

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

FROM PACIFIC GATEWAY TO TOURIST CITY:  
MOBILITY, REVOLUTION, AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE MEXICAN SEASIDE,  
ACAPULCO, MEXICO, 1849-1970

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO  
THE FACULTY OF THE DIVISION OF THE SOCIAL SCIENCES  
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF  
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY

BY  
MARCEL SEBASTIÁN ANDUIZA PIMENTEL

CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

MARCH 2019

Copyright © 2019 by Marcel Sebastián Anduiza Pimentel  
All rights reserved

*A mi familia,*

*A mi madre, Luz Aurora, y a mi abuela Aurora,*

*A Adam, mis tíos y primos; a mis seres queridos y familia extendida,*

*Por apoyarme de infinitas maneras y creer en mí todos estos años. Gracias.*

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

### LIST OF FIGURES

---

vi

### LIST OF IMAGES

---

vii

### ACKNOWLEDGEMNTS

---

viii

<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	Broadening and Narrowing Horizons <i>North American Borderlands, the Mexican Heartland, and the Pacific World in Acapulco</i>	1
<b>CHAPTER I</b>	Acapulco and the Making of the Pacific Borderlands <i>Migrants, Maritime Business, and the California Gold Rush, 1849-1852</i>	65
<b>CHAPTER II</b>	The Revolution of Ayutla and the Scramble for Port Cities <i>Caudillos, Maritime Traffic, and Pacific Markets in Mid-Century Mexico, 1853-1855</i>	97
<b>CHAPTER III</b>	“A Poor Village of Fishermen” <i>Commercial, Urban, and Demographic Stagnation in Nineteenth-Century Acapulco</i>	153
<b>CHAPTER IV</b>	The Port of Call in the New Pacific <i>Services, Coasting Trade, and Seaport Life in Acapulco, 1869-1914</i>	199
<b>CHAPTER V</b>	Roads, Merchants, and Revolutionaries in the Utopian Port <i>Mobility, Connectivity, and the Old Order, 1915-1927</i>	244
<b>CHAPTER VI</b>	Motorists, Generals, and Merchants in the Fading Port Town <i>Post-Revolutionary Mobility and an Urban Economy in Transition, 1927-1946</i>	298

<b>CHAPTER VII</b>	Creating the Coastal City <i>City Planning, Urban Development, and Postwar Tourism, 1945-1955</i>	337
<b>CHAPTER VIII</b>	The Making of a Boomtown <i>Regional Planning, Big Business, and the Rush to the Coast c. 1950-1970</i>	395
<b>CHAPTER IX</b>	The Boomtown and the Informal City <i>Migration, the Working Poor, and Services in Acapulco, c1940-1970</i>	446
<b>CHAPTER X</b>	The Kaleidoscopic City <i>Image Economies, the Advertisement Machine, and the “Imaginario de Acapulco”</i>	517
<b>CONCLUSION</b>	The ‘Void Pacific’ and the Mexican Seaside: <i>A Synthesis and Cultural Reappraisal of Urban Change and Coastal Development in Acapulco and Mexico, 1849-1970</i>	548
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY</b>	_____	569

## **LIST OF FIGURES**

Figure 1: Mobility in Acapulco and the Impact of the California Gold Rush, 1849-1852.....	76
Figure 2: American Expenditures in Mexico (according to U.S. Consular Districts along the border).....	325
Figure 3: Imports and Exports in Mexico from the Port of Acapulco, 1921-1948.....	334
Figure 4: Tourism Growth in Mexico, 1934-1958.....	350
Figure 5: Public Works and their Respective Costs in Acapulco for the Fiscal Year 1948.....	385
Figure 6: Tourism Growth in Acapulco and Mexico, 1958-1971.....	436
Figure 7: Hotel Development in Acapulco, 1960-1971.....	439
Figure 8: Population Growth in Acapulco, 1900-1990.....	458

## LIST OF IMAGES

Image 1: Port of Acapulco and Port Marqués by Alexander Von Humboldt.....	21
Image 2: Puerto de Acapulco en el Reino de Nueva España en el Mar del Sur, 1618.....	27
Image 3: Acapulco and Marqués flanked by the Costa Grande and Costa Chica.....	28
Image 4: Map of the Navigation Routes of the P.M.S.S.C., 1854.....	74
Image 5: El testamento de Don Año de 1852.....	125
Image 6: Tableau physique de la pente Occidental du Plateau de la Nouvelle Espagne, 1806....	165
Image 7: Perfil longitudinal desde la orilla del mar hasta el hospital civil Acapulco, 1889.....	208
Image 8: Puerto de Acapulco desde el semáforo, circa 1890-1900.....	305
Image 9: Vista panorámica del puerto, Acapulco, circa 1940s.....	345
Image 10: Flyer and Map of Fraccionamiento Península Las Playas, Acapulco, 1951.....	392
Image 11: Sectorial Map of the Greater Region of Acapulco, 1954.....	405
Image 12: Map of the Projected Plan of the Industrial Port of Puerto Marqués, 1954.....	407
Image 13: Map of the Projected Colonia Obrera in the Ejido Santa Cruz, 1954.....	469
Image 14: A Model of a <i>Casa Obrera</i> in Acapulco's Planned City of a <i>Colonia Proletaria</i> , 1955.....	471
Image 15: Photographs of Acapulco's Informal City, published in <i>National Geographic</i> , December 1964.....	494
Image 16: Photograph of "Enfermeras Acapulco," Acapulco, circa 1950.....	499
Image 17: General Plan of Acapulco from the Junta Federal de Mejores Materiales, 1955.....	511
Image 18: Photographs from <i>Acapulco en el sueño</i> (1951) and <i>Lady from Shanghai</i> (1947)....	526
Image 19: Airline Advertisements of Acapulco, 1950s and 1960s.....	531
Image 20: Casa del Señor Terrell, Acapulco, 1954.....	532
Image 21: Sketches of Raúl Baillères House (unbuilt), Acapulco, 1952.....	535

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

A few words of appreciation could never express how grateful I am to friends, family, colleagues, archivists, institutions, and mentors who have made this dissertation possible. Without their emotional, intellectual, academic, and financial support, this process would not have been as enriching. I dedicate this dissertation to them. Thank you.

I would like to express my gratitude to many scholars and academic communities, many of whom have greatly contributed to this dissertation. I wish to thank, first and foremost, my chair Emilio Kourí. He has been a wonderful adviser and acute critic, supervising this project from its earliest stages through to its completion. Throughout the process, he taught me how to see the macro picture without losing focus of the local and regional reality of Guerrero and Acapulco. Without his guidance and tutoring, this process would not have been possible. Mauricio Tenorio's erudition has been invaluable. His ability to make unexpected connections, his creativity, and historical imagination have greatly enriched my knowledge while forcing me to think always outside the box. His enthusiasm and words of encouragement have been a driving force behind the writing process, especially during the final stretch. It was wonderful to have Brodwyn Fischer in my committee. Her lectures, eloquence, and deep knowledge of the social sciences and urban studies have been a great source of inspiration. Teaching and working under her supervision have been pleasurable and edifying experiences. Graciela Márquez has truly been a breakthrough in my career. She saved me in San Diego from getting bogged down with nineteenth-century fiscal history and taught me the beauty of economic history. Like the rest in my committee, her knowledge, friendship, collegiality, and sage advice on all aspects of my dissertation and career will be forever valued. Discussions, workshop comments, and seminary work with Dain Borges have always been illuminating and learning from his deep and expansive knowledge of Latin

American history, theory, and social sciences undoubtedly strengthened my dissertation. Without their guidance and persistent help, this dissertation would not have been possible. Thank you.

Other scholars have greatly enhanced this dissertation. Alan Knight, Nara Milanich, and Claudio Lomnitz served as readers and advisors during my B.A. and M.A. studies. I am also in debt intellectually to all three, their influence can still be felt in this dissertation. For their comments and deep reading of several different drafts, of individual chapters or entire sections of my dissertation, either at UChicago, workshops or in conferences, I thank Erika Pani, Paul Gillingham, Diana Méndez, Pablo Piccato, Miguel Martínez, Antonio Azuela, Paul Gootenberg, Matthew Vitz, with whom I've also had many wonderful conversations that have greatly enriched my knowledge of Guerrero, urban studies, Mexican history, and other disciplines.

I would also like to thank my colleagues in Chicago, New York, Mexico City, and San Diego. The University of Chicago, through the history program, the Katz Center, the Center for Latin American Studies, and the Latin American History Workshop have allowed me to meet great friends and colleagues. I deeply appreciate all of their support. Thank you to Keegan Boyar, Mariana Flores, José Juan Pérez Meléndez, Emilio de Antuñano, Inés Escobar, Hilda Larrazabal, Amanda Mitchell, Chris Gatto, Chris Dunlap, Casey Lurtz, Christian Rocha, Diana Schwarz, Jackie Sumner, and Marco Torres. I would also like to thank the UChicago staff, Jamie Gentry, Claudia Giribaldi, Sonja Rusnak, David Goodwine, Franco Bavoni, and Irena Cajkova. The Center for U.S.-Mex Studies at the University of California, San Diego has provided a wonderful working space in California where I met great friends, colleagues, and mentors. I have greatly benefitted from the company of Amalia Pulido, Alejandra Trejo, Ana Bárbara Mungaray, Alejandra Díaz de León, Aileen Teague, Betsabé Román, Guillermo Yrizar, Tobin Hansen, Rafael Fernández de Castro, Cecilia Farfán, Lorraiane Affourdit, Martha Balaguera, Paolo Marinaro, Melissa Flocca, and Greg Mallinger. Also thanks to Teresita Rocha, Claudia Rafful, and Annick Bohórquez for

making the Tijuana-San Diego experience a great one. The same goes for the Columbia Latin American History Workshop for adopting me while living in NYC. Thanks to Pablo Piccato, Nara Milanich, Daniel Kressel, Sarah Hidalgo, Fabiola Enríquez, Rachel Newman, and Alfonso Salgado.

Countless friends have made the experience in Hyde Park wonderful and livable. UChicago experience Hilda, Inés, Charlie, Jorge, Roberto, Haena, Mariana, Franco, Yuna, Zeynep, José Juan, Chris, Emilio, Maria (Welch). Claudia, Yaniv, Tessy, Gaby, Alex, Rudo, Eileen, Andrew, Reggie, and Brad, as well as many other friends who visited, Anna, Gerard, Daniela, and Monica. I'm also deeply grateful to the Gelman for making Hyde Park feel like home to me.

I would also like to thank archivists and staff from many archives in Guerrero, Mexico, and the United States. Throughout all of these years, I have encountered wonderful, knowledgeable, and very helpful researchers and archivists. Similarly, I express my gratitude to CONACYT, the University of Chicago, the Andrew Mellon Foundation, the Center for U.S.-Mexican Studies, and the Orin Williams foundation for their financial support throughout these years.

And last but not least, I wish to thank my wonderful family. My mom, Adam, Claudia, Angélica, Eric, David, Mónica, and Victoria; Jorge, Mari, Margarita, and Horacio. I would like to especially thank my mom, Adam, and Eric for actively helping me in the research and writing process; my mom and Adam for reading, proofreading, and re-reading endless drafts; and Eric for sifting with me through mounts of dust to finally unearth a box or a document that might be of interest in the 200 and so uncatalogued boxes of the Junta Federal de Mejoras Materiales. Their unfailing support and unconditional love have made this project flourish. I cannot thank them enough.

## INTRODUCTION

### Broadening and Narrowing Horizons

*North American Borderlands, the Mexican Heartland, and the Pacific World in Acapulco*

This is a tale of conflict, exchange, and displacement on a coastal frontier, where a city of services emerged from the remnants of an old port of trade.<sup>1</sup> “From Pacific Gateway to Tourist City” details the drastic transformation of Acapulco from 1849 to c. 1970, from the California Gold Rush to the dawn of mass tourism. Yet to picture this transformation a certain type of narrative is mobilized to create a visual excursion around the long history of urban and economic change in Acapulco. This visual excursion has the shore as its point of departure. It starts from the bayside of Acapulco, takes us through the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, only to return to the point of departure, the shore, now to the beachside of Acapulco, changed beyond recognition.

This narrative initially draws our eyes away from landlocked worlds and towards the sea, looking out from the port town of Acapulco and into the Pacific Ocean, only to then gradually draw back our gaze, landwards, looking in from the city of Acapulco to the shore and into the Mexican heartland. From this vantage point, there was Asia and its trans-Pacific horizons, once towering over the shore, but during the nineteenth century growing narrow and dimmer for the declining port town, while in the distance, North American borderlands, Mexico’s heartland, and the beach looming large and closer for the emerging city of services.

To further elaborate on this excursion, take a look out and an entire world opens up in the Pacific Ocean, an old economic geography. It is a maritime world in motion without a clear center

---

<sup>1</sup> Karly Polanyi. “Ports of Trade in Early Societies.” *The Journal of Economic History* 23, no. 1 (1963): 30–45. Polanyi refers to a “port of trade” as an ancient economic institution that, in broad terms, emphasized administration over commercial competition. The Spanish mercantilist port of Acapulco resembles more this definition than one governed by the dynamics of a market society. For a discussion on the distinction between port and city and their relation to mobility and global flows in the urban literature, see Carola Hein. *Port Cities: Dynamic Landscapes and Global Networks*. (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2011)

and in turmoil during the nineteenth century. Acapulco, having linked Asia with the Americas for nearly three centuries, eventually lost all commercial centrality, a reflection of Mexico's decline in the Pacific World during the nineteenth century. As the Spanish Empire collapsed and the silk-silver routes between Manila and Acapulco disappeared in the 1820s, coastal frontiers, borderlands, and the Pacific seaboard began to shade into one another as never before in North America. This was the world of the Pacific borderlands, a nineteenth-century map and historical construct that no longer exists. Entire coastlines were destroyed and recreated by sudden shifts in the movement of people. Steamships, revolutions, and gold rushes set off ripples across the Pacific World as migrants surged and linked coastlines and frontiers in unexpected ways. In this world, boundaries in North America shifted and nations wavered at the edges.

From afar, one can see the rise of California, with Acapulco beginning to service the movement and regular trade routes of this booming market. Acapulco's trans-Pacific horizons kept narrowing until they disappeared altogether as the seaport became a pioneer station during the Gold Rush, a port of call steeped in the realm of North America's western borderlands. From this emerging world, people, trade, and capital began to flow as new Californian markets surged outwards to the Pacific Ocean. In this vortex of change, Acapulco became a pioneer station during the 1849 Gold Rush. "Nowadays that steamers have replaced galleons, the seaport starts to revive," noted a historian upon visiting its bay in the mid-nineteenth century.<sup>2</sup> From the perspective of Acapulco, the Pacific Mail Steamship Company would only arrive to replace the Manila Galleon, and the seaport would continue to function as an intermittent, if less glorified, town on the edge of the Pacific World. Yet, instead of trading with goods, Acapulco slowly began to evolve its economy and produce more services. It began to channel the slow-motion movement of people

---

<sup>2</sup> Benjamín Vicuña Mackenna. *Páginas de mi diario durante tres años de viajes: 1853. -1854. -1855.* (Santiago: Imprenta del Ferrocarril, 1856), 12

who moved back and forth through a network of interconnected ports that stretched from Panama to San Francisco. For the rest of the century, Acapulco remained disconnected from the Mexican heartland, with no railroads, only the old winding paths that remained from the old colonial paths. Acapulco, still deeply connected to the Pacific, existed as a city servicing steamships, black markets, revolutions, and maritime traffic. Once the first tarmac road connected the Pacific port to Mexico City in 1927, after the Mexican Revolution, the last remains of this transit town disappeared. Acapulco would ultimately reemerge as a tourist city in the twentieth century.

To continue our visual excursion, now look back to the shore in the twentieth century and a new economic geography begins to appear for Acapulco: the desire to consume and enjoy the shore in warmer climates. On the foreground, the beach, North America and the Mexican heartland, begin to move closer, with their massive consumer markets surging forth and taking over Acapulco's economy. Here, the landlocked world of the tourist city emerges in the twentieth century, and Acapulco begins to service the movement of people, goods, and capital from landlocked places to the shore, a momentous shift that transformed Acapulco, this time, beyond recognition.

