

A Performative Army:
The Military and Imaginings of Nation in Porfirian Mexico, 1876-1910.

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Abstract:

The modern idea of *mexicanidad*, or “Mexican-ness”, was the product of the era known as the Porfiriato (1876-1910). After nearly a century of turmoil, insurrections, and foreign invasions, the relative peace of President Porfirio Díaz’ lengthy reign saw concerted efforts by the Mexican elite to shape a modern nation that suited their views of Mexico and its place in the world. The military played a central role in representing a particular set of images and ideals that were intended to become the foundation for the nation.

The Mexican regime created a performative army that could emulate European and American modernity, demonstrating and parading itself as proof and pedagogue of modern Mexican nationalism. As a public spectacle it acted out a sense of what the nation should or could be, constructing an identity through its interaction with the gaze of the nation’s subjects and that of privileged foreign viewers. The military’s primary purpose became the performance of cosmopolitan and nationalist ideals for the gaze of various audiences.

This nationalist “imaging” of the nation and *mexicanidad* was a much-contested terrain, a battleground for ideas and ideals between Mexicans and also a performance that was closely watched by foreign observers including journalists, emissaries, tourists, and military experts. These “outside” observers were far from a passive audience; they broadly reinterpreted the images into their own framework of stereotypes, racial beliefs, and class assumptions before re-presenting them to the wider world. This paper examines how the Porfirian elite (political and military) formulated a particular range of national images and imaginaries for the performative military to enact, and how foreign observers, especially via American periodicals, experienced these performances. In the fissures between these two imagined spaces, we may find a more complex and nuanced understanding of culture and the formation of national identity in late nineteenth century Mexico.

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Introduction

The modern idea of *mexicanidad*, or “Mexican-ness”, was the product of the era known as the Porfiriato (1876-1910). After nearly a century of turmoil, insurrections, and foreign invasions, the relative peace of President Porfirio Díaz’ lengthy reign saw concerted efforts by the Mexican elite to shape a modern nation that suited their views of Mexico and its place in the world. Establishing an imagination of Mexico that could connect a heterogeneous population to an elite vision required struggle. The negotiation of ideas and images and silencing tactics that, given time, might fashion a Mexican nation more or less in the intended shape, required that the Porfirian elite both articulate, and visually present, their ideas of *mexicanidad*. The imaginings they expressed established parameters of a public sphere for national discourses and identities, defining nation, citizen, and culture within Mexico in ways that eventually seemed natural and inevitable. Mexican identities, both social (race, class, and gender) and political (citizenship), were subject to attempts by the Porfirian elite to refashion and control them through use of the military as both an enforcer and, especially, as the embodiment of meaningful assumptions. The army, as a contact zone for nationalist images, was a vital intermediary between an elite presentation of *mexicanidad* and audiences of citizens, subjects, and foreigners.

The Mexican regime created a performative army that could emulate European and American modernity, demonstrating and parading itself as proof and pedagogue of modern Mexican nationalism. As a public spectacle it acted out a sense of what the nation should or could be, constructing an identity through its interaction with the gaze of the nation’s subjects and that of privileged foreign viewers.¹ The Porfirian military, clothed in all the symbolic trappings of nationalism, enacted political rituals and silenced alternate views of the nation. Far from merely defending the country, its primary purpose became the performance of cosmopolitan and nationalist ideals for the gaze of various audiences.

¹ For the public spectacle as locus of nationalism see especially Diane Taylor, *Disappearing Acts: Spectacles of Gender and Nationalism in Argentina’s Dirty War* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), and also Claudio Lomnitz, *Deep Mexico, Silent Mexico: An Anthropology of Nationalism*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), p.130 where he describes the contact zones of national identity.

Gaining membership into the “modern” world and acceptance into a European vision of modernity required that nations could present (and justify) themselves in specific ways.² As Tenorio-Trillo has argued in the context of Mexico’s participation in the World’s Fairs, the Porfirian elite conjured a national “imaging” (use of symbols, icons, and spectacles) that represented their “imagined” nation, displaying a “form, façade, and style” both uniquely and exotically Mexican, yet also cosmopolitan and modern.³ This nationalist “imaging” of the nation and *mexicanidad* was a much-contested terrain, a battleground for ideas and ideals between Mexicans and also a performance that was closely watched by foreign observers including journalists, emissaries, tourists, and military experts. These “outside” observers were far from a passive audience; they broadly reinterpreted the images into their own framework of stereotypes, racial beliefs, and class assumptions before re-presenting them to the wider world.⁴ This paper examines how the Porfirian elite (political and military) formulated a particular range of national images and imaginaries for the performative military to enact, and how foreign observers, especially via American periodicals, experienced these performances. In the fissures between these two imagined spaces, we may find a more complex and nuanced understanding of culture and the formation of national identity in late nineteenth century Mexico. In relation to existing research, this paper seeks to increase understandings of the Porfiriato as the crucial era in the formation of the modern Mexican nation, and does so by examining the modernizing military, an institution absent from the historiography, within frameworks provided by cultural histories.⁵

The military had a significant and unusual part to play in the Porfirian nation. One of the many ways in which Mexico has differed from Latin America more generally is that its process of nation formation has not entailed overt military rule in the 20th century. In contrast to states such as Brazil, Argentina, or Chile, Mexican political elites since the late nineteenth

² The definition of “modernity” that I use is drawn from Rita Felski, *The Gender of Modernity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995) p.9, that 1) modernity is inclusive, saturating modern life and forming historical consciousness, 2) It is a polysemic, indeterminate, and ambivalent manifestation of a cultural consciousness. To this definition, I would add that modernity comprises both discourse and practices, and forms or invents both the notions of the modern and the traditional at the same time and in a specific context.

³ Mauricio Tenorio Trillo, *Mexico at the World’s Fairs: Crafting a Modern Nation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), pp.1, 2.

⁴ Lomnitz, pp.135, 142.

⁵ For the cultural historiography of Porfirian Mexico see especially, William French, “Imagining and the Cultural History of Nineteenth-Century Mexico”, *Hispanic American Historical Review*, (Vol. 79:2, 1999, p.249-267).

century have not permitted the military to take on a role as self-regulating guardian of national virtue or purity, and from this “moral” position remove civil leadership from power.⁶ This suggests that the role of the military in the project of Mexican modernity needs to be understood differently from its role in the history of other nations in the region. The Porfirian regime’s modernist project of creating order (and hence progress) depended on the use of the military as a performing showpiece of its ideals, but for political reasons the military was kept relatively weak and ineffectual. In keeping with the projection of a modern image of Mexico, President Díaz’ regime very publicly reformed the military and presented it as part of the new, modern Mexico. Contrary to appearances, in Porfirian Mexico the attempts to rehabilitate the feeble military and its shabby image were sometimes feigned, sometimes pragmatic, and occasionally purely symbolic. At the heart of the attempts were Díaz and the Mexican elite who supported the performance, and manipulated the images presented, in keeping with their imagining of the Mexican nation. The military was displayed, along with railways and *rurales*, as a fetish object that exemplified the Porfirian agenda of order and progress in the nation.⁷ The regime directed the military (and other aspects of public life) on a trajectory of modern nationalism, and reformation of public spaces and contact zones in Porfirian Mexico dictated a relatively limited role that the military was expected to fulfill within the nation.

In some ways, the military was presented as a feature to “sell” Mexico as a stable place for foreign investment. Although certainly the case, this conceptualization is too simple and overlooks the central role the military played in the “imagining” of the nation. The peculiar culture that is embodied in military practices, warrior ethos, and modern militaries in general, provided an arena in Porfirian Mexico where tradition, European influences, modern positivism, indigenous identity, and religion were all contested. The military was a laboratory for various attempts at social engineering, moral ordering, and imagining *mexicanidad*. This imagining, the regime hoped, could be taught and demonstrated by the modern military.⁸ The Porfirian military institution underwent significant changes in technology, organization, and

⁶ Alicia Hernández Chávez, “Origen y Ocaso del Ejército Porfiriano”, (*Historia Mexicana*, Vol.39:1, 1989), p. 258, although it was never an easy task to control the Mexican military, especially in the aftermath of the Revolution, at which time it was also necessary to rejuvenate the military’s reputation and prestige. See Juan Manuel Torres, *Las Virtudes del Guerrero Mexicano: Entre el Pasado y Entre Los Muertos*, (Mexico: Compañía Editora Latino Americana, 1924). Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.

⁷ Lomnitz, p.73.

education, all of which ultimately made it better at performing modern spectacles, if not necessarily improving its efficient performance of organized violence and warfare.

The Military and the Mexican Elite

The Mexican army and its institutions were essential arenas where national conceptions of modernity were created, contested, interiorized, and “projected” to society. The new classes of military officers, and eventually the troops, were intended to personify the patriarchal, masculine, and modern Mexican nation. As in Europe, nationalism and militarism were also inseparable in Mexico.⁹ The priority given to this performance caused the military to decline dramatically in its actual fighting ability throughout the Porfiriato. In Porfirian Mexico, the military actually consisted of numerous elements: the federal army and reservists, the National Guard, informal militias, and police (gendarme) or paramilitaries (in the sense of specialized government forces).¹⁰ It is the *Rurales* (rural paramilitary) rather than the federal armies that historians have often highlighted as the showcase of the regime, and thus early modern Mexico. Nevertheless, the stigma of the rather loose boundaries between *Rurale* and bandit, the specifically Mexican (and rural) context of the *Rurale*, and their relatively small numbers, all argue for a different performative role than that posited for the federal military in this paper.¹¹ While the *Rurales* certainly represented order and reinforced unique Mexican identities, they were but part of a larger project, an opening act for the much larger show where the federal armies presented Díaz’ vision. Throughout this paper, the military referred to will be primarily the federal army because of its close links to the Porfirian regime, its formal continuity, its political significance, and its conspicuous absence in the historiography of Mexico.

The Porfirian envisioning of Mexico and its armies came not only from Porfirio Díaz but also from his coterie of advisors (called the *científicos*), whose ranks included powerful

⁸ Peter M. Beattie, *The Tribute of Blood: Army, Honor, Race, and Nation in Brazil, 1864-1945*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), p.11 argues that, internationally, in the late 1880s militaries gained ground as the “quasi-mystical” embodiment of the nation.

⁹ George Mosse, *The Image of Man: the Creation of Modern Masculinity*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp.3, 4.

¹⁰ Hernández Chávez, p.258

¹¹ Paul Vanderwood, *Disorder and Progress: Bandits Police and Mexican Development*, (Wilmington: Scholarly Resources, 1992), stresses the loose distinctions of bandit/ *Rurale*, and Hernández Chávez, p.263 claims that the *Rurales*’ value has been exaggerated given their low numbers, because of their exceptional nature.

politicians such as Justo Sierro and José Yves Limantour.¹² The *científicos* (and Díaz) had been greatly influenced by the discourse of Positivism, especially the works of August Comte and Herbert Spencer, but also those of positivist Mexican intellectuals, including men such as Gabino Barreda and Porfirio Parra.¹³ The Positivist discourse had a great impact on how modern Mexico was imagined, and thus how (and what) the military was to perform.

Positivists emphasized structure and order as the absolute foundation of progress. The *científico* influence in government persistently called for more construction and science, and *científicos* pointed to the enormous increase in railway mileage, telegraph lines, roads, and the generally improved societal infrastructure, as proof of Mexico's progress that they articulated in the statistical languages of the scientific "turn". Science, they felt, would also enable Mexico to overcome the 'burden' of a large and uneducated indigenous population. They envisioned a trajectory of modernization that emphasized the material progress of the nation, but at the same time, they worked toward cultural ideals of modernity.

Complementing science, the demands of a modern nationalism required that a nation have a unique identity, a stipulation that led to molding a "heritage" of *mexicanidad* from the raw materials of history. Through revision of history and production of official icons, the elite could produce an invented sense of the "traditional" nation rooted in indigenous identities, but controlled and further described by apparently "modern" frameworks such as scientific discourses on race, climate, or diet. Modernity, they hoped, would create a Mexico that culturally resembled Europe or America, and something of this is seen in how the elite in Mexico City promoted European fashion and theatre. Particularly at this nascent stage, the modernity that they sought was something that needed to be made painfully conspicuous to both Mexicans and foreign observers. Even if the optimal world represented was harshly dissonant from reality, the elite rather arrogantly assumed that their envisioned Mexico would inevitably become the objective for all Mexicans. Ironically, even criticism of this vision provided a discourse where modernist tenets would be reinforced and broadly inculcated, even though the elite's methods or claims of success might be bitterly contested.¹⁴

¹² The *Científicos*, and their self-image, were also an essential part of the state theatrics of modernity, see Lomnitz, p.210.

