the manifold importance of cities and towns was not confined to the heartland of the viceroyalty, but applied equally to all the provinces of New Spain. It was the aim of the Spanish Crown to integrate this vast domain on the basis of a network of administrative and commercial centers reaching from the highest to the lowest levels of political integration into which the viceroyalty was divided (Garretón 1933).

The establishment of the *encomienda* system and the foundation of new towns went hand in hand, and from an economic and demographic viewpoint, they were two sides of the same coin. After a territory had been secured for the Spanish Crown by an army or a group of privately supplied and organized conquistadors, one of the first official acts of their leader (*adelantado, capitán general, gobernador*) was to found a municipality and establish the town council (*ayuntamiento* or *cabildo*). Usually, all able-bodied men of the group or army of conquistadors signed the founding charter, thus acquiring the status of "citizens" or *vecinos* (neighbors) of the newly founded town, along with clearly established privileges, rights, and responsibilities. The concept of *vecino* is extremely important in the study of Colonial urbanization, for *vecinos* and their descendants constituted the central core of the economic, social, and political life of cities, due to original rights of residence granted to the founders of the municipality (Moses 1974).

However, the system that really made the original *vecinos* the nucleus of the Colonial city was the *encomienda* system. After the municipality was founded, the leader of the expedition often had the right to grant *encomiendas* and allot *repartimientos* to the members of his group or army according to rank, merit, and the prior agreement (*capitulaciones*) signed by the members of the expedition. But the exigencies of holding a newly conquered

territory made this mode of granting *encomiendas* and allotting *repartimientos* rather difficult. The recompense of a conquistador for his services to the Crown usually came later, from the hands of officials sent by the Crown when the territory had been fairly well organized. The *vecinos*, then, became the *encomenderos* by virtue of having first rights to the exploitation of the land, Indians, and natural resources falling within the jurisdiction or area of influence of the newly founded town or city of which they were charter members (Navarro 1930).

In time, migration from Spain led to the settlement of large numbers of Spaniards in the cities and towns of New Spain, which rapidly increased in population. But these late arrivals, usually traders, merchants, and specialized craftsmen, were referred to as *habitantes* or *moradores*, to distinguish them from the *vecinos* or *encomenderos*, and they did not enjoy the rights and privileges of the original settlers (Moore 1954). In a hearing conducted before a royal justice in Madrid circa 1570, it was established that the proportion of *encomenderos* and *moradores* in the average city of New Spain was approximately one to nine (Nutini 1972). Despite its small numbers, however, the *encomendero* class was the driving force of Colonial urban life. If we add the fact that in 1572 Philip II decreed that all the descendants of *vecinos* enjoyed the status of *encomenderos*, with its corresponding rights and privileges, it is easy to visualize the great importance of this group in Colonial urban life. The *encomendero* class not only dominated Colonial society socially, economically, and to some extent politically, but its control over large masses of Indian populations made it the most significant factor in the development of Colonial urbanization. This is the context in which the Mexican aristocracy was originally forged and throughout the next three centuries retained essentially its landed base, although in time it became increasingly diversified by engaging in trade and manufacturing.

The social composition of the conquistadors, and especially those who became *encomenderos*, was varied. We say this because perhaps no more than 40% of the original conquistadors received *encomiendas*. The majority of them were never able to activate their status of *vecinos* and in time became undifferentiated from the *moradores*. The majority of conquistadors were of course commoners, but a surprisingly high number were *hidalgos* (gentry, lesser nobility), and a few were second or third born sons of illus-

trious Spanish noble families. By 1560 or so, the ranks of the *encomenderos* had been greatly augmented by later arrivals, who by virtue of being kinsmen or friends of high viceregal officials or by being well connected in the Council of Indies, had managed to obtain substantial *encomiendas*. For obvious reasons, these later arrivals were mostly *hidalgos*.

By the end of the XVI century, there were probably close to one thousand *encomenderos* in New Spain. These included not only the owners of all large landed estates, but mine owners, and perhaps a number of individuals engaged in large scale mercantile operations. From shortly after the Conquest the subcultural and customary aversion of Spanish nobles and *hidalgos* toward manual labor and business activities (traditionally enforced by legal prescriptions) seemed to have been less accentuated in New Spain. By the middle of the XVIII century, business and mercantile activities were a universal practice among the titled nobility of the colony. Thus, from practically the beginning, the landed ruling class engaged in diversified economic activities. In fact, upward mobility from the ranks of merchants and businessmen usually involved the acquisition of land as a validation of their spring status (Durand 1953: 32-39).

Regardless of whether they were commoners or *hidalgos*, the original conquistadors — *encomenderos* and their descendents in the XVI century — and by association those late *encomenderos* who had not participated in the Conquest, claimed for themselves the status of nobles and all the rights and privileges that went with it. To support this claim, they alleged the rights of conquest and military exploits, which in Spain had been the main mechanisms for attaining the status of noble throughout the Reconquest. Writing at the end of the XVI century (1599), Gonzalo Gómez de Cervantes (second generation descendant of an original conquistador and member of one of the most powerful Creole families in New Spain) flatly asserts that those *encomenderos* who are descendents of original conquistadors must be regarded as nobles by their deeds of conquest, regardless of whether they could prove (adduce *probanzas*) that they were *hidalgos* before the Conquest. Furthermore, Gómez de Cervantes recommends to the king that all *encomenderos* officially be made nobles, that the *encomiendas* be given in perpetuity, and that all high offices in the Colonial administration below the viceroy be given to *encomenderos* (Gómez de Cervantes 1944: 77-93). These somewhat exaggerated but

well reasoned and economically and administratively sound claims were obviously never heeded by the Crown, always jealous of its power and trying to maintain as much control as possible overseas. But they clearly exemplify the dominant ideology of the Creole aristocracy, which had significant social, economic, and political repercussions throughout Colonial times. It becomes less realistic and outmoded, as the pageantry and heroic deeds of the Conquest begin to fade from the collective consciousness, and the base of the Creole aristocracy broadens to include rich merchants and businessmen of more recent lineage.