All from the start, the simple construction of a road, connecting Mexico City to Acapulco, set off a chain reaction that would transform Acapulco profoundly. Motorists and adventurers arrived. Post-revolutionary officials, tourists, and city planners followed suit; they overhauled the port's infrastructure. Tourism, services, and beach leisure took over as circuits of mobility were redrawn over old ones by revolutions in transportation and new systems of communication over land, air, and sea in North America. Acapulco was the lucky byproduct of war, revolution, and new transport communications. The 1940s small port town would grow into a coastal city by the 1960s. Thus, the town at the edge of the Pacific vanished, and along with it, the seaport's old world of maritime exchange, disappearing altogether at the edge of consumer capitalism. From then

onwards, Acapulco turned into a site of beach leisure, only to become irreversibly tied to Mexico City's markets and to international circuits of mass tourism. It grew into one of the first boomtowns of mass tourism in North America.

Once the narrative and visual excursion comes full circle, as one reaches the point of departure, the shore, it is possible to capture from this vantage point the entire view of the landscape of history in post-colonial Acapulco. And yet, as if through the looking glass, one starts "looking out in all directions over the country – and a most curious country it was."<sup>3</sup> What for centuries was expected to happen in Acapulco, never happened; and what seemed unrealistic, ultimately happened. In the end, what was left of Acapulco in this strange land was an unusual city of services that in the twentieth century quickly supplanted Acapulco's four hundred years of seaport history. Ultimately, one of North America's most important port cities in the Pacific completely vanished, replaced by one of the first boomtowns of mass tourism. Why this came to be is one of the central paradoxes explored in this story, while the history of this city of services—Acapulco's many shapes and forms of urban change, its history of decline and reinvention, boom and bust—is the main subject of this study.

Acapulco's particular transition from a Pacific port city to a coaling station to a boomtown of mass tourism reflects a sea change in the relationship drawn not only between North America, the Mexican heartland, and the Pacific World, but also between port cities and their relationship with the sea. The present story is one of reinvention. In its most essential aspects, it is about the city's displacement of economic activities, "from bayside to beachside;" a Pacific gateway, or seaport, that became a tourist city.<sup>4</sup> One of the central arguments in this dissertation is that beach

---

<sup>3</sup> Quoted from Lewis Carroll *Through the Looking Glass*. Champaign, Ill. : Boulder, Colo.: Project Gutenberg ; NetLibrary.

<sup>4</sup> The phrase was coined by Jack E. Davis, *The Gulf: The Making of an American Sea*, 1 edition (New York: Liveright, 2017). 223-261. See his chapter on the onset of beach tourism along the Gulf coast in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century.

tourism in Mexico emerged, initially, from Acapulco and the Mexican Pacific coast, when the seaport, beginning in the late 1920s, quickly surged as a resort town, transforming bayside trade into beachside consumption, all in the same geographical space: Acapulco's Santa Lucía Bay. It came with a reinterpretation of seaside aesthetics, natural beauty, and social practices: lucrative seaside beauty began in Acapulco, even though it was not exclusive to the place, if we bear in mind how underdeveloped beach tourism remained in the Caribbean up until the 1970s. Yet Acapulco became the first epicenter of seaside change in Mexico. Beach tourism from then on spread to the rest of Mexico's Pacific Coast, eventually reaching the Gulf Coast and the Mexican Caribbean in the second half of the twentieth century.

Furthermore, there is another side to the argument that beach tourism and the Mexican seaside emerged from Acapulco and from the country's Pacific coast. Not only is this a story about reinvention, it is also about decline, about the effects and consequences of Mexico's commercial decline in the Pacific World and its local impact at a city and regional level in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. A qualification, then, to the central argument is that the rise of Mexican seaside tourism in the twentieth century, would not have spread as quickly and ubiquitously across Mexico's Pacific seaboard had many of these coastal regions not declined commercially in the first place. Beach tourism was the direct result of regional economic decline; it swept across disconnected port cities and economically depressed seaside economies, like Acapulco's, along the Mexican Pacific Coast. Had commerce and industry, the great barriers of "lucrative natural beauty," been as robust on the Pacific Coast as they were in the Gulf of Mexico and Caribbean, tourism perhaps would not have spread as quickly and forcefully as it did in Acapulco and Mexico's Pacific regions.

Thus, equally important is the central claim that the origins of the Mexican seaside, beach holidays, and resort tourism can be found in the struggles of Mexico's economically depressed

Pacific coast. The origins lay in the scramble to revive commerce, connect port cities to larger markets, and find ways out of a system of collapsed seaside economies. Acapulco was the most spectacular story as the city grew out of a “poor village of fishermen” as many observers noted. Yet the nostalgic patina of Acapulco’s so-called “golden years,” all the glamour and corruption, the contrasts, the luxury, the poverty on the beach, and all the alluring images conjured up by the Mexican Miracle and its modernizing authoritarianism has so far prevented many scholars from drawing Acapulco’s far more interesting conclusions for the study of regions and cities. An important conclusion has been persistently overlooked: at the time, it stood as one of the most important international feats of urban reinvention and economic renewal in the postwar years.

All in all, the story of Acapulco neatly encapsulates the changing relation between Pacific commerce and seaside tourism in Mexico. This explains why many old commercial ports in Mexico’s Pacific—Mazatlán, San Blas, Manzanillo, Barra Navidad, among many others—eventually turned to beach tourism and became resorts that irradiated seaside change to nearby coastal regions along the Pacific littoral. Acapulco’s story in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries is central to this momentous displacement of geographies, social mores, and economic activities along the coast.

To further understand why this particular displacement of worlds happened, it is also important to understand that Acapulco’s history has been, all along, one of a constant struggle between historical actors looking outwards to the Pacific Ocean or inwards to the Mexican heartland, but always looking at a single view at the expense of the other. The present story explores this historical dilemma and how Acapulco’s actors were able to solve it by creating an economy that joined both seemingly distant worlds: the sea and the interior. Hence this story looks for answers in the questions posed by people reflecting, at times, with their backs turned to the sea, but on some other occasions, with their backs to the heartland. How to connect the city; when,

how, and why people moved through Acapulco, through which channels and for what purpose, became overriding questions for those involved in the city's transformation, as the port's trading functions disappeared and services multiplied, with an accompanying change in urban attitudes towards the water and the seashore. I show how such questions became more and more important for historical actors as they sought to reshape the face of Acapulco. Only then, as a result of this simple change of perspective, can one understand how the influence of the Pacific World and Mexico's heartland on Acapulco waxed and waned over the years and centuries.

Since its creation as a port of trade in the sixteenth century, Acapulco has been built, destroyed, and recreated by the ebb and flow of people across the Pacific and around its shores. Yet everything changed in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. I explore how and why post-colonial Acapulco was transformed by this world of constant movement. Instead of continuing to function as a commercial port, it turned into a city of services as people moved through the city and deeply transformed it. The port began performing key intermediary functions, as it served to channel movement and mediate other forms of coastal exchange. In a history of great leaps and discontinuities, sometimes violent displacements --of groups, families, and individuals— that changed the make-up of classes in the port, this study shows how shifting generations of merchants, revolutionaries, businessmen, boosters, and political actors in Acapulco reacted to these profound changes. Immersed in the politics of mobility, economic renewal, and urban development, these actors pushed and pulled new flows of people— namely, moving populations of migrants, travelers, and tourists— in the service of competing interests and frontier markets. This process gradually turned an old seaport into a seaside economy, showing how, in the end, an intermittent town became a permanent place through new forms of movement at sea and towards the shore.

A powerful narrative, then, has indelibly marked the history of urban change in Acapulco. The port has always been a receding paradise in the popular imagination. Its deep and certainly old history has been reinterpreted and understood in cycles of splendor, decadence, and renewal. For one, colonial splendor remained an illusion, thereafter setting off Acapulco's permanent decadence, always in decline and in dire need of social, urban, and economic renewal. This powerful myth—the myth of decline, revival, and renaissance—has deeply shaped how historical actors have come to understand and reinterpret Acapulco's past to thereby act upon its city. From an urban vantage point, this dissertation unearths these questions, most of them elicited from historical actors in Acapulco who, in many sources, try to explain the port city's perplexing story of decline, fall, and reinvention.

The resulting story thus defies some conventional stories and explanations in urban history, urban economics, and the New Economic Geography, particularly those that have made urban growth an inevitable outcome of commercial advantage and central location. Up until the twentieth century, Acapulco was subject to the tyranny of commercial determinism, location, and ideas on “first nature.” That is, ideas and theories that explain the growth of cities at strategic sites in terms of trade and central markets.<sup>5</sup> After many false-starts, however, Acapulco kept declining commercially despite its distinctive natural advantages: a deep-water bay, completely sheltered from the ocean, surrounded by bountiful natural resources, strategically positioned between navigable currents in the Pacific Ocean, and connecting Central America with the North American West Coast.

---

<sup>5</sup> See for instance Paul Krugman's reflection on urban growth and the influence of first and second nature factors on the urban history of Chicago by William Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West* (W. W. Norton & Company, 2009) in Paul Krugman, “First Nature, Second Nature, and Metropolitan Location,” *Journal of Regional Science* 33, no. 2 (May 1, 1993): 129–44. “

The city never became the modern commercial seaport everyone envisioned. All along, the beach, the seashore, and the aesthetic qualities of the coast, the bay, and the landscape were never seen as natural advantages for urban growth. What many urban historians and economists of the New Economic Geography refer to as “first nature” (natural, in opposition to “second” nature, human-constructed) advantages of location were all, in fact, socially and culturally construed; qualities that focused solely on geographic location for commercial and industrial growth. The reinterpretation of Acapulco’s natural advantages could only be accomplished through a social and cultural re-appreciation of the ecology of the place which led to the consumption of Acapulco’s nature and seaside aesthetics. Only then did a new economy emerge, but one based on different sources of urban and economic growth: services and consumption.

In sum, “second nature,” that is the self-reinforcing process of urban agglomeration, happened when Acapulco’s coastal geography was reinterpreted, culturally, socially, and spatially. Henceforward, the city was repurposed for different economic activities through increasing social and cultural interactions with the sea and the seashore. Acapulco’s story thus answers new questions on the dynamics of urban growth, connectedness, and the politics of mobility between the Pacific World, North America, and the Mexican heartland. Engaging such questions, this dissertation offers an alternative story of how, at the edge of coastal frontiers, new service cities have emerged and grown from obsolete trading ports, while examining a central paradox in the broader urban literature: the decline of port towns saw the rise of coastal cities that lost their primeval economic relationship with the sea. Acapulco, after all, became a full-fledged tourist city when its age-old port disappeared and the beach displaced the Pacific from its central role in Acapulco, in a similar way as the story of so many other seaports. In the end, the Mexican seaside emerged with full force when the great ocean in Acapulco turned into “the void Pacific.” Only buzzing beach remained, with no commerce or movement to be seen at sea.

Global and long-range thinking are inseparable from this historical analysis. The ten chapters that follow are organized around subtle shifts, abrupt halts, and long-term changes that marked Acapulco's urban transformation. These changes, continuities, and turning points in the narrative challenge more traditional ends and starting points in Mexican and U.S. historiography. Each chapter moves forward in rough chronological succession across the nineteenth and twentieth centuries from 1849 to c.1970.

Two intertwined stories are told in this study: the deeply local, small connections of urban and economic life in the changing space of the bay and the port city; and the global, the shifting world of the Pacific, North America, and the Mexican heartland in Acapulco. Both stories are woven together into a comprehensive history of urban change in a single port city. There is, however, an underlying premise in the telling of this story: the tourist city was never a foretold passage, nor was the decline of the Pacific port. One way of interpreting urban change in Acapulco is to construct a historical narrative that emphasizes outcomes and end points, focusing on the inevitable rise of the tourist city or, vice versa, on the irreversible decline of a port. This type of narrative obscures a more complicated, protracted, at times chaotic process of urban change. Rather, the story I tell is embedded within the shifting economic geography of Acapulco. It brings in the possibility of unexpected shifts and contingencies, when highlands, maritime and borderland regions began to shape one another, in ever-more volatile ways, until they created an all-encompassing system of mobility and exchange that connected landlocked and littoral histories in new forms.

The first two chapters demonstrate how the region and the historical map of the Pacific borderlands were formed in the context of Acapulco and Mexico's commercial decline in the Pacific World. The 1849 California Gold Rush clashed and then merged with Acapulco and other Mexican seaports on the Pacific, eventually creating a relationship of interdependence in the

context of Mexico's commercial decline in the Pacific. This deeply shaped a series of events that shook Mexico between 1849 and 1857. I argue that the commercial and fiscal confrontation in Acapulco between central authorities and a crescent of coastal and frontier regions in Mexico is an integral part of this seemingly distant transformation in the Pacific Ocean and the North American West.

Chapter 1 shows how, throughout the years of 1849 and 1852, thousands of migrants, pioneers, gold seekers, filibusters, merchants, and privateers swirled around Acapulco and ushered in a new era for the port. This unprecedented movement of people altered old bonds between seaports in the Pacific World and the west coast of North America; in these roiled waters, Acapulco slowly began to change its urban economy. It acquired a position of prominence as a transport hub, beginning to communicate an interregional network of coastal traffic and trade between San Francisco and Panama. Acapulco, through this movement, slowly consolidated its role as a port of call whose economic activities revolved around transportation, coastal trade, lodging and refueling services. The chapter further examines the impact of the California Gold Rush on a nascent political and economic alliance that sought to transform the old, declining port of Acapulco into a modern transport hub adapted to the new realities of Pacific mobility in the 1850s. The urban space of the seaport, however, remained as intermittent yet unvarying, as it had always been. Very little changed. The political imaginary did change, however, and drastically so. The result was not the creation of a modern commercial port, I argue in this chapter, but rather, the emergence of a modest coaling station with immodest revolutionary ambitions.

Chapter 2 explores the underbelly of Acapulco's new economy during the gold rush as it became a dangerous breeding ground of regional rebellions, black markets, and foreign complicity, always at risk of turning local skirmishes into national revolutions against central authorities. The chapter analyzes how the California Gold Rush created a vigorous market for the bankrolling of

popular insurrections in Acapulco and other ports on Mexico's Pacific littoral. It goes on to show how the customhouse of mid-nineteenth century Acapulco, a veritable frontier regime, ended up entangling the Ayutla Revolution (1853-55) with the California Gold Rush. Retelling this well-known national story from the perspective of maritime and borderlands history means exploring key connections between revolution, population flows, and changing markets in the Pacific borderlands. Acapulco's customhouse and port authorities, in their attempt to regulate a new era of Pacific mobility and migration in the 1840s and 1850s, stepped into the maelstrom of smuggling, filibusterism, and the expansion of a seaport economy in Acapulco that profited from black and grey markets—of arms, ammunition, merchandise, capital, and mercenaries—spreading their networks from San Francisco to Panama. I argue that such networks fueled in significant ways cycles of insurrection in Acapulco and Guerrero, eventually provoking the fall of one of the most aggressive and comprehensive efforts to create a centralized state in mid-nineteenth century Mexico, Santa Anna's Dictatorship (1853-55). By the 1850s, I conclude in the chapter, Acapulco and a network of interconnected Pacific ports increasingly struggled to mediate between the relentless logic of revolution and civil war in North America and the volatility of Gold Rush markets on the west coast. This became the new norm of an emergent littoral economy along Mexico's Pacific Coast.

The next two chapters (3 and 4) address the central question of commercial decline vis-à-vis a rising service (or refueling) economy, which, once more, resulted in a lack of urban growth in the port city. Acapulco continued to function as transport hub that fostered circuits of exchange and mobility in the Pacific borderlands. But it also became a city in flux amid an unstoppable wave of revolution that continued for years, renewing in different forms under further cycles of revolution, reaction, civil wars, and foreign intervention in the United States, Mexico, and Central America in the late 1850s and 1860s. During this period, Acapulco continued to lose most of its

significant economic ties to the world of commerce until it became a veritable commercial backwater in the closing decades of the nineteenth century. It became, however, a coaling station and important refueling stop, situated halfway between California and Panama. The period of Acapulco's significant commercial decline in the Pacific runs from the inauguration of the transoceanic railway in 1869 through to the Panama-Pacific International Exhibition in San Francisco that celebrated in 1915 the opening of the isthmian passageway, amid celebrations that erased Acapulco from the history of the Pacific World.