¹³ Carlos Gil, *The Age of Porfirio Díaz: Selected Readings*, (New Mexico: University Of New Mexico Press, 1976) p.31-56, and see Charles Hale, *The Transformation of Liberalism in Late Nineteenth Century Mexico*, (Princeton: 1989).

¹⁴ Tenorio Trillo, p.159, and in Lomnitz, p.210.

While the *científicos* represented the most influential faction of the Porfirian elite, they were neither unified nor uncontested. Some of the strongest opposition to the *científicos* came from a man who was equally committed to modernity and progress, General Bernardo Reyes.¹⁵ The *científicos*, and especially Limantour, perceived Reyes to be a threat to their standing with Díaz. Reyes enjoyed significant support from the military and was therefore viewed as a militarist while vocal support from his native state of Nuevo León branded him as a *cacique*, or regional warlord. As governor and military commander of Nuevo León Reyes brought the authority of the central government fully into place along a troublesome frontier with America. Instilling order required harsh measures, Reyes was not shy of using *Ley Fuga* (execution of “escaping” prisoners), conscripting criminals into the army by force, and was even thought to have ordered assassinations of his political enemies, such as Dr. Ignacio Martínez in 1891.¹⁶ An especially important accomplishment of Reyes’ was engineering the federal army’s defeat of Catarino E. Garza, a wealthy revolutionary of Mexican parentage whose raids from Texas into Mexico (1891-1893) created great instability and tension along the frontier. The status of Reyes and the federal army was much enhanced by his success, especially in contrast to the less fortunate Colonel Nieves Hernandez who, in 1892, had been sentenced to die by a court martial for his failure to suppress Garza.¹⁷ Díaz went to some lengths to install Reyes as his Minister of War in 1900, and many speculated that Reyes might be chosen to succeed to the presidency. Reyes’ role as a skilled general was important to the survival of the regime but his greatest contributions to Mexican modernity were in his reforms to the military from 1900-1902.¹⁸ Others within elite circles were also highly critical of the *científicos*, including the prolific ‘*enfant terrible*’ critic Francisco Bulnes, and military sociologist Brigadier General Eduardo Paz. Paz even went so far as to equate scientific reasoning with treason, and was far from alone in seeing modernization as an unrealistic, premature, and overly foreign conception for the Mexican nation in the early years of the 20th century.¹⁹

¹⁵ Anthony Bryan, Mexican Politics in Transition, 1900-1913: The Role of General Bernardo Reyes, (PhD dissertation, University of Nebraska, 1970).

¹⁶ Bryan, p.34-36.

¹⁷ Manuel Romero Rubio, “The Garza Raid and Its Lessons”, The North American Review, (Vol. 155: 430, Sept.1892), p.328, it should be noted that Romero was hardly disinterested, being plenipotentiary to the US and responsible for officially discrediting Garza.

¹⁸ Bryan, p.69-72.

¹⁹ Eduardo Paz, A Dónde Debemos Llegar: Estudio Sociológico Militar, (México: Tipografía Mercantil, 1910), p.6., and for examples see Tenorio Trillo, pp. 159-178, that surveys widespread Mexican opinions that modernizing was at best an ambivalent accomplishment and a poorly managed affair.

Among these various elite politicians, writers, and military officers that comprised the Díaz regime, there were vigorous and ongoing debates regarding the military. These debates reveal a great deal regarding the role envisioned for the army within “modern” Mexico, what it meant to be a soldier, an officer, and a man in the nation, and about the broader image of the Mexican military and nation meant for the foreign gaze. It should be noted that the line between the military and the elite was never clearly or sharply drawn; the vast majority of those in political office were former military men, and there were very few in higher military ranks who did not owe their position directly to Díaz. Nevertheless, factions within government meant that the negotiation of issues between political and military elites could be very bitter.

In literature, periodicals, legislature, and enacted policies, the Porfirian regime negotiated three critical issues: recruitment practices, education, and foreign versus “traditional” doctrines. Modernizing the image and function of the military required dealing with these larger debates, all of which were also reflections of differing imaginings of the military in “modern” Mexico. In the influential 1910 book by Eduardo Paz, he articulates no fewer than eight separate systems of recruitment or universal service that had been suggested or enacted during the Porfiriato.²⁰ Paz was clearly in the anti-científico faction of government and felt that superficial scientific knowledge of humanity was not only useless but also dangerous, particularly in determining policy. For Paz, the question of how to build a modern military was inseparable from that of how to build a modern nation, and for both projects, the key to success was educating citizens about their national duties. He contended, “Mexico has never had until today its own military institution in relation to [Mexico’s] interests and necessities”²¹ but that there remained the need for “a truly national army made up of all social classes...[and we must not] insist that they assimilate to the ideas, systems, and doctrines of other peoples, so different from us.”²²

One of the greatest problems the Porfirian military faced was that of recruitment. Simply put, there were not enough men joining voluntarily to maintain even the modest army

²⁰ Paz, p.85.

²¹ Paz, p.7, “México no ha tenido hasta hoy institución militar propia en relación á sus intereses y necesidades”

²² Paz, p.9, “un verdadero ejército nacional constituido de todas clases sociales...insistamos en asimilarnos ideas, sistemas, ó doctrinas de otros pueblos que tanto difieren del nuestro.”

that Díaz envisioned.²³ This problem received a great deal of attention from various military reformers who attempted to balance constitutional rights, state treasuries, and military efficacy. This contentious issue provides an important window into how the Porfirian political and military elite envisioned the military in the modern nation.

Recruitment laws were critical to the formation of the nation. For Paz, the law, because it was so tied to patriotic ideals, needed to be especially concerned with the “popular elements” and “*el pueblo*” because without their support recruitment was meaningless.²⁴ Bernardo Reyes agreed, seeing universal service in particular as a means to “ennoble the young” and unify the nation, however, he was pragmatic enough to realize that this was a utopian view, and that the masses were not (yet) educated enough for this to succeed.²⁵ He argued that this was especially the case for indigenous peoples, whom he saw as unfairly targeted by the *leva* (forced conscription) and laws that did not take native customs and traditions into account.²⁶ In Reyes’s military history, written in 1899 (as part of the Positivist *México: Su Evolución Social* series), he blamed state governments for sending contingents of the “worst classes of society”²⁷ to the army, and called for universal service as an evolutionary step for the good of the nation and the military. According to one Minister of War, “it would do incalculable good to morality, discipline, and economy of the army” if the *leva* were removed, instead of continuing the current system of recruiting “bums, the vicious, or criminals.”²⁸

There was a constant demand on state governors to send more men to the army, and each year’s shortfall was added to the next year’s quota, resulting in widespread use of the *leva* to fill the ranks.²⁹ Local elites began with volunteers, then emptied the prisons, and often rid themselves of any political dissenters or opposition through use of the *leva*. The draft was also used to enforce ideas of moral and social order, for example through the forced conscription of

²³ Robert M. Alexius, *The Army and Politics in Porfirian Mexico*, (PhD dissertation., Austin: University of Texas at Austin, 1976), pp.12, 13, 32.

²⁴ Paz, p.66.

²⁵ Cited in Paz, pp.45-47.

²⁶ Cited in Paz, p.40.

²⁷ Bernardo Reyes, *El Ejército Mexicano*, (México: Tipografía Mercantil, 1899), p.74, “El sistema de reclutamiento para el ejército no satisface aún, ni con mucho, á las aspiraciones del gobierno, que pide á los Estados los contingentes, y estas los reunen de un moda irregular, hacienda en lo general recaer el servicio sobre las clases ínfimas de la sociedad.”

²⁸ Paz, p.18-19, “Serían incalculables los Buenos resultados que habría dado la moralidad, disciplina, y economía del Ejército...para el reemplazamiento fija la Ley referida...[but right now] adoptan el sistema de formar su contingente con hombres vagos, viciosos ó criminales.”

21 transvestites in 1900.³⁰ On other occasions, laborers who had been maimed too badly to work would be collected in the chain gang (*cuerda*) and sent to the military.³¹ The *leva* was not uniformly applied across Mexico, nor was it free from class or racial bias. Although all Mexican men were constitutionally liable to serve in the military if called upon for universal service, the constitution also prohibited the state from infringing on personal freedoms arbitrarily. This created a legal loophole called the *amparo* whereby a man caught up in the *leva* could get a judge to set him free. Evidence suggests that the *amparo* was granted very regularly, to the extent that it became a contentious debate in the legislature.³² For educated, literate, and relatively wealthy men the *leva* was usually avoidable and even if the *amparo* failed, it was still possible to purchase a substitute, “hiring” a poorer man to take one’s place.

Defining citizenship, “solving” the problems of race, and preventing class “contamination” were all complications to the arguments over recruitment of a modern national army. Generally, foreign systems and universal service were seen at best as premature, at worst as treacherous and anti-patriotic. The resurrection of the National Guard was one possible solution to manpower shortage, but it was rejected by a Porfirian regime that was attempting to centralize power and reduce regional militias. Similarly, the largely middle class Second Reserve created by (and loyal to) Reyes was potentially dangerous to Díaz’ hold on power, and, though dismantled after only two years, did eventually contribute many former soldiers to the ranks of his opponents during the Revolution. For some reformers a military recruitment system based on German (*Landwehr* and *Landsturm*) or Japanese militias seemed ideal, whereas others repudiated this as inappropriate and harmful to national unity. Ultimately, the Porfirian regime was to begin steps towards universal male service, but little had been accomplished before the Revolution began in 1910.

Preparing the nation for some form of universal service in the future required an education that could overcome the race “problem”, preserve class distinctions, and enhance masculinity. One educator, Dr. Francisco Vázquez Gómez, believed that if secondary schools developed physical, intellectual, and moral students, it would be possible to “make men of

²⁹ Beattie, p. xxi explains the occasional difficulty of labeling (sometimes) forced recruits as “pressed”, “conscripts”, “dragoones” etc. For simplicity, I will refer to them here as troops or conscripts.

³⁰ Alexius, p.34 and more extensively in Robert McKee Irwin, “The Famous 41: The Scandalous Birth of Modern Mexican Homosexuality,” *GLQ: a Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 6: 3, 2000. The irony of conscripting the transvestite men into the overtly masculine army was not lost on observers, p.365.

³¹ Alexius, p.34.

them”, and in time “inculcate [values of] the [truly] Mexican man”³³ whose primary loyalty was to the state. By contrast, in some other nations there was a notion that the universal service in the army would provide the state with means to provide education, using the army to teach literacy skills and civic duty.³⁴

The idea of applying recruitment laws that included the wealthier classes in Mexico was highly contentious. Education might instill masculinity and patriotism, but the question of morality and class segregation remained. The barracks, a problematic space for discipline and the homosocial, was also implicated in promoting negative behaviour and being the antithesis of the private, moral, family home. Some wealthy writers argued that, for the good of the nation, the rich and productive needed to work in the economy instead of the barracks. Some suggested that educating soldiers could be accomplished in groups with common “intellectual culture” (money), while Paz felt military education was wasteful and that it would be enough for soldiers to understand “*á morir y á matar*” and “patriotic love and self-dignity” thus removing the need for lengthy associations of the poor and the *gente decente*.³⁵ However a military education was to be accomplished, the elite agreed that the classes and races should not fraternize in the process.

For example, calls for universal service by all men were qualified with suggestions that barracks remain segregated by class to avoid moral contagion. The rich and middle classes (sensibly) hated military service anyways, Paz held, so they should educate the “Indian” to do it. Reyes believed that the educated would feel humiliated to enter barracks for a common life with the lower classes, and that the middle class were better used guiding the nation.³⁶ Even more directly, he argues,

“we must consider that there are three classes, whose limitations aren’t well determined,... and it is impossible to have decent and well educated youths (rich or poor) share a barracks, let alone a room with the promiscuity and moral dangers of the drunk, the petty thief [*ratero*] and the criminal. A parent would spare nothing in their power to pay for a replacement, and [this]

³² *Ibid.*, pp.57, 58.