The Spanish Crown halfheartedly recognized the claims of the original conquistadors and those claiming the same rights and privileges by association, but it was not about to make nobles of all of them, much less grant indiscriminate titles of nobility. Throughout the XVI century and the first fifty years of the XVII century, only seven titles were granted by the Crown. In order of antiquity they are: (1) Marqués (Marquis) del Valle de Oaxaca (1529), awarded to Hernán Cortés, conqueror of Mexico; (2) Mariscal (Marshall) de Castilla (1531), awarded to a member of the Luna y Arellano family, of ancient Castilian lineage; (3) Adelantado (no equivalent in English) de las Filipinas (1569), awarded to Miguel López de Legazpi, conqueror of the Philippines; (4) Marqués de Salinas del Río Pisuerga (1609), awarded to Luis de Velasco the younger, twice viceroy of New Spain; (5) Conde (Count) de Santiago de Calimaya (1616), awarded to a grandson of Luis de Velasco the younger; (6) Conde del Valle de Orizaba (1627), awarded to Rodrigo de Vivero, captain-general of the Philippines and Panama; and (7) Conde de Moctezuma (1627), awarded to Pedro Moctezuma y de la Cueva, great-grandson of the Aztec ruler Moctezuma II. The descendants of the two main *dramatis personae* of the Conquest of Mexico were never really part of the social life of New Spain: the descendants of Moctezuma moved to Spain by the end of the XVI century; and the descendants of Cortés never lived in New Spain for any length of time, until in the fourth generation the title passed to the Pignatelli, a princely Neapolitan family. (It is interesting to note, however, that for more than three centuries the Pignatelli family were the absentee landlords of much of Cortés enormous estates in Central Mexico.) The descendants of the other five original title holders became the nucleus of the Creole aristocracy in New Spain, and by virtue of their multiple kinship and ritual kinship

interrelationships became the arbiters of the social life of the colony until practically the end of Colonial times (Ladd 1976: 13-23) (4).

The mature and late colonial periods: 1650-1824

When in the middle of the XVII century the *encomienda* system was replaced by the *hacienda* system, the *hacendado* class became the heirs of the *encomendero* class. Much of what has been said about the *encomienda* system obtained in the *hacienda* system, which became the most significant social, economic, and political reality in Mexico until the Revolution of 1910 (Zavala 1948). This is the ancestry of the Mexican aristocracy today, most of whose members can trace their descent to the XVI, XVII, and XVIII centuries. The cycle is completed by the middle of the XIX century with the incorporation into the aristocracy of upwordly mobile elements from the ranks of trading, manufacturing and banking, which begin in a large scale during the last three decades of the XVIII century. By the time of the French intervention, they constituted the richest families in Mexico and the last significant group of people to become part of the ruling class (Urías 1978). After the French intervention and until the turn of the century, individuals still entered the ranks of the aristocracy but *qua* individuals, for one of the characteristics of the Mexican aristocracy has always been a receptivity to the aspirations of those in the upper reaches of the social scale.

The end of the *encomienda* system in New Spain is difficult to pinpoint. In its original form, it ends *de jure* in 1542 with the rather unsuccessful implementation of the New Laws. *De facto*, it survived in many parts of New Spain until the beginning of the XVII century, and exceptionally — in places where there was no other way for Spaniards to make a living — continued until the end of the XVIII century. The passing of the *encomienda* system means essentially that Indian *repartimientos* were no longer allotted, except perhaps to mining operations which were of paramount importance to the Spanish Crown. By the middle of the XVII century the great majority of landed estates were held in private property. The problem for the landowners, then, was to assure themselves of a steady supply of labor. This was achieved, according to Zavala (1948: 54), by

attracting Indians to live permanently on the landed estates, a practice that started much before the *encomienda* system *de facto* came to an end. In order to ensure that the Indian laborers would stay on the *haciendas*, the *hacendados* employed all kinds of legal subterfuges, but principally by placing them in debt. The system of debt peonage that replaced the *encomienda* had two main consequences: it disenfranchized many Indians from their communities and made them permanent residents of the *haciendas*; and as the *hacendados* become independent from the Crown for their steady supply of labor, they became increasingly more powerful in the life of the colony, a process that culminated during the Diaz regime. From then on, regardless of the increasing importance of other economic activities that went on in New Spain, the *hacienda* system became the focus of social and economic life in the colony.

One of the themes that dominates the social and economic life of New Spain in early Colonial times is the antagonism and sometimes confrontation between the traditional Creole aristocracy (mostly descendants of the original conquistadors-*encomenderos*) and the merchants, traders, and manufacturers that quite often had amassed large fortunes. As early as the last two decades of the XVI century, members of the Creole aristocracy bitterly complained that these *nouveaux riches* were being favored economically and in matrimonial alliances by officers of the viceregal bureaucracy, generally high ranking Spaniards (*Peninsulares*), who usually returned to Spain to continue pursuing their careers there (Gómez de Cervantes 1944: 125-126). But as the landed aristocracy began to engage increasingly in commerce, and merchants and traders acquired social standing through the acquisition of wealth, a plutocracy began to emerge in which no clear socioeconomic distinction separated gentlemen from rich merchants. They became interrelated by economic and social alliances, quite often fostered by the necessity of the former and the ambition of the latter (Durand 1953: 68-70). Economic necessity and social ambition are one of the most common and universal lubricants of upward mobility, especially since the demise of feudal society in Europe, which in this context shows the relative flexibility of Colonial society's upper stratification.

By the end the XVII century, the situation had become quite fluid as considerable numbers of individuals of non-*encomendero* origin had been incorporated into the ruling aristocracy. By the

middle of the XVIII century, the Colonial plutocracy formed a distinct class composed of three social ranks: The titled nobility, the *hacendados* of original *encomendero* extraction, and the businessment-*hacendados* of merchant and trading extraction. Notice that in this we have not taken into consideration the *Peninsulares* of the royal and vice-regal bureaucracy. These were Spaniards born in the mother country, who after their tour of duty, which probably averaged from five to seven years, generally returned to Spain. The policy of the Crown was for these military and administrative personnel to remain as aloof as possible from the social and economic affairs of the colony. Beyond their own political and administrative functions, they were advised to interfere as little as possible in the political affairs of New Spain. While a few Crown officials remained in the colony after their tour of duty, their social and economic influence and importance was never great throughout Colonial times, despite the many matrimonial alliances established with the Creole aristocracy. The social and economic life of the upper classes in New Spain was exclusively based in the colony, and the royal bureaucrats who remained in the colony were quickly assimilated (García Purón 1964: 160-185).

It is in the XVIII century that the first truly great fortunes were amassed in New Spain. The number of millionaires and the size of their holdings surpasses by many times those of plutocrats in other Spanish possessions in the New World. As Ladd (1976: 25) puts it, « Only in Mexico was a rich man literally a millionaire » in the second half of the XVIII century. Although the XVIII century is characterized on the whole by the Spanish Crown's loss of control over the colony, it is also marked by great mining, import-export and internal trading activities. This is especially true of the second half of the century, when personal fortunes reached three million gold pesos, an astronomical sum for the times. Although these fortunes included entailed and non-entailed mining and trade, probably the bulk of the wealth was still from agriculture, cattle raising, and other stock. It is clear, however, that the wealth of New Spain had been diversified to include all kinds of business activities under the rubrics of mining, manufacturing, trading, and banking.