Chapter 3, from a macro-level perspective, tells the story of Acapulco's commercial decline and the rise of a coaling station. A series of interconnected causal factors became serious obstacles to Acapulco's ability to take off as a commercial port after the 1849 Gold Rush, and yet these causal factors were also responsible for the creation of a new seaport economy in Acapulco. The period of decline, between 1869 and 1915, is the main focus of this chapter as it traces the overarching changes in infrastructure, public works, commercial competition, and communications that precipitated the commercial decline of Acapulco and Mexico in the Pacific World. There were a series of opportunities associated with several trans-isthmic infrastructural projects in Mexico. But they all turned out to be missed opportunities for Acapulco. The system of Mexican seaports on the Pacific was unsettled by wild swings in commercial fortunes set off by a "race" to connect both oceans Ports disappeared as quickly as they had risen. Even though Acapulco eventually lost in this race to connect trade between the Atlantic and Pacific oceans, many opportunities still flowed from its coaling business as a refueling stop in the middle of the Pacific. Hence a measure of contingency is preserved by emphasizing individual decisions regarding commerce, colonization, public works as well as responses from the local merchant elite and Porfirian officials to these overarching changes, which amounted to the creation of a modest coaling port. In the end, merchants and officials of Porfirian Mexico failed to bring Acapulco under

the sway of national and international markets. This free fall was hard to stop by the end of the century, although Porfirian officials continued to toil under the illusion of temporary commercial decline and inevitable revival.

Chapter 4 moves from the macro to the micro level of Acapulco's history. Even though commercial isolation became Acapulco's major marker in the late nineteenth century, I argue that the city reveals a hidden economy and dynamism. The seaport's society and economy thrived, at the imperceptible local level, as the city fell squarely at the service of the ebb and flow of population movements and steamship between California, Mexico, and Central America. Its most important function was to serve as a coaling station when the industrial era began making headway against the vastness of the Pacific Ocean. Acapulco's urban landscape and society continued to be a reflection of its function, no longer as a robust commercial seaport, but as a servicing port of call, reinforcing a centuries-old pattern of lack of urban growth. The port's society thus created, as a response, a particularly weak monopoly around a more or less predictable pattern of movement at sea. The seaport's Porfirian elite, a group bound by debt, credit, and family ties, profited from refueling, transport, retailing, and credit services in Acapulco, connecting its seaport, hinterland, and coastal frontier to the Pacific coast. With no railroads, however, the port remained disconnected from the Mexican heartland for the rest of the nineteenth century; yet Acapulco's elite managed to serve as an outpost of Porfirian control on an indomitable coastal frontier. The chapter goes on to explain how the seaport's social fabric and economic life adapted to Acapulco's new reality of commercial isolation, demographic stagnancy, and overland disconnection. In sum, on the eve of the Mexican Revolution in 1910, the real social, economic, and urban revolution of Acapulco had already taken place in the nineteenth century when Acapulco silently shifted from a commercial seaport to a service town.

The following two chapters (5 and 6) reveal how the contours of a new seaside economy slowly began to show through in Acapulco. Surges of people during and after the Mexican Revolution arose from older, slow-moving channels of mobility on the Pacific coast. Workers, migrants, refugees, and exiles had been moving back and forth since the mid nineteenth century, between California, the Pacific Coast in Mexico, including the Gulf of California, and Central America. This older story of movement in the Pacific overlapped with the history of the Mexican Revolution and its aftermath. As a result, new flows of people began circulating at a greater speed, in shorter multidirectional flows, like never before; a movement unseen since the 1849 Gold Rush that provoked the mass circulation of migrants through Mexico's Pacific ports. From a *longue durée* perspective, these new forms of mobility also suggest the further integration of Mexico's Pacific seaside economies into California and its consumer markets, revealing how this process of incorporation moved at a breakneck pace during and after the Mexican Revolution.

Chapter 5 analyzes how, between 1915 and 1927, two silent revolutions in mobility and connectivity profoundly shaped Acapulco's economy as large numbers of people were set in motion by the Mexican Revolution and the opening of the Panama Canal. It tells the story of a city in flux, when the Mexican Revolution reached its nadir in 1915. Mobile workers, evacuees, exiles, soldiers, refugees, migrants, and an invasion of revolutionary forces and bandits began to dominate the rhythm of seaport life. At the edge of a coastal frontier, the flow of people posed a formidable challenge to Acapulco's inhabitants. Once again, the local elite proved its resilience and flexibility by becoming, once more, an itinerant group, moving constantly while negotiating their survival in the face of violence, popular upheaval, and instability. Simultaneously, a workers' movement was formed in this highly volatile context, also proving its resilience and capacity for organization in the face of widening spirals of revolution and counterrevolution. The diffusion of new ideas mobilized workers in the port of call— artisans, ship builders, and longshoremen—as new forms

of “radical labor mobility” appeared in the region. Hence a reenactment of gold rush conflicts, with the atavistic revival of filibusterism, played out in the Pacific, as socialists, anarchosyndicalists, and followers of Magonismo dominated the region. This medley of revolutionaries promoted the building of a road between Mexico City and Acapulco and sought to reset the terms of an old order, dominated by Acapulco’s elite, which had politically excluded a growing number of workers in the port’s service sector.<sup>6</sup>

Chapter 6 show how roads finally arrived in 1927, connecting Acapulco to markets in the Mexican heartland. Acapulco’s local elite had been weakened by revolutionary movements that emanated from seaport workers who sought to change the terms of Acapulco’s socioeconomic order. But in an unexpected turn of events, after 1927, revolutionaries, workers, and merchants were all swept aside by yet another wave of new actors drawn from new flows generated by Panama’s steamship traffic, by new road traffic from Mexico-City and from the International Pacific Highway that connected Los Angeles with the Pacific Coast and Mexico City, in the 1920s. Meanwhile, American economic interests in the northwestern portion of Mexico’s Pacific seaboard kept trickling their way down to its southern coast. Motorists and steamship travelers from Mexico and the United States visited Acapulco, some remained and carved out a fortune for themselves in the port. This movement was intensified by post-revolutionary socioeconomic mobility, as rural migrants, merchant and revolutionary returnees, generals, and businessmen rose and fell in the port’s shifting social classes. Mobility had a strong impact on Acapulco’s seaport economy, shifting from maritime, refueling, and transport services to beach leisure, tourism, and consumption. In the end, caught between the turmoil of continuing revolutions in Guerrero and traffic flowing from roads and steamers, Acapulco’s inhabitants found themselves at the cutting

---

<sup>6</sup> “Radical labor mobility” was coined by Claudio Lomnitz-Adler in his *The Return of Comrade Ricardo Flores Magón*. xviii

edge of new markets and circuits of mobility. As a result, Mexico's Pacific seaside economies emerged as important sites of exchange and consumption.

The next three chapters (7, 8, and 9) analyze the planning of the resort, the destruction of the refueling port, and the emergence of a boomtown in Acapulco. By the mid twentieth century, Acapulco was a boomtown in the making. This is the well-known story of Acapulco's spectacular rise and sudden prosperity, when the city surged forth and sprawled from the late 1950s onwards, when its population soared and thousands of migrants and tourists were attracted by economic opportunities and the advertisement of the resort. This is a moment in time when the rush to the coast of people and capital, combined with the unintended consequences of regional planning, created a boomtown which at the time appeared, deceptively, to have appeared out of nowhere.

Chapter 7 explores the reaction of boosters, architects, engineers, political actors, urban planners, and businessmen to larger transformation, their efforts to accommodate and create new tourism flows under the Junta Federal de Mejoras Materiales, a state-led agency dedicated to public works and urban development in seaports and border towns, and the implementation of Acapulco's urban plan, the *Plano Regulador*. I explore the rise of a tourist economy through the interplay of Acapulco's economic boosters, new population flows, and foreign and national actors. Their interests converged on the real estate business, large infrastructural works, and land development companies, the *compañías fraccionadoras*. This initial development, in conjunction with the ensuing wave of expropriations of old merchant property and ejidal lands, drove Acapulco into new forms of movement, services, and circulation.

Chapter 8 explores how Acapulco received an unprecedented flux of tourists and capital after the 1959 Cuban Revolution and a technological revolution in air travel and commercial transport at sea. Containerization and the shift to air travel reinforced larger forces that made it impossible for the tourist city to diversify and recover its old commercial port. I argue that at play

was the postwar boom of consumer capitalism, which completed the urban transformation of the seaside in both California and the Pacific littoral in Mexico, as coasts and harbors were turned into sites of leisure, urbanization, and consumption. Moreover, the 1958 Cuban Revolution cut off La Habana from Caribbean circuits of mass tourism generated in the United States, which were quickly redirected to the west coast. I argue that the tourist city was neither inevitable nor predetermined. Rather, it emerged, as a viable option, when the logic of tourism and urban planning in the new seaside economy set in motion a piecemeal reshuffling of the multiple bonds that had connected Mexico's Pacific coast with declining ports like Mazatlán, Zihuatanejo, San Blas, and other ports and coastal regions.

Chapter 9 tells the story of the informal city and its different manifestations in Acapulco, showing how informality changed in tandem with the maturation of the tourist industry and with the demographic explosion that accompanied the booming city. A land-based regime of capital accumulation from tourist services began to be dominated by speculators, cronies, and unresponsive bureaucracies that failed to provide basic services and bring order to sprawling urbanization in Acapulco. Yet, this chapter argues, people kept migrating to the port in search of better opportunities, however deficient, in this new "welfare city." By tracing the spatial transformation of informality, I explore the pauperization and corporatization of labor mobility under the tourist industry. This resulted in an organized force that spurred a series of land invasions between 1958 to 1967, changing once again the urban face of Acapulco. For the first time, exclusionary forms of urban mobility and an unequal order that had emerged in the tourist city, were being seriously challenged. The wave of violence in the late 1960s stood as a reminder that Acapulco's innovative model of coastal development, based on an agglomeration economy of services catering to certain floating populations but not to others, was increasingly under strain.

The dissertation deliberately ends in 1970 at the onset of the age of mass tourism, when an urban boom in Acapulco ended with a violent bust, and a new cycle beginning thereafter.

The last chapter (Chapter 10) goes on to analyze the creation of Acapulco's urban imaginary attempts to advertise and sell Acapulco as a capital of leisure to a growing postwar Mexican and American consumer market that emphasized traveling and tourism as new and modern forms of mobility on the west coast of Mexico and the United States. Businessmen, bankers, boosters, and investors changed the nature of finance and tourism in a city whose future had been irreversibly pegged to its own successful image. The relation between the city and its potential visitors became mediated by the mystifying effect of cosmopolitanism, international film festivals, Mexican and American advertisement campaigns, Hollywood, and the Golden Age of Mexican Cinema. A speculative and creative society, as ephemeral as its vast temporary population, filled urban ventures with optimism, experimentation, ambition, and utopias all projected onto Acapulco's image, an image which was then refracted to national, regional, and transnational consumer markets.

The bay and the city thus began to trade services and images instead of goods and commodities. This entailed a broader reinterpretation of the role of obsolete port cities and their new relationship to the sea and shore. The beach became an integral part of many coastal cities in this new seaside economy; in some cases, like Acapulco, the entire city began revolving around the shore, the beach, and the beauty of the bay, all the more to satisfy the needs of an emerging culture of leisure, water-gazing, and beach tourism. Acapulco ultimately became one of those old port cities that had fundamentally altered its age-old relationship to the sea and the shore.



## **The Geography of Transpacific Acapulco: A Deep History of Commerce, Exchange, and Mobility.**

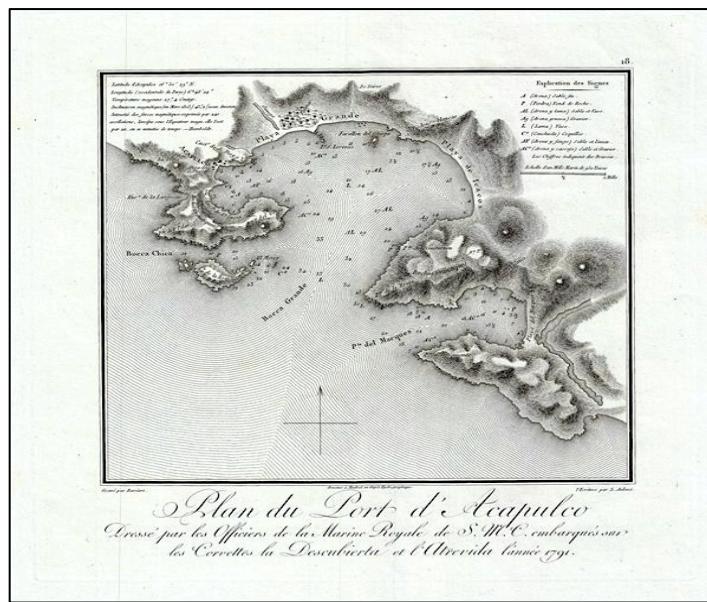
The story of Acapulco's geography sits at the intersection of regional, maritime, and global history. Before it turned into a tourist resort, the seaport had always been an intermittent town at the edge of a coastal frontier. For centuries, geography, routine, and ritual had imposed a predictable rhythm on the pace of social and commercial life, mobility, and exchange between the sea and the port city. Hence this is also the story about the gradual making of an urban place, shaped by an ongoing interaction between the sea and the interior.

A brief description of the city and the lay of the land reveals Acapulco's shifting urban economy in relation to the Pacific World and the Mexican heartland. Up until the early twentieth century, Acapulco was a town disconnected from the center, serving as an outpost of the Mexican heartland, yet linked to a deep history of movement, exchange, and global connectedness in the Pacific World. From the twentieth century onwards, however, the roles were reversed and the port was finally cut off completely from Pacific commerce, but tied progressively closer to the Mexican heartland and consumer markets in North America. The resulting story is the following: Acapulco, serving as a prominent global port, was insignificant and intermittent, spatially speaking, a backwater urban economy at the forefront of early globalization and mercantilism. But as soon as the port turned to services, led first by maritime transport then by consumer capitalism in Mexico and North America, a vibrant urban economy emerged from the lagging edge of global markets.

Acapulco is the product of a geological accident. The great land mass of the Sierra Madre Occidental breaks several miles before reaching the shore and drops precipitously only to resume its downward course, smoothly undulating its way down to the Pacific Ocean until it disappears into a vast territory of coastal lowlands. From this flat coastal terrain, a massive protrusion of granite rock surges forward; its headlands reaching deep into the sea, thinning out as they move

farther away from the shore, until they begin to curve landwards leaving in this movement a trail of round sea-worn boulders on the calm waters of the main Santa Lucía Bay.

**Image 1: Port of Acapulco and Port Marques by Alexander Von Humboldt, 1811**



Port of Acapulco and Port Marques by Alexander Von Humboldt.,  
*Atlas Geographique Et Physique Du Royaume De La Nouvelle-Espagne*, (Paris, 1811)  
Sourced from: [www.geographicus.com](http://www.geographicus.com)

The bay of Acapulco, as many travelers described it, resembles an “amphitheater;” a “mountain lake” at the end of the Sierra Madre del Sur. Crescent-shaped, this “amphitheater” separates the main bay from a smaller one east of Acapulco, Puerto Marqués [see Image 1 above]. Coastal wetlands flank both bays with a system of rivers, lagoons, salt marshes, and mangroves. A long strip of sand barriers stretches along the coast, thinly separating the ocean from these flood plains. It is through the ceaseless tidal activity, as waves roll in and draw back with the ebb and flow of people, that the surrounding coastline of Acapulco and the port city have been constantly broken and remade over the centuries.