³³ Vázquez Gómez cited in Paz, p.75 “para hacerlo hombre”—“puede formar hombres sanos y robustos, hombres de corazón y de voluntad firme...puede inculcar alguna vez el hombre mexicano, la idea de que la felicidad de la Patria debe ser el supreme ideal de cada uno...”.

³⁴ Beattie, p.76.

³⁵ Paz, pp.72, 73.

³⁶ Reyes cited in Paz, pp.40, 44.

changes a sacred honorable duty into a disgrace, because barracks life would extinguish the youth's not very well cemented habits of work and morality."³⁷

This does, however, leave the issue of how the lower classes, largely illiterate and including many indigenous Mexicans, experienced and even used the *leva* to pursue their own ends. While there have been studies of this elsewhere, for example in Brazilian history³⁸, the topic remains unexamined for Porfirian Mexico. The question remains as to whether the poor used the *leva* in Mexico to police their own societal strata, or how deliberate enrollment or desertion played a role in how they saw themselves as part of a modern or traditional society. There are, for example, suggestions that military enrollment was a means to steal a horse or a new rifle, or to learn vices, and there seems to have also been a common perception or stigma (especially among the middle-classes) that the Mexican army was filled with *marijuaneros* (marijuana smokers).³⁹ Less negatively, the military may have also offered a less arduous lifestyle than poverty or farming, or even been seen as a respectable career for those with limited options.

Beyond, and in addition to, class divisions, the elite also sought to "solve" the difficulties of race, especially the role of the indigenous Mexican in the military and the nation. Despite the rhetoric of indigenous identity (for example, in Díaz' own ancestry), the Mexican military's lower ranks at this time were almost entirely composed of indigenous men, while officers were almost universally *mestizo*. The indigenous soldier seems to have been commonly perceived in pejorative ways by Mexican writers. The unreliability of indigenous men in the rank and file was represented as either cowardice or as an indictment of the indigenous Mexicans' lack of martial quality. In contrast, Reyes and others like him believed that with education on duty and citizenship, the natives would make "enviable soldiers" (*soldados envidables*).⁴⁰ Of course, this ignores the forced nature of their service as conscripts,

³⁷ Reyes cited in Paz, p.76, "debemos considerar á la sociedad formada de tres clases diferentes, cuya limitación no es bien determinada; y en tal virtud, es imposible que en el mismo cuartel, en la misma cuadra, vivan en promiscuidad y sin peligro para la moral, el ebrio, el ratero, y el criminal, con el jóven decente y bien educado, rico ó pobre. Esta sola consideración bastará para que los padres de familia no omitan sacrificio alguno á fin de poder pagar el reemplazo... el cumplimiento de un deber sagrado y honroso, se trocará en una desgracia; porque la vida de cuartel podrá extinguir en el jóven sus no muy bien cimentados hábitos de trabajo y de moralidad."

³⁸ For examples, Joan Meznar, "The Ranks of the Poor: Military Service and Social Differentiation in Northeast Brazil, 1830-1875", (*Hispanic American Historical Review*, Vol. 72:3, 1992) and in Peter Beattie *The Tribute of Blood*.

³⁹ Personal communication with William French, (Vancouver, April 2003), the archives of Parral, Mexico indicate widespread belief that the army was a centre of vice and marijuana use.

⁴⁰ Reyes in Paz, p.43.

exemplified by an army that had even recruited Yaqui prisoners of war at the Sonoran uprisings, at times immediately pressing them into service for the very federal army unit that had captured them.⁴¹

The accomplishment of the Mexican army in maintaining draconian order should not be underestimated. The military, for many Latin American governments, has been rather like keeping a vicious dog in the house, representing a balance between security and the risk of violent betrayal. Díaz had himself taken power through a military coup in 1876, and was always mindful that the forces that had brought him to power might turn against him.⁴² Throughout the course of the Porfiriato, the various armed forces within Mexico were downsized, composed of fictional rosters, poorly armed, poorly fed, and poorly clothed, or simply disbanded outright. Despite this, native insurrections were repressed in Sonora State (the Yaqui) and in Yucatan (the Mayans); the Apaches were finally defeated after a century of warfare; politically ambitious *caciques* (warlords) were cowed; Guatemalan aggression was deterred; and banditry largely eliminated. The military also massacred the village of Tomochic (however ineptly), which rose up in the name of a popular religion in 1891.⁴³ The reality of the situation was that the army was continually being called upon, in all its frailty, to defend the regime and to create a new and modern Mexico. Part of this project was the transformation of the “traditional” untamed frontier into the modern regulated border, a geographic and discursive shift that defines the national territory and allows the further centralization of state power. As Ana María Alonso has argued, the federal “bureaucratized” army that acted to suppress indigenes and *serranos* (highland frontier peoples) allowed the centralized modern state to shift the status of northern warrior communities from civilizing agents (pacifying a frontier) to barbarous obstacles to progress (potential rebels on a border).⁴⁴ The Porfirian regime actively collected into its own hands a monopoly on military forces, dissolving militias and disarming these communities, and in doing so was frequently strained to marshal the forces necessary to keep order. Although aware of this weakness, Díaz deliberately resisted

⁴¹ Alexius, p.49, and for an elite Mexican view on the Yaqui campaigns see Manuel Balbás, Recuerdos del Yaqui: Principales Episodios Durante la Campaña de 1899 á 1901, (México: Sociedad de Edición y Librería Franco Americano, 1927).

⁴² Garner, Porfirio Díaz: Profiles in Power, (New York: Pearson Education Ltd., 2001) p.111.

⁴³ Paul Vanderwood, The Power of God Against the Guns of the Government, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998).

⁴⁴ Ana María Alonso, Thread of Blood: Colonialism, Revolution, and Gender on Mexico's Northern Frontier, (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1995), p.7.

initiating reforms that would resurrect the National Guard or implement universal military service, because he correctly perceived that armed citizens would not be as easily controlled or led towards his vision of the modern Mexico.⁴⁵

Despite its accomplishments, the primary function of much of Díaz' military was in its performance of the modern nation, and the government did little to enhance the military's ability to quell minor rebellions, native uprisings, and suppress bandits. The army needed to avoid any sign of being a threat to the government, and could do so by being either utterly loyal or utterly feeble.⁴⁶ Díaz opted for a bit of both. He reduced the size of the army, and permitted simple graft such as the padding of rosters by the commanding officers (in order to draw pay for imaginary or long since deserted men). He also distributed the army widely and thus made field commanders reliant upon local militias for extra manpower in case of trouble. While this arrangement made for the predominance of smaller and weaker federal units, order could still be (barely) maintained through the combination of federal army forces with local *Rurales* and militia.⁴⁷ As important as it was to reproduce a specific order, the military also functioned as a symbolic embodiment of order.⁴⁸ For the military to be successful performing the modern nation, the façade of order was crucial.

Assembling the Foreign Audience

Order, and indeed, Porfirian attempts to modernize and dominate Mexican society in general, faced considerable internal criticism. The regime endeavored to limit criticism in the Mexican media through the jailing and occasional assassination of journalists, and more subtly by subsidizing pro-Díaz newspapers and periodicals. The government did not try to suppress the media entirely and, in fact, the atmosphere apparently favoured media expansion, as newspapers increased from nine in 1860 to 531 by 1898.⁴⁹ At the same time there remained considerable resistance to the regime (not so much to modernist ideals or Díaz himself) not

⁴⁵ This was not new to Mexico, see Pedro Santoni "A Fear of the People: The Civic Militia of Mexico in 1845" in Hispanic American Historical Review, (68:2, 1988).

⁴⁶ Alexius, pp.1-3.

⁴⁷ Alexius, p.132.

⁴⁸ Paul Vanderwood argues that "order" as understood as peace and hierarchy, represents a strategy of actors rather than an actual state, Disorder and Progress: Bandits, Police, and Mexican Development 2nd Edition. (Wilmington: Scholarly Resources Inc, 1992), pp. xii, xiii.

⁴⁹ Garner, pp.123, 124.

only in large newspapers like El Monitor Republicano, but also in the penny presses, cheap illustrated works intended for the working classes.⁵⁰ Underground media produced by exiles residing in the US, like the Flores Magón brothers, also continued to provide alternative visions of the direction the nation should be taking. These newspapers, however, had relatively minor circulation and were arguably not very influential. While read by some expatriate Mexicans and other dissident groups, these underground publications were not effectively reaching either the poorest (largely illiterate) elements in Mexico nor the general public in the important American market. Certainly, they did not have the effect on foreign perceptions of Mexican culture that mainstream American periodicals enjoyed. The Porfirian regime could intimidate much of the Mexican press, but foreign media required subtler handling.

If the Porfirian regime was playwright, producer and director for the military performance of the modern nation, its favourite audiences were foreign. The regime held numerous military parades, invited foreign guests and emissaries to maneuvers, and brought foreigners to the Military College (*Colegio Militar de Chapultepec*) for inspections and musical entertainments. Mexicans also attended these events (including some 20 000 spectators at the Centenario parades) and perhaps they were affected with patriotism and militarism in the manner the regime hoped. Teaching '*amor de patria y deber*' through the example of the military display was certainly high among the regime's motives, as was a show of the strength and thus legitimacy of the government and its forces. Nonetheless, there were important reasons to have the military perform for foreign audiences, especially the journalists, tourists, and military-diplomatic emissaries of European, Japanese, and American nations.

One important motive was the need for acceptance and membership in the international military circles of Western Europe, Japan, and America. Displaying an impressive modernizing army to the military attachés and arms merchants of these foreign nations gave Mexico a credibility that denied the actual, rather poor, state of its military. Evaluating and being evaluated was a form of cosmopolitan inclusion into the modern world, and was an increasingly important part of the Porfirian imaging of the nation abroad. Over the years, Díaz sent most of his senior military men on missions to Europe to investigate foreign militaries and

⁵⁰ María Elena Díaz, "The Satiric Penny Press for Workers, 1900-1910: A Case Study in the Politicization of Popular Culture", (Journal of Latin American Studies, Vol.22: 3, Oct.1990, p.497-526).

arms manufacturing, although sometimes this was also an expedient and face-saving means to exile Díaz' political adversaries from Mexico.⁵¹ It is significant that Mexico was not a simple recipient or mimic of other nations' militaries and their cultures, but that they were in a reciprocated relationship. Foreign militaries defined their own identities against the "Other" that was presented to them, and competing in fashions, borrowing ideas, and purchase of technologies were certainly mutual interactions. Perhaps the best examples of this are the excellent Saint Chamon field artillery and an assault rifle designed by General Mondragón (a graduate of both the Colegio Militar and St. Cyr in France), the former weapon considered superior even to the famous French 75mm of World War One. More important to the Porfirian regime than inclusion in international military circles, however, was the image the military presented to foreign political and business interests.

Díaz faced a number of deficiencies that limited Mexico's ability to modernize and foremost among these was the lack of resources. The Porfirian regime was dependent upon foreign capital to actually construct the new nation by building railroads, increasing agricultural output (largely in cash crops), and in developing important mining and industrial areas of the north. There was a surplus of capital in British and American financial systems after 1880, and Díaz was forced to accede to some foreign economic interests simply to keep Mexico afloat.⁵² Mexico required capital to progress, but foreign businessmen required at least the impression of order in Mexico if they were to invest. The projection of the modern Mexican nation at World's Fairs was one important part of a larger Porfirian design to create this image in foreign venues.⁵³ The extensive efforts to create an image of prosperity and safety in the new and modern nation were also an important role for the armed forces in Mexico, which consumed some 38% of the Mexican budget.⁵⁴ After the 1880s, the Mexican regime put the majority of its attention on playing to an American audience due to the waning of European influence in the Americas. The specific American audience for these efforts was those who had the capital to invest.

⁵¹ Among them Reyes, Mondragón, and Felix Díaz. Austin Brady's article "Mexico's Fighting Equipment" (The Review of Reviews, Vol.34:575, 1906) specifically notes the presence of Mexican attachés in France and Germany, p.577.

⁵² Garner, p.139.

⁵³ Excellently expressed in Mauricio Tenorio Trillo, Mexico At the Worlds' Fairs: Crafting a Modern Nation.

⁵⁴ Captain F.H. Hardie, "The Mexican Army", (Journal of the Military Service Institution of the United States, 1892, pp.1203-1208), p.1208.