The Marqués de Aguayo, for example, was probably the richest man in New Spain in the middle of the XVIII century. He combined overseas and internal trading and the operation of several mines with the exploitation of many millions of hectares

of land in northern Mexico, dedicated to agriculture and cattle, horse, and sheep raising. Despite the fact that land remained the validating symbol of status, it appears that a diversified economy was the preferred strategy of the rich and powerful (Ladd 1976: 184-187). This was also the case among those which could be classified as members of the aristocracy of the time.

The years between the middle of the XVIII century and 1910, the onset of the wars of independence, is a period of social and economic affluence. New Spain on the eve of independence was by far the most prosperous colony in the overseas Spanish Empire. The plutocracy that had been forming throughout the XVIII century crystallized into an undifferentiated aristocracy, in which the ranks described above no longer had any operational validity, socially or economically. Ladd (1976: 25) describes the situation as follows: « The Mexican plutocracy included old Creole aristocrats who made their money from the domestic economy [basically members of the old *encomendero-hacendado* class], new immigrant merchants who speculated in the export-import trade, and Creole and Spanish miners, who, after enormous expenditures, made fortunes in silver ». The thirteen years of the wars of independence did very little to change the composition of the ruling aristocracy of Mexico, which by then include not only Creoles but many *peninsulares*, a number of whom stayed in Mexico after independence. From the viewpoint of social class formation, the last sixty years of Colonial times represent the last period in Mexican history prior to the Revolution of 1910, in which social and economic factors coalesce to structure a well defined ruling class. For the next hundred years, those recruited into the Mexican aristocracy entered more as the result of specific individual factors than social, economic, and political conditions affecting the upper reaches of the stratification system.

No titles of nobility were granted by the Crown from 1627 until 1681. In the following decade seven titles were granted: Marqués de San Miguel de Aguayo (1682); Conde de Miraflores (1689); Marqués del Villar del Aguila (1689); Conde de Miravalle (1690); Marqués del Valle de la Colina (1690); Marqués de Santa Fé de Guardiola (1691); and Marqués de San Román (1691). By the end of the XVII century there were about a dozen native titled nobles in New Spain. The second issue of titles in the last decade of the century shows that titles of nobility were

awarded to individuals who had not necessarily been administrators or military men, but rather had distinguished themselves in the economic development of the colony. This more liberal definition of the qualifications for aspiring to a noble title reflects the changing economic conditions of the time and, as some authors have maintained (Madariaga 1963: 231), was a subterfuge of the Spanish Crown in order to profit by the mining and trading boom of XVIII century New Spain.

Indeed, it became quite common in the writings of late Colonial and early Republican scholars (Mora 1972; Otero 1972) to maintain that most of the titles granted by the Spanish Crown throughout the XVIII century until independence did not reflect the true principles of Spanish nobility; that they were granted to rich parvenus by outright purchase for the enrichment of the Crown. Whatever the merit of these allegations often voiced by writers who had failed to secure titles for themselves — it makes better sociological sense to say that the estamental component that was quite pronounced in New Spain's social stratification throughout the XVI century had completely disappeared, and that business activities and even manual labor had been upgraded and, at least in theory, presented no impediment for attaining the status of titled noble.

Of the seventy nine titles of nobility granted by the Spanish Crown from 1529 to 1821, more than half (44) were granted in the XVIII century, that is, during the reign of the Bourbon kings. Of these, twenty three were granted during the reign of Charles III (1759-1788), and this coincides with the period when the greatest fortunes were made in Colonial times (Ladd 1976: 17-21). What did the titled nobility of Mexico represent on the eve of Independence? Unquestionably they were the social arbiters of the land and among the richest men in the colony. They cannot be regarded, however, as constituting a separate group from the ruling aristocracy-plutocracy from which most of them were recruited and to which they were interrelated by multiple ties of kinship and ritual kinship. The titled nobility rather embodied the social standing to which most members of the upper stratum of Colonial society aspired but the majority of whom could not achieve. This social class was small (probably no more than thousand five hundred families), tightly knitted, and was to remain basically unchanged until the Mexican Revolution of 1910.

From Independence to the Mexican Revolution: 1824-1910

With independence from Spain fundamentally little changed in the new republic that came into being. Mexico was organized into a federal republic modeled after the United States, but more so in name than in practice. The nearly forty years that elapsed until the French Intervention were marked by the birth of political turmoil, and the decline of the mining industry. In one respect, however, the situation changed rather radically. The libertarian ideas of the French Revolution, and the reaction provoked by the Napoleonic Wars, had raised expectations in the budding middle class. But the ideals of liberty, equality, and fraternity were going to take nearly one hundred years to acquire their true meaning and operational validity beyond the minuscule ruling class and the small middle class, concentrated almost exclusively in the capital and large cities of Mexico. The political vacuum left by the demise of the viceroyalty of New Spain was naturally filled by the economic plutocracy that we described for the last fifty years of the Colonial period. With the decline of mining, the plutocracy became increasingly dominated by the landed aristocracy of the *hacendados*, who, to be sure, continued to engage in business and trading activities and became the first capitalists in Mexico on a large scale. The landed aristocracy dominated the Mexican bourgeoisie in the XIX century through its official organization, the conservative party, despite the brief liberal interludes of the Reforma Laws in 1857 and the French Intervention in 1861-1866 and its aftermath, until the rise of Porfirio Díaz. The liberal party — representing the *petite bourgeoisie* of Mestizo professionals, tradsmen, and small businessmen, as well as foremen, specialized workers, and artisans — was seldom able to effectively challenge the political dominance of the conservative *hacendado* class, which more than ever came to dominate the social, economic, and political life of Mexico, as the *encomendero* class had done during the sixty years after the Conquest. When the liberal party, under the leadership of Benito Juárez, managed to pass the so called Reforma Laws, these did not bring the Indians and landless peasants the results it had hoped to achieve. This episode in Mexican history has direct implications for understanding the development of the landed aristocracy during the fifty years prior to the Mexican Revolution of 1910.