In the popular imagination, through myths cultivated over the centuries, the history of Acapulco had produced an illusion of colonial splendor. Likened to the walled city of Manila, the

“Pearl of Orient,” where merchandise poured in from many remote corners of Asia going as far as Persia and Japan, Acapulco was “the Chief Mart of the South Sea, and Port for the Voyage to China,” noted an Italian traveler in the seventeenth century.<sup>7</sup> The bay’s physical geography was ideal: it was “one of the finest ports in the known world”, asserted Alexander von Humboldt’s in 1803.<sup>8</sup>

For centuries, the bay and the town were zones of exchange positioned at the dynamic forefront of early globalization. Spanish mercantilist interests in East Asia depended on the silk-silver trade between Acapulco and Manila, a commercial route that ran relatively uninterrupted for 250 years.<sup>9</sup> Yearly, in December, Acapulco was visited by great international fairs when the *Nao de China* docked at the port, linking the Pacific with the Atlantic worlds and initiating an exchange of goods and silver that reactivated far-flung mercantile routes from all over the interior of Mexico and the Pacific coast of the Americas. It received vessels from the Philippine Islands, Peru, Guayaquil, Panama, and the west coast of North America. Global trade in the Pacific converged on Acapulco as the city grew from three thousand inhabitants to nearly ten thousand people exchanging silk, spices, and silver. But there was no permanent multinational trade converging in Acapulco, no walled city protecting the flow of riches from Asia, like Manila; there was only silver, stacked and protected in warehouses, waiting to be loaded onto the next galleon. The fair and the merchandise in Acapulco, like its temporary population, would all eventually leave Acapulco. Local wealth never accumulated, for silver quickly sailed back to China, and the profits from it resumed their arduous journey back to the highlands. In this intermittent economy of flows and transit, the riches never stayed.

---

<sup>7</sup> John Francis Gemelli Careri, *A Crusing Voyage Round the World*, in Jean Barbot Churchill, *A Collection of Voyages and Travels*, IV, (London: Walthoe, 1732), 479

<sup>8</sup> Alexander Von Humboldt, *Political Essay on the Kingdom of New Spain*, Book I, Intro., XXXIV.

<sup>9</sup> For a classic history of this old imperial trading route see William Lytle Schurz, *The Manila Galleon* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1959)

Scholars of colonial Latin America and maritime East Asia have made important inroads into the history of two crucial spaces of early global exchange in the Pacific: the Province of Acapulco of New Spain in the South Seas, and Manila in the Philippines Islands in the China Seas. In the early phases of globalization, between 1500-1700, the province of Acapulco was both “an isolated edge” and a central node connecting the world. Much like Taiwan and the province of Fujian in China, like Luzon in the Philippines, Alta California in New Spain, or Esmeraldas in coastal Quito—these maritime regions, varying in centrality, linked a complex network of zones of exchange along the trans-Pacific silk roads between the Americas and Asia. For two centuries and a half, Acapulco and the rest of these zones of exchange in the Pacific depended on this maritime frontier between New Spain and China.<sup>10</sup>

Much has been written on the rise and decline of two older trans-Pacific systems of exchange. The oldest of them all, the “sea of islands,” connected the Pacific Ocean from north to south; the relatively newer one, the Manila-Acapulco maritime silk route, crossed the ocean from east to west for nearly three centuries. Their transformation and gradual erosion in the eighteenth and first half of the nineteenth century were partly a result of the fall of the Spanish Empire and the ascendancy of Anglo-American colonialism and interests in the Pacific. Regarding the Manila Galleon, the history of the “Spanish Lake” reveals more the aspirations of the Spanish Empire, what the Pacific should have looked like in the eyes of imperial Spain, than what the Pacific actually was and became: a vibrant oceanic space of exchange shaped primarily by East Asia and Spanish America, not Spain. As Mariano Bonialian argues, the silk routes between Manila and Acapulco, but also between the less-known route between Canton and El Callao, via the

---

<sup>10</sup> See the following examples. Arturo Giráldez. *The Age of Trade: The Manila Galleons and the Dawn of the Global Economy*. (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015); Birgit Tremml-Werner. *Spain, China, and Japan in Manila, 1571-1644: Local Comparisons and Global Connections*. (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2015); Tatiana Sejas. *Asian Slaves in Colonial Mexico: From Chinos to Indians*. (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2014)

Philippines—the latter beginning early in the eighteenth century—reflect a very complex world of cultural, commercial, religious, and social exchange between Asia and the Americas, which lasted almost three centuries, from the late sixteenth century up until, as other scholars argue, the 1840s. Particularly after the second half of the seventeenth century, this world became consolidated when the Philippines fell directly under the purview of New Spain. Ostwald Sales Colín argues that this world was created by Acapulco. This Pacific began to gradually dissolve in the second half of the eighteenth century but lingered on with the rise of San Blas and Canton and with the resilience of Acapulco after the fall of the Spanish Empire, up until the late 1840s when the entire commercial system disappeared under a sea change of fur pelts, guano, and gold.<sup>11</sup>

Historians have begun to pay more attention to the underexplored history of exchange in the Pacific during this early phase of globalization in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. When the Spanish conquered the Philippines in the 1570s, linking Asia with the Americas for the first time, they peeked into the impenetrable world of old rivalries and reluctant maritime kingdoms in the China Seas. These were like “the borderlands in a world at sea,” and great powers based on mobility and exchange emerged from these maritime realms. The zones of exchange on both sides of the Pacific were far more vibrant than the proponents of the Spanish lake would have it.

---

<sup>11</sup> Epeli Hau’ofa. “Our Sea of Islands.” *The Contemporary Pacific* 6, no. 1 (1994): 148–61; Mariano Bonialian. *El Pacífico hispanoamericano: política y comercio asiático en el imperio español, 1680-1784: la centralidad de lo marginal*. (México, D.F.: El Colegio de México, 2012); I argue that this period lasts up until the 1840s because San Blas, Canton, and Manila boomed, and Acapulco benefitted from this boom in commerce in the 1830s. For Canton and Guayaquil, the new centers in this unravelling system, see Louis Dermigny. *La Chine et l’Occident: le commerce à Canton au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle, 1719-1833*. (France: Impr. nationale, 1964). Several scholars had already noted that the Philippines was more the colony of New Spain, and that the Phillipines and Manila were far from the barren islands depicted by William Lyttle Schurz.. See Ostwald Sales Colín. *El movimiento portuario de Acapulco: el protagonismo de Nueva España en la relación con Filipinas, 1587-1648*. (Mexico: Plaza y Valdes, 2000); María del Carmen Yuste López and Guadalupe Pinzón Ríos (coords.), *A 500 años del hallazgo del Pacífico. La presencia novohispana en el Mar del Sur*, (México, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, Instituto de Investigaciones Históricas, 2016); Pierre Chaunu, *Les Philippines et le Pacifique des Ibériques (XVI<sup>e</sup>, XVII<sup>e</sup>, XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècles)*. Vol. 11–11 bis. ( Ports, routes, trafics,. Paris: S.E.V.P.E.N., 1960). But Bonialian goes a step further reaffirming that this was an oceanic world economy shaed by East Asia and Spanish America. The *lago indiano* with its neuralgic center in New Spain.

The history of the Chinese southern coastal provinces, particularly Fujian and Taiwan in the seventeenth centuries, and their relations with New Spain in the Philippines reveal the lines of powerful empires emerging in liminal spaces of intermediation and exchange at sea. Most revealing, for instance, is the story of the Zheng Clan. A veritable empire was founded by a pirate-merchant from Fujian who, rising to naval prominence as lord of the China Seas, in the seventeenth century, controlled a vast maritime organization that began mediating between the Manchus in inland China, the “seafaring folk of southern Fujian, the Portuguese of Macao, the Spanish of the Philippines, the Dutch of Taiwan, and the Japanese of Hirado.”<sup>12</sup>

The fascinating account of the Dominican Friar, Victorio Riccio, in his *Hechos de la orden de predicadores en el imperio de China* offers a window into the world of complex interactions in this frontier between the Spanish Empire (though, actually, New Spain in the Philippines) and a shifting world of Asian and European alliances in the China Seas. One of these interactions has been recently unearthed by historians of East Asian history who have detailed the complex diplomatic interactions between the “sea lord” Koxinga of Fujian, Victorio Riccio, and the Spanish governor of the Philippines Dressed in Chinese mandarin robes, Riccio arrived in Manila after being sent as a royal envoy by the sea lord Koxinga in Fujian. His diplomatic mission was to negotiate the terms of Spanish surrender with the governor of the Philippines, who in turn feared the Spanish Empire would suffer the same fate as the Dutch in Taiwan, recently vanquished by Koxinga. In the end, the Spanish governor managed to retain the Philippines but what this story goes on to reveal is the fragility of the Manila-Acapulco silk route, and how the fate of Acapulco also depended on these hasty frontier negotiations.<sup>13</sup> For nearly three hundred years, the fortunes

---

<sup>12</sup> Tonio Andrade and Xing Hang. *Sea Rovers, Silver, and Samurai: Maritime East Asia in Global History, 1550-1700*. (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2016), 12; Pekka Hämäläinen, “What’s in a Concept? The Kinetic Empire of the Comanches,” *History and Theory*, 52 (2013) 81-90.

<sup>13</sup> See the interesting and very original work by Anna Busquets, “Dreams in the Chinese Periphery: Victorio Riccio and Sheng Chenggong’s Regime” in Andrade. *Sea Rovers, Silver, and Samurai*, 202-226

of the province of Acapulco, as a commercial seaport and as a zone of exchange between Asia and the Americas, were directly linked to this far-flung maritime frontier between New Spain and China in Fujian, Taiwan, and the Philippines, where pirates, smugglers, and lords of the sea thrived on Spanish mercantilism and diverse maritime prohibitions in the China Seas

Acapulco and Manila thus have a deep history of articulating trans-Pacific mobility. It was an all-encompassing world economy. The Manila Galleon [see Image 2 below] represented different types of movement in this trans-Pacific world, nearly three centuries of merchandise, music, ideas, artifacts, religions, and people flowed through Acapulco. In this Pacific World, spices, silk, furniture, art, and silver routinely moved through Acapulco. But it also became the starting point for many missionaries and their religious forays into Asia like the friar Andrés Urdaneta, described by his biographer, as *monje y marino*; or the Lazarist missionary and musician Teodorico Pedrini, who departed from Acapulco to exchange instruments and music, between the Vatican and the Early Qing Court where eventually he would spend the rest of his life composing and playing music for the Chinese imperial court; or Juan Cobo, a sixteenth-century Spanish Dominican friar who became an astrologist and sinologists. Religious artifacts and ideas moved back and forth with them: Nuestra Señora de Guia, the Virgin of Antipolo, “Our Lady of Good Voyage,” “El Santo Niño,” and countless other relics, religious figurines, and virgins. Alongside missionaries and religious objects, colonial officials and thousands of Asian slaves, represented by the proverbial Catarina de San Juan, moved back and forth together with Asian, European, and American merchants, like the Chinese Sangleyes of Fujian, denoting at the same time those who came back and forth, merchants and migrants, also reflecting the multiplication of forms of mobility activated by these new maritime silk routes. It also became the point of departure and arrival for pirates and global trotters in the early phases of globalization like Gemelli Careri or the Dutch engineer Adrian Boot [See image 2 below]; later, a point of departure for animals, plants,

scientific artefacts, and maps that traveled back and forth with the large expeditions of naturalists and geographers led by Alejandro Malaspina and later by Alexander Von Humboldt in the eighteenth century. The constellation of these tales of movement in the Pacific is infinite. It deeply shaped the history of the port but not, paradoxically, its urban space.<sup>14</sup>

**Image 2: Puerto de Acapulco en el Reino de Nueva España en el Mar del Sur**



Adrian Boot, 1618 Original in Archivo General de Indias.<sup>15</sup>

Alongside this deep undercurrent of trans-Pacific movement of things, merchandise, and people, runs the history of Acapulco as a dangerous frontier marooned by insalubrious conditions and foreboding mountains. Cut-off from the interior of Mexico by desolate *sierras*, the province of Acapulco also has a long history as an outpost of markets on a coastal frontier, strategically

<sup>14</sup> Mariano Cuevas, *Monje y marino. La vida y los tiempos de fray Andrés de Urdaneta*, (México, Galatea, 1943). For the story of Pedrini, see D.R.M. Irving, D. R. M. Colonial Counterpoint: *Music in Early Modern Manila*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 53, 254; For religion and the Sangleys, see Consuelo Varela, “Microhistoria de un galeón: El Santo Niño y Nuestra Señora de Guía (1684-1689)” and Manuel Ollé, “La proyección de Fujian en Manila: los sangleyes del parián y el comercio de la Nao de China” in Salvador Bernabéu and Salvador, and Carlos Martínez Shaw, eds. *Un Océano de Seda Y Plata: El Universo Económico Del Galeón de Manila*. (Sevilla: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 2013). This latter collection is one of the best works on the cosmos of the Manila Galleon and what it meant for the creation of Trans-Pacific mobilities. For a study of the China Poblana (Catarina de San Juan) and the wider colonial world of Asian slaves she came from see, Seijas *Asian Slaves in Colonial Mexico*; Virginia González Claverán. *Malaspina en Acapulco*. (Madrid: Turner, 1989)

<sup>15</sup> Image from electronic source, see <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b6903993j/f1.highres>

positioned at the edge of the Pacific and hemmed in by a vast, uninhabited hinterland. This coastal region was huge, thinly settled and with large swaths left unexplored up until the mid twentieth century. The hinterlands, coastal lowlands, and jagged highlands of the Costa Chica and Costa Grande, with the peaks of Coyuca and the Atoyac *sierra* towering over greater Acapulco, cover a vast and diverse territory of coastal plains and escarpments [see Image 3 below]. This territory stretches (moving from east to west) from Zihuatanejo, through Tecpan, Atoyac and Coyuca de Benítez in the Costa Grande, reaching “greater Acapulco” and ending in the plains of San Marcos and Ayutla in the Costa Chica.

**Image 3: Acapulco and Marqués flanked by the Costa Grande and Costa Chica**



Sourced from [www.maphill.com](http://www.maphill.com)

Cycles of depopulation and repopulation in colonial times would later give this coast of the South Seas, the Costa Chica and Costa Grande, a certain plasticity for outsiders to transform and experiment with the region’s economy and urban development of the seaport.<sup>16</sup> Jonathan Amith’s insights on this region are revealing. Up until the end of the colonial period, the province of

---

<sup>16</sup> See, for instance, this dynamic at work at the community and identity level in Guerrero, in the work of Andrew Bryan Fisher. "Worlds in Flux, Identities in Motion: A History of the Tierra Caliente of Guerrero, Mexico, 1521–1821." P.h.D Diss, University of California, San Diego, 2002

Acapulco still remained a vast frontier, little known and little explored, continuing to be so for the remainder of the nineteenth century. But like any “frontier society” it was a dynamic world of racially mixed coastal settlements that “constituted an improbable median between the fleeting vigor of the Acapulco port and the striking desolation of the Sierra Madre.” Past the coastal lowlands, opportunities for commerce and agriculture evaporated “in a rugged and scarcely populated landscape that thwarted the efforts of agriculture, facilitated the labor of contrabandists, and sabotaged the trade of merchants.” Acapulco was, in short, a strategic port, but one surrounded by a “cloistered sierra that shielded the most marginal elements of a most marginal land.”<sup>17</sup>

Even in the popular imagination, the port has also been depicted similarly, as an inconsequential urban space, a backwater snubbed by Catarina de San Juan in a late seventeenth century epitaph recounting her arrival in the port: “*Soy una Nao de China,/ que una China desembarcó,/ Acapulco es poco Barco/para abarcar esta China.*”<sup>18</sup> Once the galleon sailed away, sailors, merchants, stevedores, colonial bureaucrats, smugglers, and pirates would all part ways; and the port would sink back to its isolation and everyday torpor—resuming its long wait for the next yearly visit. The fortress of San Diego, positioned in sharp relief against the dwarfish town of Acapulco, was a constant reminder of the importance and vitality of this Pacific outpost. Without the fortress and the Manila Galleon, insignificance would have certainly haunted this small town, with its sea-worn huts surrounded by gullied cliffs. “As for the City of Acapulco, I think it might more properly be call’d a poor Village of Fishermen, than the chief mart of the South Sea, and Port of the Voyage to China; so mean and wretched are the Houses being made of nothing but Wood, Mud and Straw,”<sup>19</sup> noted the Italian traveler, Francis Gemelli Careri, in 1697,

---

<sup>17</sup>Jonathan D. Amith. *The Möbius Strip: A Spatial History of Colonial Society in Guerrero, Mexico*. (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 2005), 63-66

<sup>18</sup> The epitaph is from 1688, see Seijas, *Asian Slaves in Colonial Mexico*, 27.