Did the message performed by the military reach these potential investors? Certainly, they did invest in Porfirian enterprises, with over 50% of the US foreign market investment tied to Mexico by 1910. Americans who chose to invest heavily in Mexico included the most famously wealthy men of the day: Guggenheim, Speyer, J.P. Morgan, Bleichroeder, and Rockefeller among them.⁵⁵ This does suggest that the Porfirian assertion of stability and order, exemplified by the military, seemed credible to some of the most astute businessmen in America, and at least implies that Mexican investment was seen as a reasonable gamble. These men, in addition to their wealth, were also included in the targeted demographic of key periodicals such as Harper's, The Review of Reviews, Scribner's, and The North American Review.⁵⁶

American periodicals were an intermediary between the important capitalists and the performances of the Mexican military as representative of a modern, stable, and "Westernized" Mexican nation. These periodicals had a number of similarities. They were illustrated, each was in its heyday in terms of readership numbers, and they all included articles on the Mexican military. These articles came in the form of political opinion pieces, fictions, travelogues, and economic analyses. Some were later expanded into books, (e.g. W.H. Bishop's), and pictures included in the articles were occasionally reworked into larger paintings (e.g. Frederic Remington's works). There are common threads of argument that run through their discourses on the Porfirian military and Mexican society. These are: 1) portraying the military as an evolved (or evolving) modern institution, 2) representing Mexico and its people as a modernizing yet alien nation, and 3) evaluating the opportunities and risks posed to American interests. There is also an ongoing dynamic within the articles that pits the modern (or modernizing) against the exotic Mexico, a dichotomy often reflected in differences between the text and the illustrations. Finally, these articles generally correspond with the context of US-Mexican relations. From 1870-1885, they examine the prospects for modernizing and investment; in 1885-1897, they examine border issues and favourably review the Mexican army (especially in context of border raiders like Garza); and from 1898-1908 they exhibit worries about the Mexican army as a threat or its ability to maintain order (legally) within Mexico. How this American media represented the Mexican military was influenced, often

⁵⁵ Garner, p.171.

⁵⁶ Frank Luther Mott, A History of American Magazines, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1939) p.410.

directly, by efforts of the Porfirian regime to promote their imagined nation. In this sense the American periodicals can be read as a reflection (albeit somewhat unstable and distorted) of the Mexico that Díaz' government envisioned.

Repairing the Military's Reputation in the American Periodical

The first step towards creating a façade of order was transforming the prevailing international perspective that the Mexican military was unreliable, undisciplined, and generally incompetent. The army's image, tarnished in a century of upheavals and invasions, required considerable polishing. An article published in 1867 discussed the anti-Maximilian army of Díaz' youth. "The Mexican Armies and Generals" by A. Conquest Clarke, portrays an army that sounds unhappily similar to the one that Díaz' regime tried to hide from foreign view in later years.⁵⁷ Clarke is highly critical of the ragged conscripts whom he derides as a rabble of imminent deserters highlighted with a very entertaining description of the "sport" of rounding



Figure 1. J Gómez, "Pelotóns del Fusilamiento Maximiliano", 1867. Depicts the rather ragged soldiers of pre-Porfirian Mexico.

up deserters from horseback. The author is more complimentary towards the women camp followers, who perform as "sutlers [peddlers], cooks, and purveyors" with the "sang froid of the oldest veteran."⁵⁸ The Mexican army was, according to Clarke, absolutely devoid of such basic equipment as tents. This article also displays some common American stereotypes towards Mexicans as lacking moral character. For instance, Clarke states that "a

⁵⁷ A. Conquest Clarke, "The Mexican Armies and Generals", (*The Galaxy*, 4:6, Oct 1867, pp.691-700).

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p.696.

mounted Mexican is *prima facie* proof that he has been smart enough to steal a horse or lucky enough to win...one.”⁵⁹ The article also points the way to a more advanced and modern military in its praise of General Miramón (a royalist officer, at that time commanding Mexican troops in Maximilian’s northern army). According to Clarke, “his abilities as a general were very considerable; he had studied military tactics both in Europe and in Mexico.”⁶⁰ To contemporaries in both America and Mexico it must have been a commonly held view that Europeans provided the model for modernizing, but admitting this would not be politic in Mexico in the decade following the Liberal revolution against Maximilian.

The reputation (if not the reality) of the Porfirian military had quite improved two decades later, through the efforts made by Díaz’ regime. In part, this was no doubt accomplished by keeping journalists away from the worst units in the army, but the primary method of improving the image was to create a performative army within the comfort of Mexico City for the purpose of display.

This is the “The Mexican Military” written about by Thomas Allibone Janvier, a regular contributor to Harper’s.⁶¹ It is hard to find a more favourable foreign publicist for the Mexican army than Janvier. Janvier was a sometime resident of Mexico City, often invited to official functions as a personal guest of Díaz (even being presented to his wife) and Janvier’s writing tended to present precisely what Díaz’ regime desired foreigners to see. Mexican efforts to convey a particular image to Janvier even included having the Minister of War personally order handpicked soldiers of each regiment to make themselves available for Janvier and artist Frederic Remington (see page 23) to speak with and to sketch. Janvier favourably compared the majority of the army (of “primitive Mexican stock”) to the “trained French troops” they had fought in 1866-67.⁶² In the minds of European and American military writers of the time, racial traits defined a soldier’s potential ability. Typically, non-European troops were considered inferior in terms of discipline, although capable of bravery and ferocity in close combat, and Western nations pointed to their experiences in Africa and in the Boxer

⁵⁹ Ibid., p.693.

⁶⁰ Ibid., p.699.

⁶¹ Thomas A. Janvier, “The Mexican Army”, (Harper’s new Monthly Magazine, Vol. 79:474, Nov.1889) p.814-827. This article was a major feature with 12 illustrations (by Frederick Remington).



Figure 2. Frederic Remington, "Full Dress Engineer", 1899.

Rebellion, as proof of their own martial superiority. It was therefore important to Janvier that he describe how the Mexican "race" held up in modern warfare. Accordingly, he described the excellent ability of the Mexican in both "short, sharp work that can be carried through with a rush and a hurrah" as well as in an almost French "coolness under fire."⁶³ Although meant as an unqualified compliment, Janvier was still writing what has to be considered a generally condescending piece.

Some of the Porfirian repairs to the image of their armed forces seem to have been successful. The Mexican army of the day had improved, and Janvier's article contended that: "out of very unpromising materials he has created an orderly, well-

disciplined, trustworthy military force that has been used solely to maintain the power of the constitutional government."⁶⁴ This indicates awareness among foreigners that the military was

undergoing reforms or changes. He went on to assert that the modern army had overcome its past difficulties through the "growth of a national spirit." The unknown author of "The Mexican Major" agreed, stating that the reforms of the military were an "endeavor to raise them to an equality with the troops of other [i.e. modern] nations....a compact and serviceable army"⁶⁵ and should not be confused with "undisciplined, ill-armed, ill-fed levies unwillingly forced into the ranks."⁶⁶ Captain F.H. Hardie, a representative of the US army, appraised the Mexicans less glowingly; infantry men were not "well set up", they were deficient marksmen, and made undisciplined sentries. On the other hand, he found them accustomed to living in hardship and believed that their very rapid "dog-trot" style of marching made them the premier infantry in the world for their mobility.⁶⁷ Nevertheless, even by 1906 the predominant

⁶² Janvier, p.815.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p.820.

⁶⁴ Janvier, p.815.

⁶⁵ Unknown author, "A Mexican Major" (*Harper's Weekly*, Vol34:755, Sept.1890), p.755, although the writer is very possibly Remington himself, whose other articles closely resemble this one.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p.755.

⁶⁷ Hardie, pp.1207, 1211.

perspective in America (according to Brady) remained contemptuous of the Mexican soldier, as “half wild, half starved, half naked, and ridiculously armed.”⁶⁸

“Levies unwillingly forced into the ranks”

An army performing the best notions of the modern, liberal state is not credible when the audience is painfully aware that the actors (soldiers) have been forcibly coerced into the military. Any attempt by Díaz to rehabilitate the army’s image required dealing with the unpopular use of forced conscription, a practice that the Americans were particularly sensitive to due to their own Civil War experience. While Díaz’ legal reforms to the *leva* never actually changed its practice, foreign observers were continually reassured that recruitment methods were being transformed. On paper, at least, this was the case, and army regulations state baldly that recruitment should be primarily from those who “voluntarily ask to enter the ranks.”⁶⁹ In reality, however, nothing had changed.

That the *leva* primarily targeted the impoverished was not lost on foreign observers. Janvier seemed quite aware of the imposition of the *leva* on the poor and commented that the bulk of the army was drawn from “the lowest classes”, and that the “common people” invariably assisted in their frequent desertions. He also commended the “strong efforts” that Díaz was making to “put an end to a custom so demoralizing.”⁷⁰ Janvier claimed Díaz’ reformation of the institution of the *leva* that at least halted the drafting of criminals was part of “his many army reforms.”⁷¹ Given his close contact with the charismatic Díaz, it should not be surprising that the author was not overly sympathetic to the conscript, and even applauded the practice of sending ‘convict’ soldiers to garrison the malarial coast, where they would face “dangerous sickness, and very often death.”⁷² The Porfirian regime seems to have been actively misleading journalists, as the author of “A Mexican Major” was led to believe that compulsory recruitment had been entirely done away with, with only the questionable practice of conscripting convicts remaining to cause “discontent, and constant desertion.”⁷³

⁶⁸ Brady, p.582.

⁶⁹ Decreto 225, Estado Mayor, Sec. de Guerra y Marina, 1900, Ley Orgánica del Ejército Nacional, Article 15, “de los que voluntariamente soliciten ingesar á las filas.”

⁷⁰ Janvier, p.818.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p.818.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p.820.

⁷³ Unknown author, “A Mexican Major” p.755.

Desertion was a major problem created by the *leva*, and a major blemish on the image the military was trying to portray. One Minister of War, Felipe Berriozábal, called for the rejection of the *leva* not because it was unjust but simply “in order to prevent desertions.”⁷⁴ Both Captain Hardie and Janvier noted how the military served essentially as a mobile penitentiary. Soldiers were surrounded by armed officers while marching or confined to a barracks/stockade in what Hardie refers to as “Jackals.”⁷⁵ He perceived that the recruitment was from the lowest classes and seemed especially worried about the desertion of “all classes of criminals”, particularly from border units into the US. Hardie was led to believe that recruitment practice was changing, and that at least in the large cities, the army was composed of “an entirely different class of men”, while units in the interior rarely deserted, as it was punishable by death.⁷⁶

Desertion and fictional rosters obscured the size of the Porfirian army from foreign viewers, and seems to have been malleable depending on whether Díaz intended intimidation or reassurance. The numerical strength of the military told to journalists could be manipulated through including or omitting reserves, militias, men of service age, or more simply, just lying. In truth, the government may not even have known the accurate number, but the figures they gave the American press are lower when US relations were tense (down to 25 000 men) and much higher when tensions were primarily with Guatemala (20 000 troops in Mexico City alone). The actual desertion rate in the federal army has been estimated at between 30 and 50% at any given time.⁷⁷ Taken with the estimate that many commanders padded their rosters by upwards of double their actual troops, a combat unit showing 100 men on paper in headquarters would actually be hard pressed to put together 30 men in the field. As a result, estimates of the size of the Porfirian army have ranged from Janvier’s 160 000 men to Hardie’s 33 000, down to a mere 12 000 men, and probably the latter figure most closely approaches the true number of effectives.⁷⁸ Although Janvier’s estimates of Porfirian military numbers were very dubious (an exaggeration of about tenfold), he seemed quite acquainted with the massive desertion problem in Díaz’ reluctant army.

⁷⁴ Berriozábal cited in Paz, p.20, “con el objeto de evitar deserciones.”

⁷⁵ Hardie, p.1211, in reference to high-fenced areas where soldiers were “herded” for the night, possibly from the Spanish term “*jacales*”, meaning shacks or huts.

⁷⁶ Hardie, p.1207.

⁷⁷ Alexius, p.68.

⁷⁸ From Hernández Chávez’ lower estimate, p.263, Hardie, p.1206, Janvier, p.815.