Throughout Colonial times, but especially after the expulsion of the Jesuits from the Spanish overseas possessions in 1767, the Catholic Church had accumulated a great deal of arable and pasture lands. The liberals rightly maintained that it was necessary that these corporately owned lands be released to private ownership for their exploitation. In 1857, it was decreed that all corporately owned lands in the country be sold at public auction. What the liberals unaccountably did not realize was that not only the Church but the majority of Indian communities owned land corporately. As a result, Indian communities lost more than half of their land, leaving their inhabitants no recourse but to hire themselves out as laborers in nearby *haciendas*. In turn, Church and Indian lands were acquired mostly by the large *hacendados*, and their holdings reached incredible proportions. In fact, such an accumulation of arable and pasture lands by the *hacendados* had never taken place on such a large scale, not even in the decades immediately after the Conquest. Forced to leave their communities, Indian populations flocked to the *haciendas*, towns and cities in order to survive. In this process, the *hacendados* were the great beneficiaries, and their control of a large labor force in their immense estates resembled the *corregimientos* of the XVI century. By the beginning of the XX century, the landed aristocracy of Mexico had reached the pinnacle of social, economic, and political control over the country (Bancroft 1914: 543-580).

Despite the political instability that characterized Mexico's first fifty years as an independent country, there was a good deal of economic development. It is during this period that Mexico began to enter, however slowly, the age of industrialization. Trading and some manufacturing flourished, and the textile industry was firmly established. The first railroad began operations between Mexico City and the port of Veracruz shortly after the French Intervention, and Mexico engaged in import-export trade with the United States, England, France and other nations. The captains of these varied commercial, manufacturing, and financial enterprises were a mixed lot of members of the *hacendado* class, new domestic capitalists, and a few foreign capitalists. The landed ideology was still strong, since new capitalist arrivals sought to validate their acquired wealth by the acquisition of land, and upward mobility to the ranks of the landed-business aristocracy was still possible. By the beginning of the XX century, the ruling class of Mexico was a closed group, very jealous of

its privileges, and much less willing than in the past to accept an element of upward mobility. This is one of the main factors that provoked the Mexico Revolution of 1910, by unduly constraining the rising aspirations of the budding middle class, which finally abandoned its halfhearted support of the *status quo* (Nutini 1980: 576-591).

The French Intervention does not represent an important event for the development of the Mexican aristocracy. Rather, it must be interpreted as an abortive attempt to establish a monarchy in which its members were to play an even more exalted social role. It is true that during the Wars of Independence the aristocracy was divided between the royalists and those who wanted total independence from Spain and a republican form of government. It appears that a generation later the aristocracy was fairly united about establishing a monarchy, but it failed for lack of popular support. It is in the aftermath of the French Intervention that the conservative party was to dominate the situation completely during the dictatorship of Porfirio Díaz, who became president of Mexico in 1875 after the death of Benito Juárez. General Díaz had distinguished himself in the resistance against the French and came to power with great expectations. It soon became clear that he made a common cause with the policies of the conservative party, which broadly speaking envisaged the continued control of the landed estates and a steady labor force tied to the *haciendas* by debt peonage, on the one hand, and the industrialization of Mexico and the growth of business, on the other. The avowed policy of the government, which was synonymous with the policies of the conservative party, was to bring Mexico into the status of a modern nation. But this obviously was in serious conflict with the almost total state of servitude that characterized the peons on the *haciendas* and in most of the rural areas. Despite the efforts of the government at modernization and upgrading of the masses, Mexico was a tight oligarchy, in which the rising Mestizo middle class in the cities had not been given an opportunity to achieve economic aspirations and participate in the political process. This is the state of affairs that prevailed in the country when the Díaz regime made extravagant preparations to celebrate the one hundredth anniversary of the beginning of the Wars of Independence (Nutini 1980: 593-599).

The Mexican Revolution: 1910-1940

The Mexican Revolution of 1910 was the first popular revolution of the XX century. The Mestizo middle class abandoned its century old alliance with the traditional ruling class and allied itself with the lower elements of the old order: the peons on the *haciendas* and the Indians in Indian communities. The economic catalyst of this alliance was land reform, that is, the division of the landed estates among the propertyless; the ideological catalyst was "Indianism," or the search for roots in the Indian past. There were actually two movements in this transformation: the purely political movement of the middle-class Mexican pressing for political liberalization of the regime; and the peasant revolt, first in Morelos and the northern states, and then extending to most Mexican states, pressing for land and more economic opportunities. (It should be noted that, except for the brief interludes mentioned above, the liberal party throughout the XIX century was never able to present a united front and effectively challenge the conservative party. The incipient middle class, as Mexico emerged from Colonial times, had grown significantly in importance throughout the XIX century, but explicitly or implicitly it supported the *status quo*. It appears that the Mestizo leadership became actively involved when it realized that only an armed struggle would bring about the achievement of their political aspirations.) At the end of the armed phase of the Revolution in 1919, the new middle class leadership began land reform with the redistribution of the immense estates of the aristocracy. The land reform continued on a small scale until the middle thirties, but it did not become fully enforced until the presidency of Lázaro Cárdenas, who finally abolished all latifundia in Mexico by 1940 (Nutini 1980: 601-605).

The Mexican Revolution was a catastrophic event for the aristocracy, from which it has never recovered. Its political power as the dominant sector of the nation was totally obliterated, and until recently its members have not engaged in national politics in any important capacity. The land reform seriously undermined its economic base, and although some of its members were able to salvage part of their capital to start anew, the majority joined the ranks of the economic upper-middle class. The social prestige and visibility of the aristocracy has diminished significantly, as they have been forced to interact with upwardly mobile elements

in the evolving social order. Moreover, its universal recognition at all levels of Mexican society as the undisputed arbiter in social affairs has disappeared, and only among certain sectors of the new bourgeoisie are its members still halfheartedly recognized for what they once were. But as a self-defined group, the traditional ruling class of Mexico retains a good deal of vigor, and continues to play a role in the social and economic affairs of the nation. During the past seventy years, the aristocracy has undergone drastic changes and has come to occupy a different place in the stratification system.

When a measure of stability was established and the armed struggle ended in 1919, the leadership of the Revolution began the redistribution of land that resulted in the modern *ejido* system. Until 1934, probably one-fourth of the landed estates had been redistributed. (It should be realized that there were great differences in the size of the holdings, ranging from small estates of two or three thousands acres to immense estates of several million acres. For example, the *latifundia* of one family in the state of Coahuila was nearly twenty million acres). Immediately after President Cárdenas came to power, the massive redistribution of land took place, and by the end of his presidency there was practically nothing left (5). What did this mean economically for the landed aristocracy?