<sup>19</sup> John Francis Gemelli Careri, *A Voyage Round the World*, Book III, Chapter I, 502 in *A Collection of Voyages and Travels*, Vol. 4, (London: Printed for Awnsham and John Churchill, 1704).

describing Acapulco in this unfavorable light, upon reaching its harbor, and instantly becoming disillusioned. For travelers, the long and dangerous voyage across the Pacific was unrewarding.

General conditions were unforgiving. Humboldt vividly described the natural environment of the place. He arrived in 1803, just in time for the international fair of commerce, but also for a fog of vapors that recurrently sets in the port: “Acapulco is one of the most unhealthy places of the New Continent.” Everything became stagnant: “the unfortunate inhabitants”, he goes on to say, “breathe a burning air, full of insects, and vitiated by putrid emanations. For a great part of the year they perceive the sun only through a bed of vapors of an olive hue...The heat must be still more oppressive, the air more stagnant, and the existence of man more painful at Acapulco, than at Vera Cruz.”<sup>20</sup> In sum, Acapulco of old was inhospitable, small, and isolated; at best it was “a fisherman’s town”, at worst the “sepulcher of Philippines and Mexicans.”<sup>21</sup>

The movement of traffic and commerce, its patterns and rhythms, gradually changed with the waning of mercantilism in the eighteenth century. What Bonialian called the *lago indiano* of the eighteenth century began to slowly dissolve. As a result of changing crown controls on intercolonial and international trade in the second half of the eighteenth century (1779-1802), the silk-silver trade became entangled with an expansion of legal and illegal trading networks crossing the Pacific Ocean, especially the contraband of slaves, opium, and tobacco; the second trend was the blooming of the cacao trade between Guayaquil and Acapulco;<sup>22</sup> the third is the emergence of a highly productive coastal cotton economy, the mainstay of Acapulco’s hinterland. But most importantly was the emergence of interimperial competition in the Pacific Ocean in the eighteenth

---

<sup>20</sup> Von Humboldt, *Political Essay*, Book V, Chapter XII, 145.

<sup>21</sup> William Lytle Schurz, “Acapulco and the Manila Galleon”, *The Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 22, No. 1 (Jul., 1918), pp. 18-37

century, when Anglo-American, French, and Dutch commercial interests began to spread to remote corners of the Pacific.

Matters momentarily and drastically changed with the fall of the Spanish Empire in 1808. Seaport life, its routines, rituals, and rhythms of exchange were completely interrupted by the sacking and torching of Acapulco during the Wars of Independence. The ensuing chaos of the nineteenth century threatened to eternalize this precarious state of affairs. Certain aspects radically changed for Acapulco in the nineteenth century: the colonial, administrative, and political structures of the port completely disappeared. Acapulco's Castellan, for instance, became a relic from a bygone era. The Manila Galleon and the fairs held annually in Acapulco also vanished in the 1820s, during Iturbide's Empire. Acapulco's role in commerce also changed, and the nature of the market economy in the Pacific evolved significantly, drifting inexorably towards an Anglo-American order of commerce and empire in the Pacific world. For nearly three hundred years, the fortunes of Acapulco, as a commercial seaport, were tied to this zone of exchange between Asia and the Americas.

Before the Age of Revolution (1779-1849) reached the Pacific, the west coast of North America had been for centuries directly linked to the far-flung maritime frontier between New Spain and China in the Philippine Islands, Fujian, Taiwan, and Canton, where pirates, smugglers, and lords of the sea thrived on Spanish mercantilism and diverse Japanese, Korean, and Chinese maritime prohibitions in the China Seas. The unravelling of the trans-Pacific silk routes, after the fall of the Spanish Empire, cut loose many of these interconnected seaports and maritime regions. In this transition, routinely exchanges, fairs, and markets appeared and vanished amid wars in Acapulco throughout the first half of the nineteenth century. Yet the ebb and flow of exchanges were more the reflection of deep transformations taking place in the world of Pacific commerce,

than the reflection of a fundamental change taking place at the heart of the urban structure, social fabric, and economic life that gave purpose to Acapulco as a commercial seaport.

The chaos of independence was a blip in the deep history of mobility, exchanges, and commerce in Acapulco. Not even after all of these “zones of turbulence” did the essence of economic life change in; in other words, what Braudel calls “the ever-present, all-pervasive, repetitive, material life” of a declining commercial seaport, and a refueling port, in Acapulco during the nineteenth century.<sup>23</sup> The essence of seaport life, the basic routines of mobility and rituals of exchange in a seaport and the way they were organized around commerce and maritime traffic, remained fundamentally unchanged. Even if this continuity took place amid deep transformations in the Pacific.

But in the manner of Braudel’s deep history of material life, Acapulco throughout the long nineteenth century kept running according to similar routines dictated by maritime exchange: as always, since colonial times, merchants, muleteers, and stevedores would pour into the port from the interior when a galleon or a steamship arrived; the city and market would double its size with vendors, peasants, sailors, and merchants selling all kinds of goods and services. Like colonial times, inhabitants and visitors, as they always had done, would grasp and plunge the city into a frenzy of commercial activity for a few days or hours, sometimes months, only to hand back Acapulco to its malarial slumber when the galleon or steamship left. Wars, occupations, raids, evacuations, and hasty commercial negotiations would continue to disrupt the routines of commerce and human mobility in this intermittent town, as it had always been since colonial rule, when pirates and hostile empires constantly threatened its existence. The town’s population never

---

<sup>23</sup> Fernand Braudel. *Civilization and Capitalism, 15th-18th Century: The Structure of Everyday Life*. (California: University of California Press, 1992.), 24-28

exceeded six thousand inhabitants and never dipped below two thousand, and it kept oscillating between these two ends for an entire century after Independence.

The Pacific borderlands of North America, by the mid-nineteenth century, in the throes of the gold rush, replaced the world of the maritime silk routes, which had been growing more and more tenuous as the first half of the nineteenth century progressed. It is at this juncture where the present story of Acapulco begins: with the creation of the State of Guerrero and the California Gold Rush in 1849 when the seaport declined and became entangled with gold rush cycles and revolutions like the Revolution of Ayutla (1854-55). Acapulco's transformation into a migration and pioneer station was a momentous, if overlooked, change with important rippling effects on the story of the western-eastern axis Pacific veering towards an emerging world economy in the North American West. The nature of Acapulco as a backwater and a dangerous frontier resurfaced as Mexico's Pacific coast pulled away from old trade routes and began to gravitate towards new frontier markets of consumption and circuits of mobility in California and the Pacific seaboard of North America.

Under these momentous shifts, the nature of exchange and commerce fundamentally changed for most of these maritime regions and seaports on both sides of the Pacific. Acapulco and Coastal Guerrero in the mid-nineteenth century, like so many other maritime regions in this Pacific World in turmoil, became mere coastal frontiers without any imperial ports or outposts left to control them. With the silk routes vanished from the center of the Pacific World, seaports like Acapulco turned into feared breeding grounds of "domestic revolt and foreign collusion" where smugglers, rebels, *caudillos*, customs administrators, gold seekers, and filibusters seriously challenged the power of central authorities in the Mexican heartland. Filibusterism, gold rush markets, and the Revolution of Ayutla (1854-55) which toppled Mexico's centralizing experiment is a clear example of this dynamic of coastal revolt and foreign collusion at work. From then

onwards, a double-edged situation emerged from Acapulco. The seaport and its surrounding region, so open to outsiders, represented “both a backward and outward edge of the nation,” like so many other coastal frontiers. As Julie Chu argues, coastal and rural residents of these forgotten regions were destined to live permanently “on an edge, teetering uncertainly between being left behind, breaking away and ahead, or falling between all boundaries.”<sup>24</sup>

### **“A Poor Village of Fishermen?” Theoretical and Historiographical Considerations**

Why have many major world cities developed at ports? I address this simple question by exploring Acapulco’s transformation as it slowly became a city of services. To fully address this initial question, the story moves forward an idea: the rise of coastal cities is closely connected to the decline of port towns. This central idea, moreover, is tied to a paradox in the literature of urban studies: nearly all world cities developed at the site of ports (some of which were at one time major ports), but many have long since ceased to exist mainly as ports; some, like Acapulco, continued to grow as coastal cities even after ceasing to exist, socially and economically speaking, as port cities altogether.<sup>25</sup>

This idea is captured, in its most essential aspects, by Acapulco’s central story: a tale of movement, conflict, and exchange on a coastal frontier, where a city emerged from the remnants of an old port town. And yet the idea becomes more thought provoking if we consider the following question, how have coastal cities developed at Pacific ports in a country like Mexico which has experienced the growth of major cities in its heartland and not on its coasts?

---

<sup>24</sup> The similarity between Acapulco and the history of Fujian and Taiwan, which had been closely connected to Acapulco through the silk routes, is revealing. See Chu, *Cosmologies of Credit*, 26; R.P. Weller, “Living at the Edge: Religion, Capitalism, and the End of the Nation-State in Taiwan.” *Public Culture*, no. 2 (2000): 477.

<sup>25</sup> Masabisa Fujita, Paul R. Krugman, and Anthony J. Venables. *The Spatial Economy: Cities, Regions, and International Trade*. (Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2001), pp. 227-236

This dissertation, then, seeks to solve a central dilemma—of change and continuity—in the urban history and economic life of Acapulco. By urban continuity, I refer to the uninterrupted stream of material life in the seaport, barely changing throughout this prolonged period; to the rhythm and movement of sea-based exchanges remaining fairly constant, even if wars were a source of recurrent yet superficial disruption. But by continuity I also refer to a lack of urban and spatial transformation. The town itself never really grew in population or size, nor its urban makeup ever really changed significantly since its foundation. For four hundred years, since its foundation in the sixteenth century, Acapulco's urban space barely changed. Its basic contours, its function as a seaport remained recognizable, and a testimony to this story of continuity is the nature of the town itself.

Rhetorically speaking, observers referred to the town in strikingly similar terms, even if centuries separate their observations. Nineteenth century observers inadvertently echoed the remarks of their colonial predecessors by voicing disillusionment upon their first impression of the city. Over the years, the colonial past of Acapulco was increasingly romanticized, and the comparison between a glorified commercial past and a decaying present in the nineteenth century made the contrast between the real and imagined city even starker. When a French observer visited Acapulco in 1840s, he noted that “the town of Acapulco [has] considerably fallen from her ancient splendor.” But as historian William Lytle Schultz responded to this remark, “Acapulco was never ‘splendid,’ even during her heyday of her fairs.”<sup>26</sup> Nineteenth century actors, particularly those in charge of Porfirian development, toiled under the same illusion that had earlier informed and disillusioned colonial and mid-nineteenth century observers. After many false starts, by the late nineteenth century, the port became a monument to abandonment and commercial isolation. Yet

---

<sup>26</sup> William Lytle Schurz. “Acapulco and the Manila Galleon.” *The Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 22, no. 1 (1918): 18–37; Duflot de Mofras, *Exploration du Territoire de l’Oregon, des Californies, et de la Mer Vermeille* (Paris, 1844), I, 144.

not everything had been lost for Acapulco, suggested a statistician in the 1890s, “the ancient splendor of Acapulco has vanished—but it will come back soon.”<sup>27</sup>

Since time immemorial, Acapulco’s colonial fame and commercial importance far exceeded and overshadowed its inconsequential urban space. Most historical actors saw the nineteenth century as a long period of urban and economic decline as a transitory phase. After all, it was not the first time Acapulco had declined in the nearly four hundred years of its existence as a commercial seaport; and surely, it would not be the last. Yet they believed in the nineteenth century, and up until the twentieth, that it was a matter of time before Acapulco began experiencing another renaissance in commerce, not as a port that connected Europe with Asia under the protection of Spanish mercantilism but as a port-city connecting the interior of Mexico to a new Anglo-American era of trade. Acapulco, the story goes, at the dawn of the twentieth century, would bring together the Atlantic and Pacific worlds of commerce, once again.

Henceforth, a powerful narrative has indelibly marked the history of urban change in Acapulco. The port has always been a receding paradise in the popular imagination. Its deep and certainly old history has been reinterpreted and understood in cycles of splendor, decadence, and renewal. For one, colonial splendor remained an illusion, thereafter setting off Acapulco’s permanent decadence, always in decline and in dire need of social, urban, and economic renewal. This powerful myth—the myth of decline and revival—has deeply shaped how historical actors have come to understand and reinterpret Acapulco’s past to thereby act upon its city. From an urban vantage point, this dissertation unearths these questions, most of them elicited from historical actors who, in many sources, try to explain Acapulco’s perplexing story of decline, fall, and reinvention.

---

<sup>27</sup> Alfonso Luis Velasco, *Geografía y estadística de la República Mexicana, Tomo X-Estado de Guerrero* (Mexico: Oficina Tip. de la Secretaría de Fomento, 1892), 177-9

The resulting story thus defies some conventional histories in urban history and economics, particularly those that have made urban growth an inevitable outcome of commercial advantage and central location. This leads us to our central dilemma in the historiography of urban continuity and change in Acapulco. I will call it the dilemma of the “poor village of fishermen.” Acapulco, the “Chief Mart of the South Sea, and Port for the Voyage of China,” disappeared after the 1820s, yet nothing changed substantially: the seaport continued to be “a poor village of fishermen.”

What in fact did change—and it goes without saying—was Acapulco’s economic centrality, its strategic commercial importance, in its long transition to a city of services. But why did the seaport’s urban space remain largely unchanged? Unlike its existence as a tourist resort, Acapulco remained a village on a coastal frontier, all throughout its existence as a port. A spiral of creative destruction could have taken place after the collapse of mercantilism, after the sacking and torching of Acapulco in 1813 and the general disappearance of Acapulco’s colonial institutions. But what instead happened was simply the collapse of the old colonial seaport, quickly giving way to a similar maritime town, if slightly changed and newfangled, in the form of a strategic transport hub—a refueling station—between Panama and San Francisco, during and after the Gold Rush. The seaport, in the end, was unable once again to take off and generate urban and population growth, despite enjoying this new economic impetus, that came in the form of transport and refueling services, which many other global ports received at the time.

Continuity, however, does not entail a history of stasis during the nineteenth century. Far from a situation of stasis, there was quite an eventful boom and bust, and a series of revolutions thereafter in the mid nineteenth century. But the question still remains: why was there urban continuity in Acapulco despite major conflagrations and Mexico’s commercial decline in the Pacific, and despite deep global transformations that saw deep changes in commerce and migration

during the nineteenth century? A deep change in the context would have decisively affected the urban makeup of the seaport—and yet it did not.

There is the easiest and most conventional explanation found in dependency, staple, and location theories in regional and urban economics. These theories are often chosen to explain Mexico's lack of economic growth, which can easily be extended to an explanation of lack of urban growth, especially against the context of a country where urban development took place mainly in the interior and not on the coasts. Throughout the nineteenth century, and well into the early twentieth, Acapulco continued to function as a seaport and transit nexus in the Pacific. But it continued to do so as a subsidiary to larger markets and cities. Its subsidiary status did not change, even if the gravitational centers on which the port depended had radically changed. Its central location and natural advantages, which qualified the port for commercial and industrial growth, mattered little if we take into account Acapulco's subsidiary status and lack of staples, which prolonged the failure to stimulate growth of urban networks, linkages, and transport systems in relation to the interior, thus exacerbating isolation and further creating disconnected geographies. Had this not happened, if we follow such conventional explanations, then the commercial port would have flourished.