An Army to “Fill the enemy with bullets and favourable opinions”

Overlooking the problems of conscription and desertion, Janvier still depicted the Porfirian military as an essential part of the cohesive national “idea” of Mexico, and an element closely tied to the constitutional government. The creation of a modern army had not



Figure 3. Frederic Remington, "Lt. Engineer Battalion, 1899"

occurred previously, according to his piece, because of the problems of finance that Díaz solved, and because “it is only a matter of a few years since there has come to be only one centralized army, as opposed to numerous armies.”⁷⁹ In fact, he was quite incorrect in this, as there existed any number of informal militias, disbanded Guards units, paramilitaries, and even more divisive, the federal army itself was far from being “one army” given the enormous social gap between troops and officers. Janvier was well aware that it was high quality officers that made the modern military possible, and in fact did not consider the ordinary soldier a problem, so long as certain appearances were maintained. After all, Janvier felt that the officers (who appeared modern) could be trusted to keep discipline in the army. The concern

in America regarding the stability and nature of their modernizing neighbour can be seen in Janvier’s repeated assurances throughout this piece that the army in Mexico was now the “servant of the nation” and with the “guarantee that the days of revolutions are ended.”⁸⁰

Another influential American author was W.H. Bishop. Bishop traveled extensively through Mexico as a guest of the Porfirian regime, attending Senatorial dinners, and traveling with a military escort. In “With the Vanguard in Mexico”, Bishop described Mexico’s modernization efforts, including electrical lighting and new mines, and combined this with the

⁷⁹ Janvier, p.814.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p.817.

expectation of discovering great wealth in such an exotic locale.⁸¹ Bishop wrote a follow up article in the next month's issue, "Commercial, Social, and Political Mexico".⁸² These articles eventually were combined into his book Old Mexico and Her Lost Provinces in 1883 that continued to lament that the economic realization of Mexico was yet to come.⁸³ While his articles only briefly touched on the status of the military, he dealt with them more fully in his book. Bishop's image of the Porfirian army emphasized the divide between high quality officers and their almost 'savage' soldiers. He described an incident where a trainload of soldiers and *aguardiente*, en route to Cuautla, derailed. The soldiers took the opportunity to steal the alcohol in the midst of the train wreck, became "drunk and excited", and began to shoot and stab one another. In the chaos, accidental fires detonated the remaining liquor and ammunition cartridges, causing tremendous carnage.⁸⁴ Bishop also had rather typical (for his time) views on the indigenous Mexicans he observed. He pitied the indigenous laborers, saying that "they seemed about as wretched as the poor Irish, except for the advantage over the latter in climate."⁸⁵ Bishop did not seem to hold Mexico or Mexicans in overly high esteem, in one case observing a decrepit town gaol at Chaloco, about which he claimed, "No self-respecting American prisoner could be induced to stay in a place so easy to escape from. But there is no accounting for tastes."⁸⁶ Despite its potential Mexico remained, for Bishop, far from being a modern nation.

The role of the military in ensuring order and enforcing the Pax Porfiriana was well covered in American magazines after 1885. In 1890, artist Frederick Remington's large full-page picture of a Mexican officer and cavalry at attention was used for a Harper's Weekly article. Remington, a graduate of Highland Military School, was already a noted artist of the "Wild West" and military topics.⁸⁷ Despite his obesity, Remington spent considerable time riding with American cavalry in New Mexico and Arizona. Through this experience and his many army connections, he developed a thorough knowledge of "frontier" militaries, though

⁸¹ W.H. Bishop, "With the Vanguard In Mexico", (Harper's New Monthly Magazine, Vol. 64:380, Jan.1882, pp.209-227).

⁸² W.H. Bishop, "Commercial, Social, and Political Mexico" (Harper's New Monthly Magazine, Vol.64:381, Feb 1882, pp.401-415).

⁸³ W.H. Bishop, Old Mexico and her Lost Provinces, (New York: Harper's Brothers, 1883).

⁸⁴ Bishop, p.190.

⁸⁵ Bishop, p.254.

⁸⁶ Bishop, p.155.

⁸⁷ Peggy and Harold Samuels, Frederic Remington: A Biography, (New York: Doubleday, 1982) and Allen P. and Marilyn D. Splete, Frederic Remington: Selected Letters, (New York: Abbeville Press, 1988).



Figure 4. Frederic Remington, "Cavalry of the Line", 1899.

his depictions of their roughness at times were based more on his own habit of romanticizing than on reality. As an example, on campaign he was known to take what he called a "cavalry-man's breakfast" of a cigarette and whiskey, much to the amusement of the soldiers who had never heard the term.⁸⁸ His sketches from that time and from his ranching days had earned him the position of respected writer/illustrator for Harper's Weekly and after his Mexican travels with Janvier, the more prestigious Harper's Monthly. Remington is perhaps best known now for his role in the American provocation of the Spanish-American war as the photographer whom William Hearst urged, "You furnish the pictures, I'll furnish the war."⁸⁹ In addition to his art for Janvier, he provided artwork for "A Mexican

Major" in which the accompanying article is considerably smaller than the picture.⁹⁰ The text, in this case, described the picture rather than vice versa, explaining the setting and illustration with speculations on where the pictured soldiers are going. The writer guessed that it might be a change of garrisons (implying order), a response to rebellion (implying centralization), or an "Indian" campaign (implying a "civilizing" mission). The author suggested that the soldiers might be part of a political "readjustment" which they would solve through "the convincing

⁸⁸ Splete and Splete, p.185.

⁸⁹ Mary Robinson, The Hearsts, (Mississauga: Associated University Press, 1991) p.324.

⁹⁰ Unknown author "A Mexican Major" (Harper's Weekly, Vol.34:755, Sept.1890) p.755, ill.p.752.

and quieting argument of ball cartridges [bullets] at 12 paces.”⁹¹ In truth, the picture was from an earlier trip of Remington’s, which also provided the sketches for Janvier’s article and the article “General Miles’ Review of the Mexican Army.”⁹² Although the “Mexican Major” was put together as an excuse to use Remington’s full-page drawing, its matter-of-fact assumptions of enforced order and elite control over politics through force seem entrenched by 1890, about the midpoint of the Porfiriato. Similar in tone, the article on General Miles’ review, though intended to boost Miles’ political ambitions, focused on praising the Mexican army.⁹³ Remington stated, “The Mexican people...have built a service which, if ever called upon again, will fill that enemy with bullets and favourable opinions, and it will not be dissipated by a defeat or two, as it was before it was reorganized—or *better, recreated*—by the soldier-statesman President Díaz [italics mine].”⁹⁴ The performative army that Díaz had re-created won a considerable success in impressing the anti-Mexican Remington enough to admit that he and “the American soldiers rode away [from the review] with an increased respect for their fellows of the sister republic.”⁹⁵ Perhaps this type of story had exhausted its readership for a time, but there were few articles on Mexico between 1892 and 1905 in Harper’s magazines. It is more likely that having used all of Remington’s stock of Mexican artwork, and the artist himself having departed to sketch the “exotic” NWMP and natives of Canada, the magazine simply found covering Mexico inconvenient.

With rising US-Mexican tensions, newly critical reviews of the Mexican army appeared in American magazines. In 1906 tensions between the Porfirian regime and the US had increased dramatically, especially over American unwillingness to deal with revolutionary exiles that were living in the US, but also as a reaction to increasing American penetration into the Mexican economy. Contrary to most post-Revolutionary historiography, the Díaz regime was not simply profiting from American business at Mexican expense, but from 1900-1910 was instead increasingly resistant to American investors, nationalized the railways, and set tariffs on numerous goods.⁹⁶ Díaz’ resistance, coupled with financial market weaknesses, resulted in the deterioration of American-Mexican relations, despite high-level meetings and

⁹¹ Ibid., p.755.

⁹² Frederic Remington, “General Miles’ Review of the Mexican Army”, Harper’s Weekly (July 4, 1891, p.495).

⁹³ Splete and Splete, p.63.

⁹⁴ Remington, p.495.

⁹⁵ Remington, p.495.

ongoing diplomacy. This increased tension was reflected in articles appearing in Harper's and in The Review of Reviews that highlighted the military in terms of posing a threat to America, or the military's role in perpetrating crimes on behalf of the Porfirian regime.

An example is found in "Mexico's Fighting Equipment", written by Austin Brady in 1906, which is illustrated with the same photos that are used in Reyes' military history.⁹⁷ Brady's article gave kudos to Reyes' reforms (1900-1902) and portrayed a very modern if limited army. Brady positively assessed the capability of the Mexican army to quell internal disorder, but he also gave an idea of what kind of threat they posed to America, a distinct change in tone from the articles above. Brady claimed that the Mexican army (including *Rurales* and Treasury police), number about 27000 with an equal number in reserve-- an "army well fed, well clothed, well equipped, and well officered."⁹⁸ The numbers Brady quoted are actually quite close to what the Porfirian government claimed on paper, although it was well known inside the Mexican military that the reality was perhaps half those numbers. Nonetheless, this does suggest that the Mexican military felt secure in releasing figures of this kind, and the accuracy of Brady compared to Janvier suggests that the need to exaggerate numbers for journalists' benefit had declined. Brady also claimed that in case of war with America, "The best men of the country would gladly enter the ranks, for the Mexican of the better class is by no means lacking in patriotism and bravery."⁹⁹ Significantly, while Brady decided that the Porfirian army was sufficient for maintaining internal order, he wrote that it did not entail a threat to the US because of Mexico's terribly small navy. The argument he made seems to be a reassuring one in a time of political tensions.

If Díaz' performative army was reassuring to Brady, it failed to impress Broughton Brandenburg with its modernity, loyalty, or ability to anchor the Mexican nation. Brandenburg sensationalized the tension between the neighbours, and his Harper's Weekly article in 1906 had the rather nervous title "War Peril on the Mexican Border".¹⁰⁰ Brandenburg described a Mexico on the verge of a dangerous outbreak, with social order disintegrating into a "long list of outrages, anti-American riots, assassinations of Americans in Mexico, and

⁹⁶ Garner, pp.167, 172, and Alan Knight The Mexican Revolution Vol.1, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), pp.22-25.

⁹⁷ Austin C. Brady, "Mexico's Fighting Equipment" (The Review of Reviews, Vol.34:575, 1906, pp.575-582).

⁹⁸ Ibid., p.576.

⁹⁹ Ibid., p.577.

demonstrations.”¹⁰¹ He saw this as the plot of those who opposed Díaz and America, who were hoping to incite a general uprising over such “minor” issues as the Cananea mine strike (where Texas Rangers were among those troops sent to disperse and punish workers). The author saw Bernardo Reyes as the chief anti-Díaz leader. Reyes was all the more dangerous as it was his reforms that had created an effective Mexican army. Brandenburg’s review of the army stated that, despite being “largely recruited from convicts and more or less wild tribesmen”, was “for efficacy if not appearance...nearly the equal of that of the US, and compares for its size with any in the world, [it had] become a wonderful machine.”¹⁰² Brandenburg, like the Porfirian regime, realized the importance of appearing to the larger military community and went on to point out that, “the blue-book of the European governments in which the letters of the military attachés of the foreign diplomatic establishments are made public, attest to what outside experts thought of the Mexican army.” Perhaps because of the apparent connection between Reyes and the reformed army, Brandenburg pinned Díaz and Mexico’s sole chances for surviving the coming labour and political eruptions on the *Rurales*, “the most mobile and daring cavalry force in the world.”¹⁰³

The Military College

Creating the image of a professional army in the modern, European sense was a direct motive for the 1880 revival of the Colegio Militar de Chapultepec. The graduates and cadets of the Colegio Militar were an intentional and important part of the cultural projection of modernity and national image that the elite had envisioned. They represented the *científicos*’ optimal future for Mexico: hygienic young men of the middle classes educated in science and inspired by patriotism and positivist ideals. Students conspicuously spent weekends in Mexico

¹⁰⁰ Broughton Brandenburg, “War Peril on the Mexican Border” (*Harper’s Weekly*, Vol. 50:2592, Aug.1906, pp.1198-1217).

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p.1198.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, p.1199.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, p.1217.