Expropriation and redistribution meant that owners were not compensated for the land, were allowed to retain only as much land as the law stipulated (ranging from hundred hectares of irrigated land to three hundred hectares of dry farming land per individual, and one to five hectares of pasture land per head of cattle), and were permitted to keep the manor house of the *hacienda* — often a large, palatial establishment run by dozens of servants — and the always extensive warehouses, silos, and other constructions. In most cases the buildings of the *haciendas* had been occupied by soldiers and peasants during the armed part of the Revolution, had been totally stripped of any valuables, and often had been partially burned down or destroyed. Only recently, the main buildings of some old *haciendas* have been restored and converted into country houses and vacation hotels. Fortunately, some of the best *hacienda* buildings in Mexico were spared, preserving this cultural and historical heritage of the country. The Mexican countryside is dotted with innumerable *cascos* (ruins) of old *haciendas*, whose buildings span four centuries and tell

the history of Mexico from the Spanish conquistadors, such as Hernán Cortés and Pedro de Alvarado, to the peasant revolutionaries, Pancho Villa and Emiliano Zapata.

A little known aspect of the economic effects of the Mexican Revolution on the traditional landed aristocracy is that a number of estates were parcelled out and sold as *pequeña propiedad* (any parcel of land of less than fifty hectares) in the interlude between 1919 and 1934, when due to the exigencies of reorganizing the country, land reform proceeded at a very slow pace. Most *hacendados* expected that the early revolutionary fervor would peter out, and therefore thought that if they held on to the land they would eventually consolidate their holdings. They were totally disappointed, for President Cárdenas redistributed most of the available land in Mexico in six short years. But those who anticipated what was coming and sold out to well-off peasants and small farmers in the towns and villages near their estates were able to salvage a good part of their fortunes and invest elsewhere. There were small landowners in Mexico before the Revolution, to be sure, but we suspect that the majority of *pequeños propietarios* (owners of twenty to hundred hectares of land) in Mexico today, had their beginning in this relatively unknown postrevolutionary episode.

A second aspect that must be taken into consideration in the economic composition of the aristocracy is the commercial, manufacturing, and financial activities that many of its members engaged in at the end of the Diaz regime. It was rare for businessmen not to own land, but many *hacendados* were also businessmen and engaged in varied economic enterprises. Of these, one of the most common was renting, selling, or leasing urban property, in addition to the import-export trade, manufacturing, and internal trade. This is important to keep in mind, since urban property, manufacturing, and ownership, in general, of anything that was not land was untouched by the changes brought about by the Revolution. Business activities were not unduly disturbed after 1919. Thus, the members of the aristocracy who had a more diversified economy were able to survive economic disaster well and, together with the *hacendados* who managed to sell much of their land before it was confiscated by the state, are today the richest aristocrats. The *hacendados* who had nothing but land, and did not have enough vision to sell at least part of it before it was confiscated, were the most affected econom-

ically, and most of their descendants today are to be counted among the new upper-middle class. The land that by law they were able to retain was not productive enough to assure them a decent income, although in some cases even 100 hectares today could be valuable property. A considerable number of aristocrats have managed to rebuild or recondition part of their ancestral *haciendas* and use them as country homes, but there are few farmers among them today. Because of their connections and still uppermost social standing, a number of improverished aristocrats have made new fortunes. But the majority has joined the liberal professions (doctors, lawyers, architects) and managed to sustain a high standard of living.

With the undisputed victory of the middle-class Mestizo leadership in 1919, the aristocrats, and some sectors of the middle-class during the Diaz regime, were *de facto* barred from participating in national and even state politics, although at the local, municipal level these various elements could still have political power. There were never legal impediments against the supporters of the old regime for participation in politics, but the early leadership of the Revolution quite carefully refrained from the temptation of drawing conservative elements into the government, even when they were badly needed in the twenties and early thirties. The only tangential participation in politics of the old aristocratic class was in the diplomatic service, given their social expertise and the crudeness of the Revolutionary leadership. The traumatic shock of the armed phase of the Revolution and its aftermath dissuaded the old conservatives from taking advantage of opportunities to enter politics. This was exacerbated by what they regarded as the highhandedness of President Cárdenas in confiscating and redistributing the landed estates. They came to regard the government and the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI) as a den of thieves, who were as much interested in enriching themselves as in upgrading the working classes, an opinion that was soon shared by the rising middle class. This aversion and often revulsion on the part of aristocrats to becoming involved in politics has only recently been overcome by the younger generation.

After the shock of expropriation, many aristocrats regrouped themselves economically and became exclusively interested in increasing whatever holdings they had managed to salvage, disregarding politics altogether. Political power, they reasoned, was

not necessary to make money. In this they were right, and they shared this attitude with the whole sector of the *nouveaux riches* who have made fortunes during the fifty years after the onset of the Revolution. What has made this possible is that the leadership of the Mexican Revolution apparently never intended to change the structure of the country into a socialist state. Even the old leaders of the Revolution became rich at the expense of the state, and after reaching the pinnacle of political careers, many became businessmen and entrepreneurs independently of politics. The Banco Ejidal (the Land Reform Bank), for example, originally designed to finance the development of private and collective *ejidos*, has been a source of significant wealth to members of the PRI. The same is true of many state-owned and parastate-owned enterprises that have been formed during the past forty years. Old revolutionaries have become capitalists, and their descendants have inherited not only wealth but political power as well. Under such circumstances, it is not surprising that aristocrats and *nouveaux riches* were not impeded from accumulating wealth. Those in political control, as capitalists themselves, became potential allies of the emerging economic elite of Mexico.

Mexico today is a curious combination of capitalism, state capitalism, and social democratic components. How the system works, and how its structural parts are ensembled, is beyond the scope of this outline. But one thing is certain, since the Second World War a new plutocracy has been developing, and it is beginning to coalesce as the dominant economic and political sector of the nation. This new plutocracy, *haute bourgeoisie*, or whatever one may wish to call it, is composed of three main groups: the political heirs of the Mexican Revolution turned capitalists and their descendants; domestic and foreign (mostly Spaniards and some European, American, and Lebanese) capitalists who have made very large fortunes in Mexico during the past fifty years; and the rich members of the aristocracy. Of these groups, the richest are the capitalists, although among the biggest fortunes in Mexico are found among former presidents, while the aristocrats' fortunes are among the smallest. We should emphasize that this is a synoptic picture at the national level, but it is quite likely that at the state and large city levels a similar situation obtains.