Theories of New Economic Geography revised these conventional explanations of location theory. Many other ports, some of them very insignificant entrepôts, developed a central market first on the coast or on lakes and, as result, were then connected to larger markets in the interior or elsewhere. Their initial connection to maritime economies created central markets that acted as a pulling force to connect these sites with larger markets; henceforward, urban growth takes place as result of this self-reinforcing “second nature” [human-constructed] economic dynamic. This is the most common explanation for urban growth, the so-called “agglomeration economies,” in the New Economic Geography. Yet the logic of commercial determinism remains:

first nature factors act as catalysts for the creation of a central market, a point from which second nature growth begins in a city.

Such explanations, however, also fall short of explaining Acapulco's dilemma of urban growth. Until the age of containerization, in the 1970s, Acapulco's Santa Lucía bay enjoyed, by all standards, one of the most privileged natural harbors in the Pacific—a spacious, deep-water bay completely sheltered from the perils of open sea, ideally suitable for commerce. The seaport enjoyed an undisputed commercial advantage in the Pacific world for centuries, and yet it never grew into a robust metropolis. It enjoyed and continues to enjoy a privileged geographic location, but up until the mid twentieth century, this did not result in any significant urban development. Acapulco articulated commerce and flows of migrants and other forms of movement in the Pacific world for centuries, but despite being situated in a staple-rich region, no permanent central market was created during the nineteenth century, nor any key commodities were developed in its hinterland with their ensuing forward and backward linkages. Little did it matter that the bay was surrounded by bountiful natural resources, nor did it matter that it was strategically positioned between navigable currents in the Pacific Ocean, connecting Central America with the North American West Coast. Location and “first nature” advantages mattered very little in the history of urban growth in Acapulco. They never generated drastic waterfront development or technological innovation from which the city could be transformed into a metropolis. The city never became the modern commercial seaport everyone envisioned.

After many false-starts, Acapulco kept declining commercially in the nineteenth century despite its distinctive natural advantages. Many bewildered observers could not grasp the reason why this enviable natural harbor did not result in any commercial boom that would, in turn, spur urban growth as it had supposedly happened in colonial times. The fort of San Diego would always stand as a reminiscence of Acapulco's commercial splendor vis-a-vis its urban insignificance in

the present. But urban monumentality was more an idealization of Acapulco's commercial past, a figment of the observers' imagination.

Consequently, a contradiction arose between a past of commercial splendor and a present of urban insignificance. But what many observers missed in the nineteenth century was the fact that Acapulco, despite being one of the most important Pacific ports and enjoying great natural advantages, had always been a "poor village of fishermen." It is at this point during the nineteenth century from which the dilemma emerged, and the following question which was impossible to answer back then: why Acapulco continued to be a poor village of fishermen if the size of all towns, supposedly, was proportionate to their volume of trade? Instead of seeing an urban continuity from colonial times through the nineteenth century, a continuity of the small fishing village, Acapulco's urban insignificance was explained in terms of commercial decline and deep changes that led to Acapulco's fall from the heights of commerce. This was further corroborated by its commercial decline, along with Mexico in the Pacific World, during the nineteenth century.

The history of Acapulco's compulsive failure to produce urban monumentality can be explained in other ways, if we turn the logic of trade-led urban growth upside down. Richard Morse, engaging with other authors, correctly points out that there is a thread of commercial determinism in the literature of American urban history. Commerce is presented as the most plausible explanation of urban growth in the narrative of urbanization in the United States: "commerce was the most universal and obvious characteristic of all urban places; Isaac Weld was nearly correct in 1795 when he asserted that 'the size of all towns in America has hitherto been proportionate to their trade.' . . . Successful central places were points of maximum accessibility for buyers and sellers."<sup>28</sup> Indeed, cities grew with the creation of a central market to which all

---

<sup>28</sup> Morse. "Trends and Patterns of Latin American Urbanization, 1750-1920." p. 355. The quote Morse uses is referenced as Lemon, 1967: 502-3

roads would then eventually lead. These are, in sum, the general premises of central-place theory, the New Economic Geography, and staple theories of economic growth.

Indeed, this narrative continues to inform urban history in the United States. This, for instance, is one of the central premises upon which the entire edifice of William Cronon's *Nature's Metropolis* is built. Even though, for the context of an ecological story of Chicago, this newfangled history of central-place-theory is not a faulty approach, its application, however, is not universal.

The insights of economist Paul Krugman on William Cronon's work are quite revealing:

In his justly acclaimed recent book *Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West*, the historian William Cronon documents the extraordinary 19th century rise of Chicago as the central city of the American heartland. As Cronon points out, what made this rise particularly remarkable was the absence of any distinctive natural advantages of Chicago's site. The city stood on a flat plain; the river that ran through the city was barely navigable; the city's lakeside harbor was inadequate and tended to silt up. Whatever natural advantages the site did have proved transitory. Initially Chicago seemed the natural terminus of a canal linking the watershed of the Mississippi with the Great Lakes, but when a canal was finally built it had only a few years of economic importance before being overshadowed by the railroads. Chicago's harbor on the Great Lakes was not unique, and in any case lake transportation became relatively unimportant by the 1870s as compared with rail links. Yet once Chicago had become established as a central market, as a focal point for transportation and commerce, its strength fed on itself. As Cronon puts it, the advantages that "first nature" failed to provide the city were more than made up for by the self-reinforcing advantages of "second nature": the concentration of population and production in Chicago, and the city's role as a transportation hub, provided the incentive for still more concentration of production there, and caused all roads to lead to Chicago.<sup>29</sup>

Chicago, after all, was a new forsaken place, commercially and geographically speaking, in the nineteenth century, until it was "discovered" by American boosters. In fact, Chicago's history of urban growth leading to agglomeration economies is quite an exception compared to old commercial towns, either on lakes or on coastal frontiers: that is, old entrepôts and transport hubs that later became booming cities on the water. The underlying problem is that the tenets of central place theory have too often been accepted without much scrutiny. Thus, the stories produced by

---

<sup>29</sup> This is a clear example of what Morse is referring to: the confidently universalistic explanations in American urban economics and history. It is the interaction between the conclusions of William Cronon's *Nature's Metropolis* and Paul Krugman's work on urban economics: Krugman, "First Nature, Second Nature, and Metropolitan Location." *Journal of Regional Science*, 33 (2), (1993) 129–144

American urban history have increasingly become like Von Thünen's urban model of the “isolated state;” the story of a marooned field, confidently universalistic in its telling, but far detached from the reality and different experiences of many other cities.<sup>30</sup>

Even for the United States, there are many cases in which commercial explanations for urban growth fall short. Acapulco's history creates echoes with many other cities in the United States. Take, for instance, the speech of one of San Diego's boosters in the twentieth century: “What is the matter with San Diego? Why is it not the metropolis and seaport that its geographical and other unique advantages entitled it to be? Why does San Diego always just miss the train somehow?”<sup>31</sup> The implicit reference is there: Los Angeles, which lacked everything, still reaped everything, like Chicago. They became thriving metropolises at the cost of sites with far more enviable natural advantages which entitled them to become thriving metropolises by developing commerce, central markets, and industries.

When exploring urban change in seaports and coastal frontiers, these latter premises of commercial determinism, central market and place theory, and urban growth must be questioned. Acapulco's history of urban change was not very different from those of countless other seaports, riverine towns, and canals, which mixed great commercial importance with urban insignificance, despite enjoying great geographic and natural advantages; these are Hong Kong, Singapore, San

---

<sup>30</sup> “And even for the United States, commercial explanations presuppose various unexamined sociological, psychological, and religious premises (cf. Smith, 1966). Were these but exposed, the language of our economic historians and geographers would become less confidently universalistic. It is in fact ironic that if United States case studies were clustered not along the northern Boston-to-Des Moines axis (growth of northeast seaports, western river rivalries, central places in Iowa) but along the southern Charleston-Dallas axis, the hypotheses and methods on which they rest would be more gracefully transferable to the land masses (Latin America, Asia, Africa) where most of the world's people live.” Richard M. Morse. “Trends and Patterns of Latin American Urbanization, 1750-1920.” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 16, no. 4 (1974): 416-47.

<sup>31</sup> Business leader John Spreckles in San Diego “Speech at a testimonial dinner in his honor, June 13, 1923. Ed Fletcher Papers, Mandeville Department of Special Collections University of California at San Diego Library, MSS 81, Box 27. Quoted from Mary Lindenstein Walshok and Abraham J. Shragge, *Invention and Reinvention: The Evolution of San Diego's Innovation Economy*. (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2013), P. 5.

Diego, Marseilles, Liverpool, Hamburg, Guayaquil, El Callao, Veracruz, or the Suez and Panama Canals, to name a few.

As many urban historians of Marseilles have reminded us, somewhat counterintuitively: the urban space of these ports is rendered even more inconsequential precisely because of their commercial advantage. Their only urban redeeming quality is their articulation of different forms of exchange and movement. I argue that in this different history of urban change in Acapulco, merchant valorization of space and services were always privileged over spatial growth, capital accumulation, and urban monumentality; “temples of commerce” as Cronon imaginatively named them for his story of Chicago. One would further argue that it is the valorization of mobility in these commercial settings, the valorization in terms of servicing “capital as value in motion,” what produced transitory urban spaces in places like Acapulco. Towns on the edge of coastal or riverine frontiers are places where flows were channeled but not incorporated into local financial and merchant networks that would have otherwise grown into teeming urban structures. In this case, the history of metropoles and dependency theory matter very little; what matters is the asymmetric relationship in a port-city between the value attributed to the channeling of mobility and the value attributed to the accumulation of capital during the nineteenth century, a dilemma that would be solved in the twentieth century with the rise of a tourist city. In the end, this is a different frontier experience of mobility, urban and economic change when compared to Turner or Cronon’s narrative of boomtowns.<sup>32</sup>

---

<sup>32</sup> “Marseilles paraît sans cesse à la recherche de l’arrière-pays (...) car l’emporium littoral est dépassé (...) ; c’est l’hinterland, le véritable enjeu.” André Donzel, “Une écologie culturelle de la ville. Une lecture de l’œuvre de Marcel Roncayolo”, *Rives méditerranéennes*, 47 (2014), 19-30; “C’est bien connu, “Marseille est une ville antique sans antiquités,” pour reprendre le constat (un peu dépassé aujourd’hui) de Joseph Méry. C’est que Marseille est une ville portuaire où l’on redoute la “minéralisation des richesses” Dans cette économie de flux, de plus en plus tendus, on évite de faire des stocks. La conséquence est que Marseille n’a jamais eu les monuments et, plus généralement, l’espace public à la hauteur de son importance économique et sociale. Lorsqu’il y a des velléités de rattrapage en ce domaine, celles-ci sont très vite subverties par des impératifs de valorisation marchande de l’espace urbain.” Marcel Roncayolo. *L’Imaginaire de Marseille: port, ville, pôle*. Vol. tome 5. Histoire du commerce et de l’industrie de Marseille : XIXe-XXe siècle ; (Marseille: Chambre de commerce et d’industrie de Marseille, 1990), 43. See David Harvey for his acute analysis of capital as value in motion, his reading of Marx and the idea that “*Capital* reveals,

Richard Morse would further argue, as a response to the premises of central-place theory, that one should question a persistent logic that axiomatically equates urban growth with commercial importance and central market location. One should focus, instead, on those factors that are “proffered almost apologetically, as an epiphenomenon to the galloping economism which makes United States’ urban development seem almost exclusively an outcome of commercial advantage and industrial location.”<sup>33</sup> One of these epiphenomena to economism is the social and cultural reinterpretation of the advantages of “first nature” in Acapulco. As Cronon himself recognizes: cultural explanations of geography take over when economics fails; or vice versa, I would argue, economic explanations for urban growth fail when cultural and social factors are dismissed as epiphenomenal quirks.

Cultural and social factors explain why there was a remarkable continuity in Acapulco’s urban forms. From the sixteenth century up until the early twentieth, the town’s purpose remained unaltered, profiting from movement at sea, with the seashore merely serving as a transit space and not as a destination. In this manner, Acapulco continued to generate similar attitudes towards the ocean, seashore, commerce, capital, and mobility.

Indeed, the beach was not always the site of rituals of culture, leisure, and consumption that would emerge later from the tourist resort. Up until the early twentieth century, the place itself continued to be perceived as an unwholesome frontier that, time and again, surprised observers wondered how inhabitants in Acapulco managed to eke out social and economic livelihoods under such inhospitable climate and insalubrious conditions. The very ecology of the place posed a formidable problem to visitors. But this is an old story: “from antiquity up through the 18th

---

however, a Marx who is always talking about movement and the motion—the process—of, for example, the circulation of capital...Capitalism is nothing if it is not on the move,” against the idea of a structuralist immovable thinker, David Harvey, *A Companion to Marx’s Capital* (UK; Verso, 2010), 12-13

<sup>33</sup> Richard M. Morse. “Trends and Patterns of Latin American Urbanization, 1750-1920.” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 16, no. 4 (1974): 416-47.

century, the beach stirred fear and anxiety in the popular imagination. The coastal landscape was synonymous with dangerous wilderness.” It was a place of malarial slumber, of unbearable heat and stagnant olive hues, where shipwrecks, invasions, and natural disasters occurred.<sup>34</sup>

Persistent attitudes towards the sea and material life in the seaport, “the world of self-sufficiency, of barter of goods and services within a very small radius,” by the nineteenth century, continued to work the way it had always done. For four hundred years, Acapulco continued to serve as an economy of flows, at the edge of a coastal frontier, that thrived and depended on a small insalubrious urban space;<sup>35</sup> in other words, an economy of flows that did not produce any stocks, as urban historians of Marseilles remind us.

In this way, residents continued to be as dependent as before on the sea and the different forms of transient mobility it produced. The city never became the “temple of commerce” everyone envisioned, continuing instead to exist as an intermittent town for these reasons, a “monument to commercial abandonment” and isolation that, nevertheless, began to foster new services on the sidelines. This dynamic maintained a form of seaport life that survived and persevered well into the early twentieth century, creating a remarkable continuity between the Acapulco of old, in colonial times, and the service seaport of the nineteenth century, a continuity that persisted even after the false start of commercial renaissance in the 1840s and 1850s. In fact, the gold rush consolidated this continuity when it failed to generate commercial and urban growth in the seaport. Acapulco would continue to rely more and more on services and mobility, and less and less on commercial exchange. But the constant factor of slow, almost imperceptible, urban change and

---

<sup>34</sup> Matthew Vitz, “The Tropical Coasts of New Spain: From Colonial Space to Post-Colonial Development” presented at the Southwest Seminar on Colonial Latin America, the University of California, San Diego, October 7, 2017. Daniela Blei, “Inventing the Beach: The Unnatural History of a Natural Place” June 23, 2016.

<https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/inventing-beach-unnatural-history-natural-place-180959538/>

<sup>35</sup> Braudel. Civilization and Capitalism, 24

rapid human mobility across the seashore remained intact, for many decades to come, until the early twentieth century.

In sum, this study offers an alternative story that accounts for the development of new service cities at old ports. It engages with other aspects in the literature of urban economics and history which deal with cities particularly vulnerable to boom and bust cycles, followed by periods of economic transition and reinvention. Acapulco is no exception, and its story belongs to this field of urban history.<sup>36</sup> But it presents a paradox related to the broader urban literature: in this transition, Acapulco became a full-fledged city of services only when its commercial port disappeared. For centuries, Acapulco grew smaller and languished at the dynamic forefront of globalization and trade in the Pacific; while at the lagging edge, once it lost all centrality in commerce and became a backwater, only then did Acapulco flourish. A growing cluster of services began to cater this new reality. Losing its commercial centrality meant that Acapulco, and the actors involved in its development, could cut the commercial port loose from the city of services, anchoring its economy and urban transformation on transportation, consumption, and on the circulation of people coming from the Mexican heartland and North American markets. At this juncture, Acapulco struck an unprecedented path to urban growth. There was, at the core of this full-fledged city, a dynamic urban base creating new patterns of consumption, leisure, and mobility between the Pacific Ocean, the Mexican heartland, and the west coast of North America.<sup>37</sup> The city boomed in this overlapping

---

<sup>36</sup> Gary B. Nash. *The Urban Crucible: Social Change, Political Consciousness, and the Origins of the American Revolution*. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1979); Marcel Roncayolo. L'Imaginaire de Marseille: port, ville, pôle. (Marseille: Chambre de commerce et d'industrie de Marseille, 1990.); Scott P. Marler, “A Monument to Commercial Isolation”: Merchants and the Economic Decline of Post-Civil War New Orleans,” *Journal of Urban History* 36, no. 4 (July 1, 2010): 507–27, Mary Walshok, *Invention and Reinvention: The Evolution of San Diego's Innovation Economy*, 1 edition (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2013). Thomas J. Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (Princeton University Press, 2005). Nathan Clarke, “Revolutionizing the Tragic City: Rebuilding Chimbote, Peru, after the 1970 Earthquake,” *Journal of Urban History* 41, no. 1 (January 1, 2015): 93–115.