City where they were in the public view.¹⁰⁴ They were also on display for numerous visitors who were permitted entrance into the Colegio and given musical entertainment.¹⁰⁵ These young men were very much, as Alan Knight states, “the *carrière ouverte aux talents*, especially middle class talents.”¹⁰⁶ That these men were (despite the egalitarian rhetoric of the college) at least middle classed is supported by an American military author, Colonel H.T. Reed, who claimed that the boys paid 16\$ a month, plus any expenses outside room and board, to attend the College.¹⁰⁷ Even if the 16\$ fee was refunded after a successful 4-7 years, few lower class families could have afforded it. The cadets reinforced (or learned) their middle class values in the College. Reed reports that they could earn weekend leave only through proper “deportment”, and that they were served meals by domestics (*mozos*).¹⁰⁸ Brady’s 1906 article comments on the professionalism of the cadets, referring to their use of French and German tactics and equipment, and arguing that the Colegio Militar was among the “world’s foremost military schools.”¹⁰⁹ The cadets also embodied a vital symbolic link to the national mythology, especially as represented by the *Niños de Chapultepec*, a group of cadets who fought a last stand against the Americans in 1848. The eventual graduates of the College were, according to historian James Kelley, highly loyal, qualified and professional officers.¹¹⁰ Kelley argues that these officers were misrepresented in post-Revolutionary historiography, and that not only were they skilled militarily, but they were also very conscious of their role in creating the national image.

Perhaps more than any other element in the Porfirian army, the cadets of the Colegio Militar were essentially performative, and not surprisingly, little attempt was made to retain them in the army once they had fulfilled their role as model military students. While Díaz regularly (and very publicly) spoke of the many highly trained officers the College was producing, this was not indicative of great changes in the army. In truth, only about 14% of

¹⁰⁴ Bishop, “With the Vanguard in Mexico”, p.226.

¹⁰⁵ Colonel H.T. Reed, “The Mexican Military Academy”, (*The Journal of the Military Service Institute*, Vol.31:811, 1902-06), p.818, interestingly, Col. Reed, despite his stodgy military background, saw no problem in male cadets dancing with one another at these Thursday night soirees, perhaps indicating the sexual distancing created by a uniform, or by cadets’ youthfulness, or acceptance of homo-erotic elements. Given the extreme distress the Famous 41 transvestites caused Mexicans, this is an intriguing juxtaposition.

¹⁰⁶ Knight, p.18.

¹⁰⁷ Reed, pp.814, 818.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p.817.

¹⁰⁹ Brady, pp.577-580.

¹¹⁰ James R Kelley, *Professionalism In the Porfirian Army Corps*, (PhD dissertation. University of Tulane, 1971), pp.1, 12.

graduates joined the army, and many found in work in the lucrative civilian sector.¹¹¹ The technicians who the army did retain were employed in civil engineering of roads, bridges, and drainage canals, or in the new armaments industry.¹¹² Under Díaz, the army built and operated factories for the production of rifles, artillery, gunpowder, and ammunition. Although these were not sufficient to replace the need to purchase arms from foreign sources (i.e. French and German), they were a point of nationalist pride and independence. With few *Colegio Militar* graduates joining the army, the need for qualified non-commissioned officers increased sharply. As a result, during this same time the *Escuela Militar de Aspirantes* was set up as a two-year program whose graduates would become the junior and non-commissioned officers the army desperately needed for internal discipline.¹¹³

To a limited degree, the curriculum of the *Colegio Militar* was a performance of the modernist ideal. Díaz had entrusted the initial directorship of the College to General Sostenes



Figure 5. "El General Guillermo Rubio Navarrete y los jefes de Artillería," 1913.

Rocha, a former opponent, and his administrative and military talents contributed to making the College into one of the best educational institutions in Mexico. Admission

¹¹¹ Alexius, p.81.

¹¹² Samuel Huntington *The Soldier and The State: The Theory and Politics of Civilian-Military Relations*, (NY: Random House, 1957) argues that this is indicative of a pre-professional army, pp.40-43, although it is perhaps misleading to apply ambiguous European stages of professionalizing to an army that was primarily, as I contend, a performative entity.

¹¹³ Bryan, p.69.

standards were relatively high and required that the boys who applied had some prior education in algebra, arithmetic, Spanish, and beginning French.¹¹⁴ The school itself boasted a gymnasium with “modern apparatus”, an idea that was all the rage in European militaries at the time, as well as new laboratories for sciences.¹¹⁵ Despite promoting itself as modern, little changed within the academic curriculum, and College exams from 1838 and 1900 show a remarkably similar subject list including studies of physics and optics. Whereas the College rhetoric claimed the superiority of military science, much more time was spent by students on mastering equestrian showmanship and sabre drills than on mastering railway logistics. Some changes did occur, including something from the German army called “physical culture training”¹¹⁶ and in 1906 a course in the Japanese martial art of Jiu-jitsu.¹¹⁷ This latter feature, possibly taught by Yomato Maida (styled Conde Koma), suggests a significant degree of contact between the Japanese and Mexican military elite, further borne out by the Mexican purchase of some 5000 Arisaka Japanese rifles in 1908. The new curriculum, as much as it claimed to be modern, instead looked increasingly cosmopolitan, if not disturbingly foreign.

Foreign influences on the Mexican army aroused heated debates within the military elite. There were three schools of thought supporting French, German, or Mexican doctrines. The curriculum of the College generally followed a French model, using French texts, uniforms, and fortifications.¹¹⁸ The tactics taught were also modeled on those of the French, stressing artillery dominance and the importance of the bayonet charge when leading conscripted (low-quality) troops.¹¹⁹ The French system favoured the aggression and *élan* that Napoleon embodied, whereas the German favoured the more calculated precision of the Prussian General Staff. In emulation of European states, the adoption of German tactics, marching songs, and spiked Prussian helmets were encouraged by the pro-German General Reyes. While the marching songs and German tactics never caught on, the *pikelhaube* helmet remained part of some units’ dress uniforms until the Revolution. Since either French or German militaries represented an equally optimal (if unlikely) model for the Mexican elite to emulate, Kelley argues that choosing between the two models eventually became merely a

¹¹⁴ Kelley, p.59.

¹¹⁵ Reed, p.816 and European trends in Mosse, p.42.

¹¹⁶ Brady, p.577.

¹¹⁷ Thomas Sanchez Hernández and Miguel A. Sanchez Lamego, Historia de Una Institución Gloriosa: El Heroico Colegio Militar, 1823-1970, (México: Secretaría de Guerra y Marina, 1970), p.213.

¹¹⁸ Daniel Gutierrez Santos, Historia Militar De México, Vol.2, 1876-1914, (México: Ateneo, 1955), pp.20-22.

matter of taste.¹²⁰ Whether the French or German systems were truly effective for fighting a war within Mexico was not crucial; the need for the military to enact cosmopolitan ideals swayed the debate far more powerfully.

This can be seen in light of an alternative and nationalist system that the Porfirian regime rejected. A Mexicanist military doctrine was articulated by Felix Díaz (Porfirio's nephew) and promoted guerrilla tactics that were time-proven in Mexican geography and historical campaign styles.¹²¹ This doctrine also stood against the waste of money to build fortresses and accumulate heavy artillery, seeing those as far less appropriate in Mexico than in Europe.¹²² While Felix Díaz was likely correct in his analysis of the inherent weaknesses of foreign strategic doctrines, the French system was adopted. The Mexican military would thus appear "modern" and European, and yet remain unthreatening to the regime, an army of the parade square alone. This choice was a demonstration of the greater priority of re-creating the military as a showpiece of modern nationalism, rather than as an effective defender of the nation, an act for which the *Colegio Militar* provided an impressive stage.

Tradition, History, and the Modern Military Man

Establishing and promoting the military image and its ability to reproduce order were important visible facets of the Porfirian project, but deeper institutional reforms were also implemented to refigure the meanings behind the military image. Much as they were to relocate the *Colegio Militar* as a "modern" site, the regime also reinvented traditions and martial heritage. These efforts to build a military culture that could support the ideological weight of the nation meant that at the same time as new practices (such as German tactics) were brought in, older continuities, such as dueling, were reinforced. Nations require an absolute (if often fictional) foundation of apparent longevity, inevitability, and sovereignty. The performative military incarnated the link between the historical memory and sense of traditions, and the contemporary, "modern", yet rooted, nation of Porfirio Díaz. Members of

¹¹⁹ Gutierrez-Santos, p.23.

¹²⁰ Kelley, p.69, but also important was the Prussian victory over the French in 1871, which swayed Reyes' support in favour of the German contingent.

¹²¹ Alonso, p.47.

the regime, and indeed many others in Mexican society, were deeply committed to projects to enforce and create (their own) morality, middle class tastes, patriotism, and masculine ideals of honour. These projects, and projections, were inextricably woven through the expectations of the higher military classes, and equally, into the artificial world of the military colleges.

As far back as 1854, the regulations for the Colegio Militar (under Santa Anna) reveal an abiding concern for military morality and public image. Officers are seen as a “distinguished class”,¹²³ to be set apart from rough society. Even sergeants, typically the harshest men in the army, were instructed to be firm but not hated, composed, well spoken, respectful, and “not to enjoy diversions inappropriate to well-educated and decent people (*gente decente*).”¹²⁴ The students, in addition, should “be decent and courteous”,¹²⁵ and could “not have books other than those of their profession, or that have been permitted”,¹²⁶ presumably to keep them from immoral reading material. The concern over student officers’ morality and adherence to military values was ongoing, and in the 1905 Reglamento Provisional del Escuela Militar de Aspirantes many of the same restrictions on behaviour are included. This was apparently such a concern that no less than five articles of the regulations dealt with the consequences of not measuring up to the military’s value system. Students and army officers alike could be judged by a Junta de Honor, a board of inquiry that determined conduct. Men found incapable of “acquiring a good military carriage, vigor in command, discipline, and general aptitudes of the officer”, who were not of “irreproachable customs and manners”, or who lacked “character, or spirit” could be judged by the Junta to be unfit for a career in the military.¹²⁷ Even personal hygiene was a matter of regulation, and clean underwear was expressly required. That the expectations of the military academy applied to society more generally (if not so strictly) is indicated in the 1900 Ley Orgánica de Ejército Nacional, written by Bernardo Reyes as Minister of War. In part IV he calls for the “development of military spirit in Mexican men that they may best serve the nation”, so that as

¹²² *Ibid.*, pp.69 -70.

¹²³ Reglamento de Colegio Militar, (México: De M. Murguía y Co., 1854), Art.17, “distinguida clase.”

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, Article 24 “ni se usen diversiones improprias de gente decente y bien educada.”

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, Article 26 “tendra urbanidad, decencia.”

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, Article 30 “no tendrán otros libros que los de su profesion y los que les sean permitidos.”

¹²⁷ 1905 Reglamento Provisional del Escuela Militar de Aspirantes, Article 12, “no hubieren mostrado aplicación y que sean incapaces de llegar á adquirir buen porte militar, energía en el mando, disciplina y en general las aptitudes necesarias para ser un buen Oficial, quedarán sujetos al juicio de la Junta De Honor...”, Art. 13, “que sean de costumbres y modales irreprochables...” Art. 27 “que manifiestan falta de carácter ó de espíritu...”

citizens they will have the “indispensable morals for a career in arms.”¹²⁸ The military code of honour and behaviour was closely tied to nationalism and masculinity, and invested modern masculinity with the resonant ethos of the “traditional” warrior culture.

Appropriate masculine behaviour was especially inculcated within the military spheres, the very place that it was perhaps most threatened, in that it was a homosocial sphere of discipline. Much of the Junta de Honor’s function was in determining appropriately manly behaviours, from regulating sexuality to controlling dueling practices. The deliberately vague wording of what they considered appropriate behaviour allowed soldiers to circumvent legal strictures on dueling without being seen as re-establishing military privileges, or *fueros*. W.H. Bishop provided an insightful example of this. Bishop had the escort of a colonel with 20 years experience and the “bullet holes to prove them”, on the dangerous road to Acapulco. The colonel was being sent to the northern frontier as a reprimand for dueling. Bishop tells us that the man had “lately fought a duel... in which the weapons were sabres and had so slashed his opponent, a brother officer, that the latter was laid up in grievous state in the hospital. A vacant barracks had been set apart, by the War Department, for this proceeding. Army dueling, as on the Continent, is contrived at. The case seems to be that, if you fight, you are afterwards reprimanded; but if you do not, you are likely to be cashiered as pusillanimous.”¹²⁹ As Bishop saw it, the Mexican army went to great efforts, even though quixotic, to promote a code of behaviours that set “traditional” masculinity and honour into the context of discipline in a “modern” military system.¹³⁰ With the increasing power of the nineteenth century nation-state to intervene against and discipline gendered identities-- from “forbidding” duels to regulating hygiene among prostitutes-- recourse to “traditions” that re-invested value and meaning into personal identities (for Bishop’s officer, his masculine identity) were literally considered life or death matters.