Until the Second World War the aristocrats were able to keep to themselves socially and economically in their quest for a

new identity and attempt to pick up the pieces of their society after the armed shock of the Revolution. The old leadership of the Revolution and soon-to-be capitalists were too busy with the reorganization of the country to be preoccupied with validating new status positions, thereby disregarding the aristocrats. Much the same can be said about the forming *nouveaux riches* capitalists, domestic and foreign. Since the Second World War, however, it appears that for the fourth time in the history of Mexico economic and political necessity and social ambition are once again one of the significant mechanisms of upward mobility. The aristocrats have slowly realized that they can no longer afford to remain socially aloof toward other sectors of the *haute bourgeoisie*, and that political power and influence enhance economic position. The parvenu capitalists and politicians not only feel the necessity to validate their new status, but they have felt constrained to emulate the expressive patterns of living of the aristocrats. Politicians and capitalists have interacted socially and economically for several decades, but this has not been the case with aristocrats, who have been willing to interact on an individual basis and mostly within the context of business transactions. During the past decade, however, the traditional resistance of the aristocrats has slowly broken down, and increasing social interaction, especially with the new capitalists, has developed. This applies not only to the very rich aristocrats — who have always been more integrated with the new plutocracy — but also to the upper-middle economic majority boasting the most ancient lineages in Mexico. Matrimonial alliances have taken place among the three sectors of the *haute bourgeoisie*, but have not yet made a difference.

The landed aristocracy of Mexico had always had an urban base in Mexico City and some twenty cities throughout the country (Guadalajara, Puebla, Morelia, Guanajuato, Querétaro, San Luis Potosí, Oaxaca, Mérida, Durango, Zacatecas, and so on), which in Colonial times had been the *encomendero*, *hacendado*, and mining towns *par excellence*. In the city they had imposing residences, many of them of palatial proportions, where they entertained and probably spent most of the year. But they also resided for part of the year in their *haciendas*. The *haciendas* often boasted elaborate, frequently immense, residential quarters, where the family and friends usually spend the summer months and harvest time. With the onset of the Revolution, the *haciendas* were mostly abandoned, as the *campesino* uprisings and the coming and going

of Revolutionary armies made it impossible to run them and unsafe to inhabit them. In the early twenties, when a measure of control was established by the central government, some *haciendas* resumed operations and were once again inhabited by their owners. But the trend of the *hacendados* was toward the city as a permanent residence. By the time President Cárdenas began the massive expropriation of land, the *hacendados* lost hope that they would ever recuperate even part of their land, and from then on they became exclusively urban-based.

Some aristocrats had to flee the country for political reasons, and many left voluntarily not wanting to associate with the new regime in any way. Most of them came back by the late thirties to pick up the threads of their past. From the provincial cities they flocked to the capital, and by the late forties there were hardly any aristocratic families in the traditional *hacendado* cities. Today probably only Guadalajara has a significant nucleus of them. The network of aristocratic ties had always been extensive, and in Mexico City the provincial arrivals found a larger, more congenial environment than in the rapidly changing cities that they had once totally controlled. In the capital, the aristocratic sector presented a fairly united front against the hostile world that they saw developing all around them. It was thus easier, and individually more rewarding, to validate their status in an evolving world that was no longer unquestioningly willing to recognize them. For many it was simply a matter of economic survival, and among them are to be counted those who joined the liberal professions. Becoming a doctor, lawyer, or engineer was nothing new to the aristocrats throughout the XIX century. But, whereas it was then done as a hobby or for strictly scientific or intellectual interests, it was now done in order to survive.

Despite the fact that since 1919 the Mexican aristocracy has been increasingly forced to interact with a number of disparate elements involving new wealth, foreigners, and the middle-class political leadership with upwardly mobile aspirations, it has retained a surprising degree of integration as a social group. At this point we can only guess why after a popular revolution the Mexican aristocracy has remained a viable social group. The answers that we expect to provide strike at the core of the Mexican stratification system, whose principles, in a different context, to be sure, have been operating for nearly four centuries. In any event, until well into the presidency of Lázaro Cárdenas, the apparently

invigorated aristocracy in the capital held sway in the brilliant social life of Mexico City. It is during the war years and the following decade that the new entries into the formative *haute bourgeoisie* began to encroach upon the social leadership of the aristocracy, its last supremely elite attribute. The wealth and power of the non-aristocratic sectors of the *haute bourgeoisie* have been growing rapidly during the past twenty years, and it is now beginning to crystallize. In this new social setting, the traditional aristocracy of Mexico is bound to disappear within the present generation as an independently recognized sector of the *haute bourgeoisie*.

Finally, it is not just lineage and tradition, the influence of genteel and expressive behavior, and the desirability that these attributes have for the upwardly mobile bourgeoisie, but knowledge of its intellectual achievements that has served the Mexican aristocracy well in the struggle to survive the shock of the Mexican Revolution. Throughout the XIX century, the traditional elite of Mexico produced a brilliant group of intellectuals, historians, and anthropologists who created a scholarly milieu of high excellence, which the Mexican Revolution brought to an end. Recognition of this achievement, together with the ostensible reminder of the myriad palaces, mansions, and *haciendas* that they left throughout the country, has been significantly instrumental in their quest for survival. Ironically, the demise of the aristocracy was not brought about by the millions of exploited peons and Indians but by their leaders and their descendants, with whom the aristocracy has been in competition for several decades.

Conclusions

In conclusion, let us summarize what we have described for the 450 years since the Conquest, and delineate more formally the main stages of development that have shaped and characterized the ruling class of Mexico. Four fairly well drawn stages emerge and they are marked by the Spanish Conquest (1519), the *de facto* demise of the *encomienda* system in most of Mexico (circa 1650), Independence from Spain (1823), and the Mexican Revolution of 1910.

With the Conquest and the establishment of the *encomienda* (land given in trust to a Spaniard with a corresponding number

of Indian laborers) and *repartimiento* (periodic allotment of Indian laborers) systems, the *encomenderos* became the undisputed ruling class in New Spain by virtue of their economic and to some extent political control of large masses of Indian populations. This XVI century method of control has often been regarded as a feudal system, but this is not accurate. *De jure*, the Spanish Crown was not about to tolerate the birth of a new feudal system, when it had so recently struggled to end it in Spain under Ferdinand and Isabella. Indeed, a cardinal principle of Spanish policy for its overseas empire was to wrest as much power from Creole populations as possible without endangering the safety of the colonies. What *de facto* gives the appearance of a feudal system to the *encomenderos'* control of the Indians is the economic exploitation and social abuses to which the Indians were subjected, far from the seat of power, and often with the connivance of viceregal authorities (Moses 1974).

But if the Creole *encomenderos* were not feudal lords, they most certainly constituted the dominant "estament" in the society of New Spain throughout the XVI century. The Spanish merchants, traders, and craftsmen that increasingly settled in the cities of New Spain constituted a kind of urban bourgeoisie, often in conflict with the *encomenderos*, and apparently with some support from the viceregal authorities. It is our claim that the social stratification of New Spain throughout the second half of the XVI century was not one of classes but an almost estamental organization including four main sectors: the aristocratic *encomenderos*, the urban bourgeoisie, the Mestizos and Mulatos, and the Indians. Notice that we are not using the terms "feudal" and "estament" as structural correlates, and moreover, we are using the latter in a less permeable and mobile sense than in the context of "class" (Palerm 1972).