<sup>37</sup> Masahisa Fujita, Paul R. Krugman, and Anthony J. Venables. *The Spatial Economy: Cities, Regions, and International Trade*. (Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2001), pp. 227-236

region of exchange where Mexico's commercial decline combined with the desire to enjoy the shore in warmer climates—in other words, the rise of the Mexican seaside.

### Acapulco and the Rise of the Mexican Seaside

Acapulco's story and the arguments drawn from it engage in broader debates about urban and social history as well as economic geography which help explain a question central to the argument: what does the history of urban and economic change in Acapulco tell us about the causal relationship between Mexico's commercial decline in the Pacific World in the nineteenth century and the emergence of the Mexican seaside in the twentieth?

Though representing an exercise in regional microhistory, when zoomed out, Acapulco's particular urban transition—from a commercial seaport to a transport hub to a boomtown of mass tourism—in the end, reflects a sea change in Mexico and North America and its shifting economic relationship to the Pacific Ocean. In this story of relentless change, with the rise of the United States as an economic powerhouse, the “*eastern* Pacific became the [North] American *West*,” while Mexico's Pacific coast pulled away from old trade routes that had connected Europe and Asia via Spanish America, and began to gravitate towards commerce, new consumption markets, and migration in California and the Pacific seaboard of North America.<sup>38</sup>

This was the new world of the Pacific borderlands where Mexico's commercial decline gave way to the Mexican seaside, as I contend in this dissertation: a world Acapulco helped create and reconnect through its own implosion and reinvention. This Pacific region is a historical construct that no longer exists, or at least few traces remain. It began with the 1849 California Gold Rush and ended with the spread of consumer capitalism in the postwar years of the mid

---

<sup>38</sup> David Igler. *The Great Ocean: Pacific Worlds from Captain Cook to the Gold Rush*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 10.

twentieth century.<sup>39</sup> This story in the end helps explain why the Mexican seaside emerged, revealing an overlooked story in Mexico's littoral world. Central to the formation of the Pacific borderlands, which saw the rise of the United States and the commercial decline of Mexico in the Pacific, is also the story of maritime towns like Acapulco ceasing to function as commercial seaports and emerging as coastal cities, creating new services and channeling unprecedented forms of mobility like mass tourism.

As early as 1915, Herbert Bolton along with a group of historians suggested a connection between the Spanish borderlands and the Pacific Ocean; two worlds linked up and displayed by the historian as part of the Panama-Pacific celebrations. Around that time, the memory of the Pacific World that Manila and Acapulco had created was fast disappearing. A series of commemorative acts of historical erasure had done their job, at least in the popular imagination of the United States in the early twentieth century. After all, the "Yankee Lake" had burst its banks and quickly replaced the "Spanish Lake," as one Spanish observer remarked, during the Mexican Revolution, in a somewhat simplified version of the story of imperial transition in the Pacific with the rise of Anglo-American commerce. A great deal of history was buried when the Spanish Lake was recast into the American Lake. The relationship between the work of Bolton, his students, and the borderlands literature that emerged thereafter became, for the most part, a landlocked affair. The field became a well-circumscribed history of landed relations, borders, and tales of landlocked imperial rivalry at the heart of North America. Nowhere has this trend been more evident than in Mexican historiography of the nineteenth century. The maritime world, so crucial for the unfolding

---

<sup>39</sup> Geographically speaking, the western continental divide, the Pacific slope of North America, stretches from Panama to Alaska. By "Pacific borderlands" I refer to a historical construct that no longer exists, a geopolitical and economic region on the western Pacific seaboard of the United States, Mexico, and Central America that created a world economy (the integrative commercial networks, navigational routes, systems of mobility, communications, and transport) between the 1849 Gold Rush and the postwar years of consumer capitalism in the 1950s. The Northwest U.S.-Canadian Pacific borderlands, though also extremely important for this period, are not the center of attention. Hence I examine Acapulco's changing relationship to the shores, coastlines, villages, ports, border towns, and harbors on the western seaboard of North America, a coastal region on the Pacific that came to be dominated by the U.S.-Mexico borderlands and by the United States, via California and Panama.

of these variegated frontier histories between the United States and Mexico, disappeared from the stage.<sup>40</sup>

New perspectives on Mexican history and borderlands have emerged in tandem with a field that has boomed over the past two decades. Borderlands have been correctly interpreted as a phenomenon fixed in time when they slowly began shifting to heavily regulated national borders during the late nineteenth century. Now borderland studies have moved away from this historical definition to a more sociocultural one. They are seen as meeting points where geography and cultural borders cannot be easily defined.<sup>41</sup> The transformative power of frontiers and borderlands, and the very act of crossing them, has led many cultural historians and anthropologists to focus on shifting identities and cultural exchanges across nation-states. Moreover, when borderlands history entered this realm of zones of exchange, it was only a matter of time before the field moved beyond national borders to a transnational stage and into a globalized world, where the meaning of the border began to accommodate new perspectives and new actors circulating through its zones of influence.<sup>42</sup>

---

<sup>40</sup> Panama-Pacific Historical Congress. *The Pacific Ocean in History; Papers and Addresses Presented at the Panama-Pacific Historical Congress Held at San Francisco, Berkeley and Palo Alto, California, July 19-23, 1915 / Edited by H. Morse Stephens, Herbert E. Bolton (New York: Macmillan co., 1917).* Sociedad Mexicana de Geografía y Estadística. *El descubrimiento del Océano Pacífico y la Sociedad Mexicana de Geografía y Estadística; Reseña, discursos y documentos relacionados con la solemne sesión verificada en honor de Vasco Núñez de Balboa, el 25 de septiembre de 1913.* (Mexico: Impr. de la Secretaría de Fomento, 1913).

<sup>41</sup> David J Weber and Jane M. Rausch, eds., *Where Cultures Meet. Frontiers in Latin American History*, (Wilmington, Delaware: Jaguar Books, 1994); For the pioneer work that fully revised Turner's frontier narrative see, Herbert Eugene Bolton and John Francis Bannon. *Bolton and the Spanish Borderlands.* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1964)

<sup>42</sup> This is naturally a large new literature, since Bolton's work, and this footnote cannot do justice to what has been written. But for general historiographical reviews and pioneering works, see Jeremy Adelman and Stephen Aron, "From Borderlands Borders: Empires, Nation-States, and the Peoples in Between in North American History," *American Historical Review* 104, no. 3 (June 1999): 814-841. On the connections between transnational and borderlands history, see Gutiérrez and Young, "Transnationalizing Borderlands History." For a synthesis of the larger conceptual range of transnational histories, see "AHR Conversation: On Transnational History," *American Historical Review*, 111 (Dec. 2006), 1441-64. Benjamin H. Johnson and Andrew R. Graybill, "Introduction: Borders and Their Historians in North America," in *Bridging National Borders in North America: Transnational and Comparative Histories*, ed. Johnson and Graybill (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 1-32; Samuel Truett and Elliott Young, "Making Transnational History: Nations, Regions, and Borderlands," in *Continental Crossroads: Remapping U.S.-Mexico Borderlands History*, ed. Truett and Young (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 1-34. For studies on cultural history and questions of national identity see, Andres Reséndez. *Changing National Identities at the Frontier: Texas and New Mexico, 1800-1850.* (Cambridge University Press, 2005); José David Saldívar, "Cultural Theory in

Indeed, the field has grown richer by broadening the stage, the analytical boundaries, and the confines of borderlands history. But since this revisionist turn, the field has stumbled upon some thorny issues, of which conceptual stretching and geographic indeterminacy stand as the thorniest. Borders have become ubiquitous, found everywhere and nowhere at the same time, like a “line in the sand:” hard to identify, fundamentally unstable, and constantly changing, particularly during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. At times, the field seems to lose its boundaries, prompting scholars to ask what the borders of borderlands history really are. Historians concede that borderlands became borders as the nineteenth century came to a close. “Legally, the border went from loose line to fixed boundary,” yet from a social, cultural, and transnational perspective, the opposite took place: “in the *imaginaries* of both” the United States and Mexico, for instance, “it went from a fixed boundary to a loose social and cultural line that, notwithstanding, is still assumed to be an unchanging boundary.” Another crucial question is defining, in time and space, the broader stage on which borderlands operate. Thanks to the possibility of a border, notes Mauricio Tenorio, we have imagined the “ins and outs,” projecting the “line back and forth in time,” seeking the origins of the border “in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and in space, finding it in segregated Chicago or Los Angeles, or in *agringado* San Miguel de Allende... or in the realization of a globalized versus an unglobalized world.”<sup>43</sup> Yet all of these borders and frontiers, moving back and forth in time and space, remained in a landlocked world.

---

the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands,” in *Border Matters: Remapping American Cultural Studies* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 17-35.

<sup>43</sup> Jeremy Adelman and Stephen Aron, “From Borderlands to Borders: Empires, Nation-States, and the Peoples in Between in North American History,” *American Historical Review* 104, no. 3 (June 1999): 814-841; Rachel St. John. *Line in the Sand: A History of the Western U.S.-Mexico Border*. (United States: Princeton University Press, 2011); and by the same author, “The unpredictable America of William Gwin: expansion, secession, and the unstable borders of nineteenth-century North America”. *The Journal of Civil War Era*. 6.1 2016-03-01. 56(29). The quote is from Mauricio Tenorio “On *La Frontera* and Cultures of Consumption” in Alexis McCrossen. *Land of Necessity: Consumer Culture in the United States-Mexico Borderlands*. (Durham [N.C.]: Duke University Press, 2009), 333-354. Tenorio further notes that “it is precisely the consumption of products, of ideas, of human labor that has blended Mexico and the United States into one human unit that makes obsolete our fixed distinction of the United States and of Mexico as ontological antinomies.”

A few years ago, it became necessary for historians to recapitulate and return to the basic definitions and characteristics of borderlands history. While leaving open new avenues of research, the “brave new world of borderlands history,” they wrote, is anchored in “spatial mobility, situational identity, local contingency, and the ambiguities of power.” In this way, Pekka Hämäläinen and Samuel Truett exhorted historians to think more deeply about the larger stage on which borderlands operate; “the field tends to be limited by its borders and lands” and, although “moving beyond spatially adjacent, land-based relations is more difficult,” they further note, other regions and urban spaces may well be considered. Hence a first step in this revisionist turn was to identify those maritime regions with which borderlands history has interacted. Trading centers, port cities, immigrant or refueling stations, they argue, may also become centers of borderlands history. At first, such places may seem “less germane,” but when the movement of people passing through these maritime places is studied, the historian soon enters a “more recognizable realm of borderlands history.”

So, assuming these “larger journeys and border crossings are interwoven,” Hämäläinen and Truett conclude, “where are we to draw our distinctions—and with what implications for the field? <sup>44</sup> To move beyond connections across landed borders, I start with a different premise: through circuits of mobility and exchange, Pacific seaports and borderlands deeply shaped one another, creating close relationships of conflict and interdependency. Acapulco is a case in point. Conventional histories would not consider Acapulco, for instance, as part of the larger stage on which borderlands history operate, even if ample evidence on the movement of people suggests a closer connection between seaports and borderlands. Yet Acapulco became an important transit point for Gold Rush migrants, channeled by an old seaport that was quickly overwhelmed by the presence of thousands of gold-seekers, filibusters, and luminary pioneers like the Sutters. The

---

<sup>44</sup> Pekka Hämäläinen and Samuel A. Truett, “On Borderlands,” *Journal of American History*, 98 (Sept. 2011), 338.

history of seaports hence becomes entangled with mobile populations that circulate through borderlands, and this inevitably leads to the realm of what David Chang refers to as “borderlands in a world at sea.”<sup>45</sup>

My dissertation offers new insights into this fusion of worlds. It focuses on questions of urban change and spatial mobility, which constitute another theoretical aspect of this study. There is a general consensus among scholars that seaports and borderlands have been “characterized by constant movement (in time, space, and activity).” In their mobility, historians have argued, “borderlands always prepare for the next move at the same time that they respond to the last one.” Spatial mobility was originally born as a concept in urban and tourism studies and the science of transport and communications. Simply put, it refers to the movement of people and things across space. Although it has been differentiated from social mobility, scholars of migration, tourism, and other mobilities would argue that the differentiation between these two concepts of mobility is not as clear-cut. Doreen Massey has deemed “differentiated mobility,” for instance, “the uneven and unequal positioning of different groups and persons in relation to various flows and movements.” While Chu and Mackeown argue that populations, when set on the move, begin to be channeled and regulated by the state. People and entire moving groups are then redrawn along “all sorts of newly mobile distinctions:” the upward versus the outward (a growing middle class and tourists versus the “new immigrants” and the “old” overseas [migrants]); the stagnant (rural unemployed) versus the uprooted, the errant (‘floating population,’ exiles, displaced, or internal migrants). While my analysis privileges the spatial/geographic mobility of people over socioeconomic mobility in Acapulco, I do not assume that they can always be analyzed and treated separately. Sometimes geographic mobility stimulates social mobility and vice versa; cycles of revolutions

---

<sup>45</sup> David A. Chang. “Borderlands in a World at Sea: Concow Indians, Native Hawaiians, and South Chinese in Indigenous, Global, and National Spaces.” *Journal of American History* 98, no. 2 (September 1, 2011): 384–403.

particularly blur this distinction. Urban change is then studied through the lens of changing patterns of mobility in Acapulco; henceforward its relations to its hinterland, the Mexican heartland, and to other Pacific seaports in North and Central America take center stage.<sup>46</sup>

Much like frontier-borderland studies, modern-day scholarship portrays seaports as spaces performing key functions of connection and intermediation, often linking far-flung frontiers, isolated coastlines, and bays. Borderland historians often recognize this relationship, even figuratively, when using the sea to illustrate their arguments about the essence of frontier-borderland studies. “Like the sea at the edge of the land (and the reverse), [borderlands] are continually in movement, both fast and slow, and any static depiction of the moment contains within it the elements of its change.” Indeed, the exploration of borderlands history has been described by their proponents as traveling through the seas, like Odysseus, from one port of call to another, creating “tales of movement.”<sup>47</sup>

---

<sup>46</sup> William I Zartman, *Understanding Life in the Borderlands: Boundaries in Depth and in Motion*. (Studies in Security and International Affairs. Athens, Ga.: University of Georgia Press, 2010), p. 2 I do not agree with the interpretation that mobility is the “all pervasive marker of the modern condition.” It is as old as diasporas and port-cities. See Julie Chu’s discussion on the subject: “plenty of skeptics have questioned mobility’s novelty and distinction as an ontological marker of modern selves and relations. Old diasporic networks as well as imperial regimes have long revealed worlds of differentiated mobility and long-distance exchange well before such features came to be identified with modern and post-modern conditions.” (Abu-lughod, 1989; Mintz, 1998) “In fact, one could endlessly debate the question of mobility’s novelty on such empirical grounds, pointing to various metrics of historical intensity and scale to argue for or against the inextricable linkages of mobility to modernity.” For the mobilities literature see Mimi Sheller and John Urry. “The New Mobilities Paradigm.” *Environment and Planning A* 38, no. 2 (February 1, 2006): 207–26. On the “politics of mobility” and “differentiated mobility” see, Doreen Massey. “Power-Geometry and Progressive Sense of Place.” *Mapping the Futures: Local Cultures, Global Change*. Eds Jon Bird et al (London: Routledge, 1993), 280-88; Julie Y Chu. *Cosmologies of Credit: Transnational Mobility and the Politics of Destination in China*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010) 8-15; Adam McKeown in *Melancholy Order: Asian Migration and the Globalization of Borders*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 3 argues that “the history of modern international identity documentation is a global history, inseparable from processes of human mobility and the proliferation” and globalization of borders and modern nation states. The creation of new legal categories of mobility were a result of this process. With this argument, McKeown drew inspiration from sociologists like John Torpey. *The Invention of the Passport: Surveillance, Citizenship, and the State*. Cambridge, (U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2000) who argue, from a Weberian perspective, that the overriding question of human mobility is “who controls the legitimate means of movement.” For an interesting study on the broader relationship between mobility and state formation, see Vigneswaran, Darshan, and Joel Quirk. *Mobility Makes States: Migration and Power in Africa*. University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015. Kaufmann, Vincent. *Rethinking the City: Urban Dynamics and Motility*. 1st ed. Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2011; for a close connection between tourism and mobility studies see, Mimi Sheller and John Urry. *Tourism Mobilities: Places to Play, Places in Play*. (London; New York: Routledge, 2004).