The invented ordering of categories of traditional and modern, in the military as well as in society, required efforts by the Porfirian elite to recast popular memory, the sense people

¹²⁸ Bernardo Reyes, *Ley Orgánica de Ejército Nacional: Decreto Numero 225* (México: Departamento de Estado Mayor, 1900) part IV, “desarrollar el espíritu militar en todos los hombres que estén en condiciones de mejor servir á la Nación.”, Art279, III, “las cualidades físicas y morales indispensables para las carreras de las armas.”

¹²⁹ Bishop, *Old Mexico*, p.265.

¹³⁰ Beattie, p.178 points out that in Brazil, similarly, “manliness in societies of honor demand an audience”, and that this demand encouraged confrontations based on “traditional” notions of honour that conflicted with “modern” military discipline.

had of their past and identification with nation and heritage.¹³¹ As many historians have argued, this process was ongoing since the Conquest itself, and combined various strains of liberalism, racial beliefs, religion, and responses to external threats.¹³² The position of the Mexican military within this historical framing of Mexico was highly unstable, represented by writers of different periods as an institution of traitors, invaders, repressive thugs, or heroic defenders.

The Porfirian regime attempted to paint over the old images of the armies and history of Mexico with one that suited its ideal, a military deeply rooted in a martial history that was an object of pride and provider of *esprit de corps*. Recreating Mexican military history meant reintroducing the indigenous past and reshaping the role of the indigenous people



Figure 6.. Mexican officer with emblems of military honours and Chapultepec castle in the backdrop. This illustration accompanied the introduction of Reyes' *Ejército Mexicano*, 1899.

within that history, particularly through promoting the images and icons of the native warrior in statuary, festivals, and history texts. Precedent of later policies of *indigenismo*, the indigenous warrior of the past became the cornerstone of the nation, even as the contemporary indigenous soldier remained an object of contempt and mistreatment. The official revision of Mexican military history was *Ejército Mexicano*, written by Bernardo Reyes in 1899. Reyes very directly links the national history to that of the military: “the life of the army is the life of the nation...our country’s past has been essentially military.”¹³³ The problem of adding indigenous history to the Spanish heritage was accomplished by making everybody heroic, by

¹³¹ Lomnitz, pp.132-135.

¹³² See David Brading, *Los Orígenes del Nacionalismo Mexicano*, (México: Edit Era, 1980).

¹³³ Reyes, *Ejército Mexicano*, p.8, “La vida del Ejército es el vida de México...nuestro pais ha sido esencialmente militar.”

describing how the brave outnumbered Cortéz fought the brave outgunned Meshicas.¹³⁴ The indigenous past created the new army, which was now the product of “*ambos conquistadores y conquistados*.”

Uniforms, Bearing, and Bodies

The federal army uniform was a costume necessary for performing the modern, cosmopolitan nation. Of course, uniforms were nothing new, and indeed, an important aspect of the uniform is the connection to the past, to regimental or national histories, that are conspicuously included in standards, unit tokens, badges, and accessories to this day. The Porfirian military uniform also held deeper meanings that were only beginning to become important in Mexico in the late nineteenth century. The uniform itself was a display of loyalty

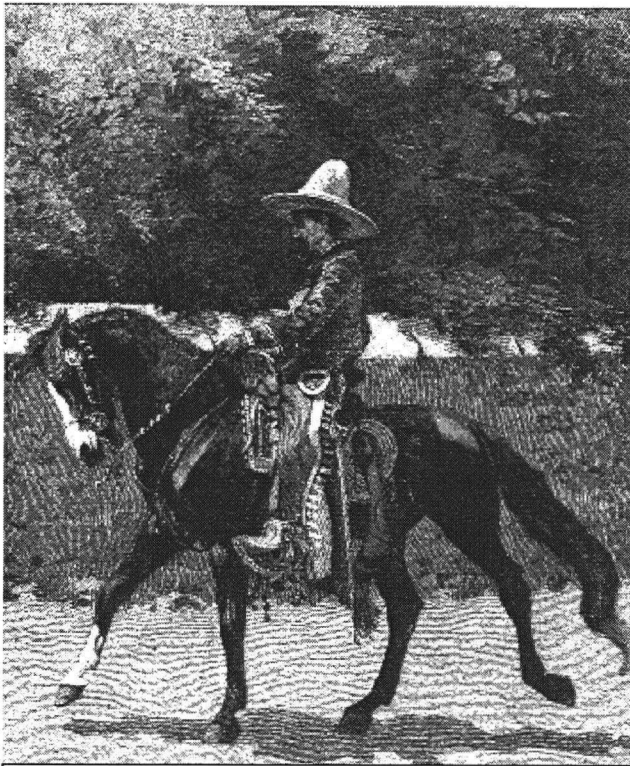


Figure 7. Frederic Remington, "A Rurale", 1899.

and discipline to the Mexican nation, yet it was (mostly) European and cosmopolitan in design. Presenting oneself in uniform was a potent identification with the federal state, a means of replacing personal identity with a corporate one in an attempt to negate “race”, regional ties, and religious affiliation.¹³⁵ In theory, wearing a uniform changed the man’s “presentation of self” into a primary identification of “Mexican soldier”, thus provoking an inward transformation of identity from ordinary civilian to an essentially national subject.

The sudden transformation of recruits from individual subjects into mechanical parts of

an anonymous mass, however, never succeeded to the degree that the elite hoped. Contingent, multiple, and varying identities, as well as class segregation between ranks, made the project

¹³⁴ Reyes, pp.12-15.

of shaping identity through dress problematic at best. Nevertheless, the display, the intention behind the clothes, speaks volumes on what the Porfirian elite wished to produce.

Uniforms made a clear impression on foreign observers. Bishop began what came to be a conventional theme by describing the *Rurales* with their “buff leather jackets crossed by wide sword belts, and their gray felt hats...and a gray and scarlet blanket strapped behind him. Nothing could be more spirited or delightful....”¹³⁶ His book added to this description that the *Rurales* had “something of the troopers of Cromwell” about them.¹³⁷ For the viewer, the military uniform did not completely negate race, as Bishop for instance referred to the “half company of dusky Indians in dark blue uniforms”¹³⁸ that escorted his train, and Remington referred to the “swarthy Indian soldiers [who] rode beautifully.”¹³⁹ Bishop also spoke of the Paseo de la Reforma “glittering with bayonets” during frequent smaller military parades where the soldiers were “...mainly of Indian blood and small in stature. The cavalry especially had a rusty look in their outfit and did not compare with the dashing rurales. The officers on the other hand are trimly uniformed and quite French in aspect.”¹⁴⁰ That the Mexican elite was aware of how uniforms lent status and authority to the wearer is clear from the specificity of laws prohibiting the wearing of National Guard uniforms off duty, or wearing clerical garb in public.¹⁴¹ Appearances of legitimate authority that were not fully controlled by the Central government, such as Church garb or militia uniforms, were not looked upon kindly.

The uniform also presented a link between masculinity and national identity. The uniform was intended to present the epitome of Mexican masculine identity, a show of strength, duty, honour, and membership within a strictly male society. Federal army officers and *Rurales* also added the suggestion of wealth to their public uniforms, with elaborate silver ornamentation and enormous sombreros.¹⁴² Janvier’s article devotes some space to the *Rurales*, describing them as especially well paid, decked out in silver, and riding the finest

¹³⁵ Taylor, pp.38, 39, and in Beattie, p.265 on the transformation into “mass anonymity” within the ranks.

¹³⁶ Bishop, p.404.

¹³⁷ Bishop, p.90, an ironic yet not inappropriate analogy given his identification of indigenous Mexicans with the Irish (p.24).

¹³⁸ Bishop, “With the Vanguard in Mexico”, p.212.

¹³⁹ Remington, p.495.

¹⁴⁰ Bishop, *Old Mexico*, p.127.

¹⁴¹ Guy Thomson, “Bulwarks of Patriotic Liberalism: The National Guard, Philharmonic Corps, and Patriotic Juntas in Mexico, 1847-88”, (*Journal of Latin American Studies*, 22(1), 1990), pp.35.

¹⁴² Paul Vanderwood, *Disorder and Progress: Bandits, Police and Mexican Development*, 2nd edition, (Wilmington: Scholarly Resources, 1992), p.55.

horses. The *Rurales* were eye-catching but they were not the only “costumed” men in the foreign gaze. Bishop described the riders on the wide avenues of Mexico City; “the Mexican dandy...wears not only his weighty spurs and silver-braided sombrero now, but a cutlass at his saddlebow, and a larger revolver than before. It is not that there is any need of them, since a couple of mounted carbineers [sic], of whom there is no great need either, are stationed at nearly every hundred yards....”¹⁴³ These uniforms (including weapons) were intended for the gaze of varied audiences: women, superior officers, the general public, and foreign observers. Of course, men also wore the clothing simply for display; Alan Knight notes that men’s tight fitting pants drew the attention of (generally) female eyes, whereas Vanderwood argues that size matters, especially in a man’s sombrero.¹⁴⁴ For officers, there was a definite sexual appeal to the gaze of spectators, one that reflected masculine norms, even as drill and homosocial spaces worked to mitigate their troops’ sexuality through dehumanization and reducing



Figure 8. F. Remington, "The Mexican Major", 1899.

independent men into dependent and mechanical soldiers.

¹⁴³ Bishop, "With the Vanguard", p.225.

¹⁴⁴ Knight, p.33, and Vanderwood *Disorder and Progress*, p.55, and Bishop, p.27, *Old Mexico*, noted, "A person in such a hat seemed capable of anything".

dependent and mechanical soldiers.

The uniforms did more than establish authority and promote one's virility; they were an essential part in differentiating the centralized and modern military from common militias or bandits, and in dividing officers from lower class men. There is a great functional and symbolic difference between the uniforms of the *Rurales* and privileged officers, and those of the average soldiers.¹⁴⁵ The *Rurales* and cavalry were an important image of modern Mexican order for the elite, but the traditional *caballero* also represented the exotic and unique features of a non-European Mexico. Frederic Remington largely agreed with upper class Mexican assumptions on military masculinity and images, perhaps because he had been inculcated with similar values. The officer portrayed by Remington in "The Mexican Major" (figure 8) is stereotypically the Mexican horseman, and represents "traditions" (e.g. *hidalguía*, or Iberian warrior culture) that persisted in the "modern" army.¹⁴⁶ The officer is clearly masculine and martial, but he is individual rather than uniformed. His difference from his presumably indigenous troops is played out less in racial appearance, but rather in physical cues of dress and bearing. The soldiers sit their horses with a visible relaxation, while their officers are erect. The major represents the difference between the warrior (owner of his own mount, with his own weapons, and self-mastered) and the soldier, (subject to orders, appearance dictated by uniforms, shorn hair, and disciplined by superiors). Whereas the officers as a social class were regulated by Juntas de Honor to be hyper-masculine, the soldier was somewhat emasculated by his inclusion within the discipline of a modern military.

An important visual cue to indicate difference between civilian and soldier was the posture and bearing of martial discipline. Foreign spectators paid careful attention to the public appearance and apparent discipline of Mexican soldiers. Remington's article in 1891 spoke of "military gorgeousness" and he specifically added, "...they [the cavalry] looked businesslike, and not as though they were going out to play tennis."¹⁴⁷ Janvier called attention to the military men as "bearing themselves in a soldierly fashion" in the less common context of a

¹⁴⁵ Beattie, *Tribute of Blood*, p.159 describes similar markers of class/rank among Brazilian soldiers, including boots, hairstyles, goatees, and tattoos.