This fairly rigid system began to break down at the beginning of the XVII century, and by the time the *encomienda* system had given way to the *hacienda* system fifty years later, it was in complete disarray (Zavala 1948). The Indian population certainly retained its status as an estament, almost a caste, but not the Mestizo and *castas* (mix-bloods), which became hardly distinguishable from the lower sectors of the urban bourgeoisie. On the other hand, there was a significant rapprochement between the upper sector of the urban bourgeoisie (the rich merchants and traders) and the aristocratic *encomenderos*. By the beginning of the XVIII cen-

tury, non-Indian society of New Spain was essentially class stratified: A motley upper-class composed of the *hacendado-encomendero* sector and *nouveaux riches* merchants, traders, and manufacturers; urban middle class composed of small merchants, traders, and some specialized craftsmen; and a mixed lower class of salaried workers of essentially Mestizo and *casta* extraction in the urban and rural areas (Palerm 1972). The opposition and occasional antagonism between the country and the city — that is, the conflict of interests between the *encomenderos* and the urban bourgeoisie that prevailed in the XVI century — markedly diminished, as the former became increasingly engaged in business, and the latter acquired land and were accepted as social equals. The small titled nobility was undoubtedly the leading segment of the upper class, but no significant distinction any longer obtained between the aristocratic *encomenderos* and the powerful *nouveaux riches* (Ladd 1976).

During the last two thirds of the XVIII century and until Independence, the upper reaches of the class structure of Mexico were characterized by the rise and predominance of a Creole plutocracy of non-*hacendado* origin which, if it did not overshadow the old titled aristocracy, interacted with it on the same footing. Indeed, this is corroborated by the fact that the majority of titles of nobility throughout this period were granted to plutocrats who had made great fortunes in mining, manufacturing, and trade. The distinction between Creole and *Peninsular* (Spaniard born in Spain) has been vastly overemphasized in the literature of the Colonial period, especially by Mexican writers (Mendizábal 1972: 11-15). It is pointed out that *Peninsulares* ranked higher than Creoles, but it is not made clear what this means in terms of the social stratification of Colonial times. It is difficult to determine whether *Peninsulares* were Crown officials who returned to Spain after their tour of duty in the colony, or were Spanish born who for a number of reasons migrated to New Spain and included the few viceregal officials who declared their intention to stay in the colony (Durand 1953).

In the case of Crown officials, it is true that at least the viceroy, the royal justices (*oidores*), high-ranking military officers, and perhaps other high-ranking bureaucrats, were the dominant force politically and ceremonially. It is not the case that they ranked socially higher than the Creole aristocracy. The fact that the *Peninsulares* monopolized the viceregal bureaucracy does not

mean that the Creole landed, mining, and trading elites were in any important way subservient to them. Indeed, matrimonial alliances between *Peninsulares* and Creoles were frequent, especially between sons of the former and daughters of the latter. The few viceregal bureaucrats who stayed did so on the basis of usually solid social and economic ties to the Creole aristocracy, whereas the immigrants from Spain, almost invariably small tradesmen and artisans, obviously started at the bottom of the Spanish Creole ladder. In any event, the status of *Peninsular* in New Spain was rather short lived, and *Peninsulares* as such never constituted a significant segment in the social stratification of the colony. Thus, the category of *Peninsular* is not structurally discriminating in the social stratification of Colonial times. It is difficult to generalize about three hundred years of colonial domination, but one thing is certain: the social stratification processes that went on in New Spain were essentially a local phenomenon, only tangentially affected by the Spanish born, and basically independent of the mother country (Gómez de Cervantes 1944; García Purón 1964).

During the Wars of Independence the ruling class of Mexico — including the titled nobility, the *hacendados*, and the new plutocracy in general — was divided in its loyalties, although it appears that the majority opted for independence. Many of the royalists lost impressive fortunes, but whether the independist-royalist split had any repercussion in the restructuring of the upper-reaches of social stratification following independence is not clear. What is clear is that the ideas of the French Revolution made something of a dent by liberalizing and restructuring the middle stratum of urban society (Ladd 1976). From Independence to the French Intervention, probably for the first time the Mexican middle class became socially and politically conscious. This cannot be said for the upper classes, in which the aristocratic plutocracy of *hacendados* and businessmen was well entrenched, and the kind of group and individual mobility which had characterized the last hundred years of Colonial rule became greatly curtailed. This trend reached its peak during the Díaz regime. By the onset of the XX century, the landed and business aristocracy, by now a *mélange* of elements of disparate origins and antiquity, were in tight control of the economic and political life of the nation, occupied an exalted social position, and had never been as rigid and all-controlling since the beginning of

the XVII century. The recurrent principle of elite renewal that had been the hallmark of middle to upper class stratification since the last years of the XVI century had enabled the ruling class of Mexico to weather many a crisis in three hundred years (Bancroft 1914; Nutini 1980).

The Mexican Revolution of 1910 transformed the Porfirian aristocracy into one of the three segments of the new plutocracy that arose out of this originally popular transformation. Its survival during the difficult years after 1919 is due partially to the momentum of the sheer economic and political power that it had held for four centuries, and partly to the expressive vacuum created by the Revolution that only its members could fill. Needless to say that the Mexican Revolution was not a socialist upheaval in the Marxist mold. Had it been so, the Mexican counterparts of the Yussupovs and Oblonskys would now be living in genteel dignity, dire poverty, or driving taxis in New York or Paris, since at that time the secret Swiss bank account had not yet been invented. It is doubtful that the leadership of the Mexican Revolution ever had the idea of totally transforming the society while it was still possible fifty years ago. Beyond the expropriation of the land and the natural process of democratization that the Revolution brought to the middle and lower classes, it left a rather wide margin for the upper class to maintain its social prestige, regroup itself as a viable entity, and even salvage a considerable part of its wealth. Paradoxically as it may seem, with the exception of local Indian communities, the aristocracy today is probably the best self-delineated, collectively conscious sector, class, or whatever one may want to call this segment of Mexican social stratification (Nutini, Roberts, and Cervantes n.d.).

Lest we be misunderstood, it must be emphasized that not all members of the Porfirian aristocracy have survived or thrived economically. There has been a significant degree of downward mobility, and old *hacendado* families are now members of whatever can be defined in Mexico as upper-middle class. We grant that by the usual measurement standards of the American sociological tradition, perhaps 70% of the aristocracy belongs to the economic upper-middle class. What we mean by people who have moved down to an upper-middle or middle class status is that they have lost their aristocratic self-identification by isolation, abrogation of traditional ties, matrimonial alliances with the economic middle class, and discontinuity of manners and behavior

that once characterized them as members of the elite.