¹⁴⁶ Alonso, pp.92-93, describes the construction of gendered honour and identities based on notions of traditional warrior ethos.

formal parade. However, Janvier also implied that Mexican military discipline and ‘spit and polish’ were not as deeply ingrained as they were in other militaries. His criticism included the National Palace sentries, whom he described as “march[ing] their beats in a slipshod fashion, while the relief loll about ...smoking cigarettes and otherwise making themselves comfortable.”¹⁴⁸ In the same way, Reed described the Colegio Militar cadets as “not well set up, and they do not present a soldierly appearance either singly or in ranks, but they seem quite studious....”¹⁴⁹ In direct contradiction to this, Janvier claimed that the “individual cadets are well set up”, although he was not clear on what was this meant. In Reyes’ own official work on the military, photos reveal soldiers on a break during maneuvers napping on the ground or gathering for what appears to be gambling. General dishevelment was also apparent in Bishop’s illustrations, showing the statue of Cortéz around which lazily lounged a number of “average” Mexican soldiers.

It seems then that most foreign observers, (especially Reed who was very familiar with West Point military college in the US), did not think much of the discipline exhibited by the Mexican soldier. Modern, disciplined soldiers stand erect, rigid, and with their gaze directly ahead. The highly gendered implication of these terms is deliberate, because the military stance was a demonstration of class, identity, and especially, masculinity.¹⁵⁰ Ideals of masculinity, according to George Mosse, permeated society through the image of the modern warrior, especially in the years from 1870-1914.¹⁵¹ Stance and bearing were essential markers of manliness, with poor posture derided as weak and lacking class. The modern body “bears the inscrutable imprint of an individual’s social class”¹⁵² and the military declares its own identity, and allegiance to the state, through not only uniforms but also the distinctive bearing of soldiers. The Mexican conscript understandably did not exemplify this connection to the state, nor was he generally “modern” in his self-conception. While military posture was meant to be both symbolically different from, and remedial for, lower class slouching of the industrial or agrarian worker, this hardly means that the recruit would interiorize modern, disciplined values. Bishop noted that indigenous people who went to the cities for education

¹⁴⁷ Remington, p.495.

¹⁴⁸ Janvier, p.820.

¹⁴⁹ Reed, p.817.

¹⁵⁰ Kirk Savage, *Standing Soldiers, Kneeling Slaves: Race, War and Monument in 19th Century America*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), p.97.

¹⁵¹ Mosse, pp.51-3, 78.

would, upon returning to their homes, change back to their old languages, clothing, and customs. It is likely that the returning (or deserting) soldier would revert to past habits in much the same way. In any case, the highly structured rigour of the modern military seems not to have filtered down to the ranks, and in its stead were conscripts with poor hygiene, allegedly smoking marijuana. Perhaps this is indicative of the true intent of a performative military, not to change the troops themselves, but over time to normalize and legitimize nationalist perspectives for specific audiences and spectators.

Indeed, the real and unhappy conscript did not appear in the pictures Remington supplied for Janvier's article, instead showing various soldiers in their uniforms and arms, striking martial poses. The pictures agreed with the text by displaying only the cleaned up, anonymous, and rather European looking "servant of the nation" that Janvier wrote about.



Figure 9. F. Remington, "Drum Corps", 1899.

Despite Remington's penchant for drawing tiny horses (or maybe huge men), the pictures seemed realistic and were no doubt an important marketing consideration of the

publishers. While some observers may have questioned the military deportment of the Mexicans, Remington's very important illustrations (12 pages in the highest circulation magazine of its day) indicated to the distant reader a relaxed but presentable and modern military. Some of the unique Mexican characteristics were also evident, for example, in the sandals worn by the drum corps (figure 9). Just as Bishop was aware of the "dusky Indian", Remington's pictures convey darker skin among the common troops, although the ubiquitous moustaches are suggestive of non-Native features and their reproduction in black and white for the magazines tended to erase any racial details. These portrayals doubtless indicated a sense of the market, that is, what kind of pictures would sell. Remington, famous for romanticizing

¹⁵²Pierre Bourdieu cited in Chris Schilling, *The Body And Social Theory*, (London: Sage, 1993), p.129.

the “Wild West”, spent a considerable amount of time in Mexico (which he quite disliked) and yet chose not to overly exoticize the military and its indigenous features. It is ironic that the most favourable images of the Porfirian army came from a man with a very low personal opinion of the Mexican people and their military.¹⁵³

Spaces and Ceremonies

The military was prominently displayed in public spaces and had increasingly ceremonial roles as part of the Porfirian conception of modern Mexico. This militarization of space manifested itself in many places and many ways, and was part of a long and continuous tradition of military display. However, this performance differed from its antecedents, celebrating history and nation in different ways, emphasizing national citizens rather than regional communities, and drawing attention to modern accoutrements of cosmopolitanism and technology. Public anniversaries and commemorative events routinely featured military parades, honour guards were conspicuous, important railways were very visibly guarded, and the President wore his military uniform for most public occasions.

Public spaces were also claimed and occupied by the military through the establishment of national armories, barracks, and drill in central plazas.¹⁵⁴ This established spaces that were not only highly gender specific, but also operated as a means of setting the military apart from (but dominant over) society and helped inculcate acceptance of the state monopoly on violence.¹⁵⁵ Less symbolically, the barracks also kept the reluctant conscript from wandering away. The spaces literally occupied were to be neutral from the “symbolic freight” of earlier liberal practices, and were zones where specific ideas of modern nationalism could be worked out.¹⁵⁶ These military spaces were also invoked in the Colegio Militar, with the highly symbolic location it claimed at the end of the Paseo de Reforma lined with national heroic statuary, and atop the dominant hill of Chapultepec. This symbolism, deliberately

¹⁵³ Samuels and Samuels, pp.76, 77. Remington also disliked T.A. Janvier a great deal, p.124.

¹⁵⁴ Chavez, p.284.

¹⁵⁵ Beattie, pp.117-121, states that the penetration of military institutions into public and private spaces, similar to universal vaccination, was part of a highly invasive form of nationalism.

¹⁵⁶ Guy Thomson, “Bulwarks of Patriotic Liberalism: The National Guard, Philharmonic Corps, and Patriotic Juntas in Mexico, 1847-88”, (*Journal of Latin American Studies*, 22(1), 1990).

invoked by the regime,¹⁵⁷ was not lost on foreign viewers. As Reed states, “there is no other place in Mexico...better calculated to inspire patriotism than the Mexican Military Academy.”¹⁵⁸ In Brazil, civilians envisioned military barracks as linked to homosexuality, an isolated sexual space of moral uncertainty and promiscuity (a view not shared by military men and their families).¹⁵⁹ While the Mexican elite were definitely concerned about the potential dangers of mixing classes within the barracks, their primary concern seems to have rather been in keeping the soldiers from escaping them. In practice, these supposedly highly gendered and military specific spaces were quite permeable. Women, for instance, commonly attached themselves to armies marching or in barracks, and were invaluable for the “domestic” work they did as cooks, washing clothes, and setting up camps.¹⁶⁰

Parade and maneuvers also provided a space and stage for the military. Janvier seems quite impressed with the dress parade of Mexican soldiers. In terms of performance, the Porfirian army could put on quite a show, “indeed, I never saw anywhere a more soldierly body of men than the force that marched in review past the President on the 5th of May, 1885.”¹⁶¹ Significantly, the author was in a press corps assembled by Díaz to view the army when Mexico was at the brink of war with Guatemala. Díaz apparently outdid himself for this parade, and brought in over 20,000 troops. Janvier’s response to this show of modern military force is worth quoting at length:

“This force, splendidly armed and equipped, was paraded through the streets of the capital. The linen uniforms were replaced by suits of blue cloth, and the sandals by leather shoes, in which the men walked gingerly; the accoutrements and arms were in fine form; and the men, in broad columns, bore themselves in as soldierly a fashion as the most rigid disciplinarian could desire. There was, moreover, a prompt, business-like air about the demonstration....”¹⁶²

This passage is an indication of the kinds of choices Díaz was making regarding modernity in the military. Janvier himself acknowledges that the dress uniform and shoes were not practical for Mexican warfare. Nevertheless, the military was fitted out in a full dress uniform and drilled for parade in order to send a clear message to the invited guests of the Porfirian government. Given that there probably did not exist 20 000 federal soldiers in all

¹⁵⁷ Mauricio Tenorio Trillo, “1910 Mexico City: Space and Nation in the City of the Centenario” (*Journal of Latin American Studies*, Vol.28:1, Feb.1996), p.85.

¹⁵⁸ Reed, p.813.

¹⁵⁹ Beattie, p.69.

¹⁶⁰ For examples, see Clarke p.696, Janvier, p.822, Hardie p.1211.

¹⁶¹ Janvier, p.820.

Mexico at this time, one might further suspect that the procession looped back on itself, or otherwise paraded in such a way that each man passed the reviewing stand two or three times. The discussion of the speed with which they marched supports this, being “very unlike that of an ordinary parade or review. The marching pace of the infantry was almost a double-quick....”¹⁶³ In order to maintain a constant flow of unfamiliar parading soldiers, the men would want to pass the reviewing stand quickly (to avoid recognition), and reposition themselves for the next pass. An alternate interpretation is that the painful and unfamiliar shoes prompted the troops to hurry the whole process, which lasted two full hours. While Janvier ascribes their speed to a demonstration of drill formation expertise, the likelihood of deliberate deception should not be dismissed. Parades were also featured in the articles by Remington and Hardie (in 1891) where upwards of 10 000 troops were on display, all remarked on for their rapid marches.¹⁶⁴

The culmination of the military performance of the nation was at the regime’s greatest celebration, the *Fiesta Centenario* (Centennial) in September 1910. The national celebration of September 15 (Mexican Independence) fortunately coincided with Díaz’ Saint’s Day, and as his cult of personality grew, the celebrations became grander. The Centennial celebrated the “political, economic, and diplomatic triumphs of Porfirian development”¹⁶⁵ that is, the great advance made towards modernizing the nation. The celebrations, according to Tenorio Trillo, “documented Mexico’s achievement of two supreme ideals: progress and modernity.”¹⁶⁶ One highlight was the *desfile histórico*, a parade of the official ethno-history of the Mexican people, complete with beautiful “virgins” and warriors from various indigenous tribes, and fully mocked up conquistadors. Not surprisingly, there were very few artisans, priests, or farmers in the representation of Mexico’s indigenous heritage. Once again, the regime created a vision of martial heritage, warriors of the past in an evolutionary progress to the present. Significantly, while the early celebrations featured enormous displays of race and progress, on September the 16th (the day of commemoration), there was a massive military parade that featured not only Mexican troops but also contingents from Brazil, Argentina, Spain, and Germany. Performing the modern cosmopolitan nation as best they could, some indigenous

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, p.820.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, p.820.

¹⁶⁴ Hardie p.1211, Remington, p.495.

¹⁶⁵ Garner, p.158.

German rifles. In exhibition the cosmopolitan Mexican military had become quite proficient, and according to German observers, the army “present(ed) itself very well in parades” being comparable to any in Europe.¹⁶⁷ By the end of the Porfiriato, the military had become adept at the masquerade.

Conclusions

The initial formation of a modern nation state in Mexico was largely the concern and the project of an elite segment of Porfirian society. Articulating an imagining of nation - of *mexicanidad*- was initially accomplished through presenting specific images (“imaging” the nation) within a framework of public rituals in public spaces. As an influential contact zone, the Porfirian military performed the modern nation, embodying and representing elite assumptions of class, race, masculinity, and citizenship. The image they were to present was shifting, at times inconsistent, reflecting major debates within the Porfirian elite over issues of recruitment, civic education, and national identity. To a very great degree, the performative army was a spectacle intended to capture the gaze of a foreign audience, in particular that of the American media and military. American writers and artists, including W.H. Bishop, T.A. Janvier, and Frederic Remington, re-presented the military to their own American audiences, and did so from a position that was informed by their own values and predispositions. Their gaze was drawn to important facets of the Porfirian military spectacle; they saw the military body, uniforms, spaces, masculinity, and the modern. Contrary to Díaz’ intentions, however, they also saw racial and class division, poverty, and they often highlighted the “traditional” or seemingly primitive faces of the Mexican “Other”. Despite this instability, and despite the distance between Porfirian elite images and Mexican realities, in the Porfiriato a foundation of imaginings was laid upon which a modern nation would eventually be built. The performative military was an important cornerstone in this process because it anchored histories, nationalism, and citizenship within the discourses of the nation. For the military, the nation won on the battlefield became the nation “created” in the parade square.

¹⁶⁶ Tenorio Trillo, p.76.

¹⁶⁷ Alexius, p.10.

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