In this context, there are striking similarities between the process of social leveling that took place after the Mexican Revolution and what occurred among the Indian nobility after the Spanish Conquest. The rulers and Indian nobles at the local level rather quickly reverted to commoner status, while those in the cities and centers of power were able to survive longer and sometimes, perpetuate their lineage by matrimonial alliances among themselves and with the Spaniards. Isolation and lack of group action at the local level were the main reasons for downward mobility (Nutini 1963). In the case of the old Porfirian aristocracy, it was its concentration in Mexico City that greatly enhanced its survival; whereas the great majority of people who stayed in provincial cities lost contact with their peers, were forced to interact socially and economically with the local middle class, and can no longer be counted among the aristocratic group. The concept of *familias venidas a menos* is often used by members of the aristocracy to refer to families — mostly in the provinces, but occasionally in Mexico — to whom membership in the group is no longer accorded by virtue of intermarriage with members of the middle class, but fundamentally because their expressive behavior is no longer aristocratic.

Intermarriage with members of the other sectors of the Mexican *haute bourgeoisie*, on the other hand, presents an altogether different problem than loss of membership in the aristocratic sector. The lubrication of money or political power is the catalyst in these mixed marriages, and since the non-aristocratic partners — and by extension their immediate families — are incorporated into the group, there is no loss of expressive behavior and manners, so dear to the socially preeminent sector of the plutocracy.

In summary, are we substantively and theoretically sound in regarding what we have termed the Mexican aristocracy as a meaningful social class or sector of the *haute bourgeoisie*? We think we are, and it is one of the principal aims of the ongoing research to demonstrate it. Moreover, it is our contention that we cannot properly conceptualize the new realignment of the upper and uppermiddle classes now going on in Mexico, unless the aristocratic sector is distinguished clearly from the other two sectors of the *haute bourgeoisie*. We have argued that no other class in Mexico is as conscious of itself and as well delineated

behaviorally as the Mexican aristocracy. Indeed, to the highest degree, and despite their lack of political power and only medium wealth, the Mexican aristocracy constitutes a psychosocial group: rather than defining their conduct in terms of membership in a class, it is their behavior that defines such membership.

Notes

1. This paper is based on a year's reading of published sources directly or indirectly related to the aristocracy and four months of data collection (September, October, November, and December of 1979) on the *haute bourgeoisie* in Mexico City. We gratefully acknowledge that the data collection was done under the sponsorship of a grant (#RO-00129-80-0122) from the National Endowment for the Humanities.

2. In the paper mentioned above (Nutini, Roberts, and Cervantes n.d.), we discuss primarily who constitutes the Mexican aristocracy today, how and why have they survived the social, economic, and political changes brought about by Revolution of 1910, and what is their position within the context of the new social stratification of Mexico.

3. It should be pointed out, however, that according to the classic Marxist position, it would be useless to study the Mexican aristocracy, for it is nothing more than a decadent segment of the exploiting bourgeoisie. By simplifying social phenomena, and to a large extent reducing the analysis of social stratification to the macro-confrontation of two classes, modern Marxists allow the pursuit of ideological goals to overshadow the sound structural aspects of Marxism.

4. For example, at the end of the XVI century, the descendants of Leonel Gómez de Cervantes — the father or grandfather of Gonzalo Gómez de Cervantes (1944), the author quoted above — were one of the richest and most distinguished families in the colony. Two centuries later, the Cervantes family was still rich and probably the most distinguished family in the land: its members held four — (3), (4), (5), and (6) — of the seven original titles granted in New Spain.

5. Mexican cynics maintain that after the presidency of Lázaro Cárdenas the land has been redistributed several times. This is an exaggeration, of course, but since then individuals in many areas of the country have accumulated land far in excess of what the law dictates.

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Summary

The purpose of this article is to present some preliminary results on a long-term research project that we expect to complete in seven or eight years. The project is concerned with the structure, ideology, and historical development of the Mexican *haute bourgeoisie*, centered on the aristocracy.

In this historical account we discuss the main principles of bourgeois stratification and aristocratic attainment in more than four cen-

turies since the Spanish Conquest, a necessary condition in order to understand the contemporary formation of the *haute bourgeoisie*. For the Conquest and Early Colonial Period (1519-1650) we discuss the socioeconomic conditions that were instrumental in the preeminence of the *encomenderos*, within the context of an almost estamental situation. For the Mature and Late Colonial Period (1650-1824) we show the social mobility that structures the upper sectors of Colonial society along class lines. For the period between Independence from Spain and the Mexican Revolution (1824-1910) we demonstrate the continuation of the pre-republican system and the dominance of the *hacendado* class in the social and economic life of the nation. Finally, from the onset of the Mexican Revolution to the contemporary period (1910-1940) we record the demise of the landed aristocracy as the ruling class of Mexico. In this account of the formation and historical development of the Mexican aristocracy we have tried to interrelate the phenomenon to the class formation of Mexico and to the social, economic, political, and religious factors that accompanied it.

Sommario

L'obiettivo di questo articolo è la presentazione dei risultati preliminari di una ricerca a lungo termine che pensiamo di completare nel termine di sette od otto anni. Il progetto si interessa della struttura, dell'ideologia e dello sviluppo storico dell'"alta borghesia" messicana, con particolare riferimento alla sua componente aristocratica.

In questa nostra descrizione storica discuteremo le cause della stratificazione borghese e delle conquiste aristocratiche negli oltre quattro secoli trascorsi dalla conquista spagnola, al fine di poter comprendere l'attuale conformazione dell'alta borghesia. Per il momento della conquista e per il primo periodo coloniale (1519-1650), analizzeremo le condizioni socioeconomiche che determinarono la preminenza degli *encomenderos* all'interno di una società divisa in "stati". Per il medio e tardo periodo coloniale (1650-1824) mostreremo come la mobilità tenderà a far disporre i più elevati settori della società coloniale lungo linee di classe; mentre per il periodo compreso tra l'indipendenza e la rivoluzione messicana (1824-1910) si avrà praticamente un proseguimento del sistema pre-repubblicano e la dominanza della classe degli *hacendados* nella vita economica e sociale della nazione. Infine, per il periodo che va dalla rivoluzione all'epoca attuale (1910-1940) registreremo la fine dell'aristocrazia terriera quale classe dominante in Messico. In questo nostro lavoro abbiamo in conclusione tentato di correlare la formazione e lo sviluppo storico dell'aristocrazia messicana con la dinamica della formazione delle classi in Messico e ai fattori sociali, politici, economici e religiosi che l'hanno accompagnata.