<sup>47</sup> William I Zartman, *Understanding Life in the Borderlands: Boundaries in Depth and in Motion*. (Studies in Security and International Affairs. Athens, Ga.: University of Georgia Press, 2010), p. 2

There are useful tools to analyze how mobility and exchange shaped the new seaside economy that emerged from the commercial decline of Mexico in the Pacific.<sup>48</sup> In unexpected ways then, the tools of the old historiography of seaports and maritime worlds are used to understand this process. Fernand Braudel, more than half a century ago, described oceans, coasts, and seas as having no single coherent unit “but that created by the movements of men, the relationships they imply, and the routes they follow.” To understand the circulation of people and goods in the seas and oceans, and to identify their extended zones of exchange and influence, Braudel further notes, “we should imagine a hundred frontiers, not one, some political, some economic, and some cultural.” Routes, trade, and people in motion were thus considered by the French historian as the primary linkages of maritime interconnections. Matt Matsuda, elaborating on this Braudelian tradition, from the perspective of the Pacific, argues that the logic of an “ocean-based” or littoral history emerges at the interface of land with the sea. The Pacific, he notes, is “simply a ‘civilization without a center,’ an Oceanic space of movement, transit, and migration in a *longue durée* of local peoples and broad interactions.” To conceptualize the variety of Pacific worlds means to establish “linkages of intermediate environments from beaches and coastlines to villages, ports, and harbors.”<sup>49</sup> Acapulco’s bayside, in its transition to the beachside, reveals these “linkages of intermediate environments.”

---

<sup>48</sup> The literature on port cities is sprawling and enormous. But this thread of urban history can briefly be organized by the maritime spaces on which the literature focuses. Oceans like the Altantic and Indian Oceans have produced rich fields. Seas like the Mediterranean, Caribbean, or the China Seas and the South Sea Islands of the Pacific have produced enormous fields. Imperial worlds (British, Iberian, and French) have also produced massive studies on port-cities. Mercantile and diasporic studies have also produced interesting works. Individual case studies have also emerged, most noticeable: ... Finally, there is an entire multidisciplinary literature that has emerged

<sup>49</sup>Fernand Braudel. *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II.* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1995), 170, 276; Matt K. Matsuda. “The Pacific,” *American Historical Review* 111, no. 3 (June 2006): 758-780. Other scholars have noted how mobility across and around the Pacific, particularly in the form of Asian and Chinese migration to the Americas, has deeply transformed the nature of mobility and global borders. See Adam McKeown. *Melancholy Order: Asian Migration and the Globalization of Borders.* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008); Mae M. Ngai. “Chinese Gold Miners and the ‘Chinese Question’ in Nineteenth-Century California and Victoria.” *Journal of American History* 101, no. 4 (March 1, 2015): 1082–1105. For a broader theoretical synthesis of maritime history or “thalassology” see, Jerry H. Bentley. “Sea and Ocean Basins as Frameworks of Historical Analysis.” *Geographical Review* 89, no. 2 (April 1, 1999): 215–24.

For the last decade, the field of Pacific and maritime studies has expanded and overlapped with borderlands history and Anglo-American economic expansion. Historians are beginning to create new syntheses. Philip Ross May sees a connection between Pacific borderlands in California and Australia during the gold rushes of the mid nineteenth century. Kornel Chang and Bruce Cumings explore how the transformation of North America's western frontiers, particularly those of California and the US-Canadian borderlands, were closely linked to U.S. imperial projections into the Pacific. David Igler identifies a specific transformational period in the history of the Pacific stretching from Cook's explorations during the second half of the eighteenth century to the 1849 California Gold Rush. Gregory Cushman calls this period the "opening of the Pacific World." Lawrence Culver and other scholars, from the perspective of the twentieth century, analyze the reshaping of the Pacific borderlands into a site of leisure, tourism, and consumption spurred by markets in Southern California, large infrastructural developments at the border, and new transport communications like roads, cruise ships, and air travel that began to circulate along the Pacific coast of North America.<sup>50</sup>

---

<sup>50</sup> Philip Ross May, "Gold Rushes of the Pacific Borderlands: A Comparative Survey," in *Provincial Perspectives: Essays in Honour of W. J. Gardner*, ed. Len Richardson and W. David McIntyre (Christchurch, 1980), 100. Albert Hurtado. "Empires, Frontiers, Filibusters, and Pioneers: The Transnational World of John Sutter." *Pacific Historical Review* 77, no. 1 (2008): 19–47. doi:10.1525/phr.2008.77.1.19; Richard Drinnon. *Facing West: The Metaphysics of Indian-Hating and Empire-Building*. (University of Oklahoma Press, 1997); Kornel Chang. *Pacific Connections: The Making of the U.S.-Canadian Borderlands*. (University of California Press, 2012), 5-12; Bruce Cumings. *Dominion from Sea to Sea: Pacific Ascendancy and American Power*. (Yale University Press, 2009); David Igler. *The Great Ocean: Pacific Worlds from Captain Cook to the Gold Rush*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013); Gregory T. Cushman. *Guano and the Opening of the Pacific World: A Global Ecological History*. (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013); Lawrence Culver. *The Frontier of Leisure: Southern California and the Shaping of Modern America*. (Oxford University Press, 2010); and Culver, "Promoting the Pacific Borderlands: Leisure and Labor in Southern California, 1870-1950" and Rachel St. John, "Selling the Border: Trading Land, Attracting Tourists, and Marketing American Consumption on the Baja California Border, 1900-1934" in Alexis McCrossen. *Land of Necessity: Consumer Culture in the United States-Mexico Borderlands*. (Durham [N.C.]: Duke University Press, 2009); Jessica Kim. "Destiny of the West: The International Pacific Highway and the Pacific Borderlands, 1929-1957." *Western Historical Quarterly* 46, no. 3 (September 2015): 311–33.

The present story of Acapulco creates bridges within this growing field, all the more to examine why, in the first place, Mexico declined commercially in the Pacific. But it also examines master American frontier narratives that, ironically, seem to be creeping back into the history of the borderlands in the Pacific World. From the perspective of a seaport to the south, Acapulco questions those persistent narratives. To that effort, I use the insights of Mexicanist historiography on the Pacific to question several underling myths and assumptions, and thus understand the nature of Mexico's commercial decline in the Pacific. For one, the myth of the "Spanish Lake," a product of Manila and Acapulco, is based on the idea that the Pacific was a vast and empty oceanic space, the "void Pacific" as it has been alternatively called by literary writers, unexplored and loosely dominated by the Spanish Empire for 250 years. Some borderland scholars have been too enthralled by this myth, suggesting that the "Spanish Lake" meant that the eastern Pacific, which includes the coastal Americas and its offshore islands, "would have made little sense before the 1700s." It was a "waterscape betwixt and between," notes Igler, "a patchwork of disparate coastal areas connected to one another by maritime traffic." Chang provides a more nuanced analysis of this transformation. While recognizing that the myths of the Pacific "Lakes," superseding one another in a prolonged story of imperial succession, are mere imperial constructs projected onto the ocean, he nevertheless goes on to create another myth, a "new lake." "America's imperial forays into the region were part of an expansionist thrust that remade the Pacific into a vast American lake by the late nineteenth century, superseding the British, whose own imperial outreach" led to the foundation of the "white settler outposts" of Australia, Canada, and New Zealand that were eventually integrated into the larger Pacific world.<sup>51</sup>

---

<sup>51</sup> O.H.K. Spate, *The Spanish Lake* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1979); Cumings. *Dominion from Sea to Sea*, 3-16; Chang. *Pacific Connections*, 6-11; Igler. *The Great Ocean*, 8-11.

Such historical reconstructions of the United States emerging as a Pacific power in the nineteenth century have led to some problems that go against the essence of both Pacific and borderlands history. For one, the narrative of American overseas expansion has erased the history and work written on the rise and decline of two older trans-Pacific systems of exchange. Furthermore, these new histories of the Pacific borderlands, in an almost Turnerian sense, have adopted newfangled frontier narratives: “frontier expansion and overseas empire-building were inextricably intertwined—the development of one being utterly dependent on the other.” Moreover, this narrative of imperial overland conquest eventually connecting to overseas expansion in the Pacific is not new. Hubert Bancroft had already suggested this narrative in *The New Pacific* written at the turn of the century as one of the syntheses of his monumental work on the *Pacific States of North America*. Bancroft’s work and the more recent scholarship have portrayed the Pacific Ocean as a result of the closing of the landed frontiers, an inexorable extension of the American West. The story becomes another master American narrative of imperial expansion but with a trans-Pacific twist. In recent scholarship, overseas migration and the worlds created by earlier systems of trans-Pacific exchange make their “cameo” appearances and quickly leave when the story of American expansion, from 1849 onwards, resumes its on and forward journey into the Pacific World.<sup>52</sup>

In the world of commercial decline of the nineteenth century, merchants, political actors, and businessmen in Acapulco helped create services and an emerging web of exchange and movement in the North American West and the Pacific Ocean. Historians like Karina Bustó Ibarra and Inés Herrera Canales, among many others Mexicanist scholars, have begun to unearth this world in transition, between the eclipsing silk routes in the Pacific and the dawning of the gold

---

<sup>52</sup> Hubert Howe Bancroft. *The New Pacific*. (New York, N.Y.: Bancroft Co., 1912). The quote is from Chang. *Pacific Connections*, 6-11. This is a reference to Pekka Hämäläinen’s illustration in his *Comanche Empire* of the incomplete depictions of the role of Native Americans in the history of North American borderlands, described by the historian as “cameo” appearances in a history of the relentless expansion of European or American empires.

rush in California and Australia. Their findings and conclusions are important: the world of the Pacific borderlands was not created on a tabula rasa. Rather, it was redrawn over one of the two older systems of trans-Pacific exchange previously mentioned: the maritime silk routes and the *Carrera de Indias* in the pre-existing networks of coastal trade and mobility between Alta California, the Gulf of California, Mexico, and Central America.<sup>53</sup> The region of the Pacific borderlands, with its markets hinging north and south of California, thus emerged as a highly articulated coast of interconnected seaports and border towns after the Mexican-American War and the 1849 Gold Rush. But it is my contention that only until the 1950s did it become an all-encompassing world economy of services, tourism, commerce, mobility, and consumption in the Pacific, when the Californian seaside emerged in the late nineteenth century, and, half a century later, when the Mexican seaside emerged in the 1930s-1940s. Acapulco, in sum, offers a unique perspective of this eclipsing coastal world on the Pacific, and the ensuing chaos between seaports and central authorities in Mexico, the United States, and Central America, before a clear center emerged from a more regulated world of borders, commercial exchange, and new seaside economies along the Pacific coast of North America (in this case, the United States and Mexico).

The urban history of Acapulco, when it became an international resort, has attracted the attention of several scholars. The story further builds on the work of Barry Carr and Andrew

---

<sup>53</sup> Juan Domingo Vidragas del Moral, "Navegación y comercio en el golfo de California, 1740-1824", BA diss, Mexico, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1982; Jaime Olveda y Juan Carlos Reyes Garza, *Los puertos noroccidentales de Mexico*, (México: El Colegio de Jalisco, 1994); Deni Trejo, "Conformación de un mercado regional en el golfo de California en el siglo XIX, in *Secuencia*, 42 (sep.-dic. 1998), pp. 117 145; Inés Herrera Canales, "Comercio y comerciantes de la costa del Pacífico mexicano a mediados del siglo XIX", *Historias*, 20 (abr.-sep. 1988) Perhaps the most interesting is Karina Bustos Ibarra, "El espacio del Pacífico mexicano: puertos, rutas, navegación y redes comerciales, 1848-1927" PhD diss., El Colegio de México, Centro de Estudios Históricos, 2008; These aspects had already been explored in the case of the Spanish Empire and the period of the Far North in Mexico, see David J. Weber, "Forging a Transcontinental Empire: New California to the Floridas," *The Spanish Frontier in North America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), pp. 236-270. Alberto Hurtado, "California's International Frontier, 1819-1846," *Indian Survival on the California Frontier* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), pp. 32-54. There is another literature that revolves around Araceli Ibarra Bellón, Walther Berneck, and John Mayo's studies on commerce and contraband in the Pacific See John Mayo, *Commerce and Contraband on Mexico's West Coast in the Era of Barron, Forbes & Co., 1821-1859.* (New York: Peter Lang, 2006.)

Sackett. Regarding the development of a tourist industry in Acapulco, Sackett was one of the first historians to adopt a different and much more interesting approach in his study on Acapulco from 1927-1973. He focuses, not on the experience of tourism, nor on the marketing of the resort and “the creation of a bastardized *mexicanidad* for international tourists”, but rather on the physical growth and the development of Acapulco, an approach which allows him to trace the changing history of urban planning, state centralization, land conflicts, and environmental change. Barry Carr, moreover, has recently added yet another layer of revision to the history of Acapulco; he stresses the importance of economic development and integrates it into a narrative of social and cultural change in societies dominated by the tourist industry. Tourism is no longer seen through the problem of a folkloric or marketing façade hiding stark social inequalities, but through the lens of a fast-developing regional economic pole that altered Acapulco’s urban space, drastically.<sup>54</sup>

Against the grain of some cultural and tourist studies that have ventured into the postwar years of the Mexican Miracle, I argue that the early development of the tourist city in Acapulco is not a magical transformation, a post-revolutionary alchemy, so to speak; nor is it the result of “the workings of an authoritarian regime” on picturesque places, which are often portrayed as sleepy towns inert and cut off from the world by insurmountable distances.<sup>55</sup> Quite the contrary, it is my contention that a new regional market emerged from the collapse of a seaside economy that had

---

<sup>54</sup> Andrew J. Sackett, “The Making of Acapulco: People, Land and the State in the Development of the Mexican Riviera, 1927-1973”. PhD diss., Yale University, 2009; “The Two Faces of Acapulco During the Golden Age” in *The Mexico Reader. History, Culture, Politics* edited by Gilbert Joseph & Timothy Henderson. Durham: Duke University Press, 2002; Barry Carr, “Acapulco and Cancun: Two Models of Tourism Development, 1927-2012” in the XIII Reunion de Historiadores de Mexico, Estados Unidos y Canada (2010 Conference, Queretaro, Mexico) Eventually, the narrative of Mexico’s façade of modernization, hiding the dirty linen of social inequality, was seductive enough to take Sacket on an exploration of the “two faces of Acapulco”— to the emergence of socioeconomic contrasts so salient in tourist destinations Sacket, “The Making of Acapulco”, 3

<sup>55</sup> A number of studies on tourism have adopted this approach, focusing on how tourism severely questioned Mexico’s national identity, resulting in national anxieties about the very essence of *Mexicanidad*. Niblo, S.R. & Niblo, D.M., “Acapulco in Dreams and Reality.” *Mexican Studies/Estudios Mexicanos*, Vol. 24, Number 1 Winter (2008); Alex Saragoza, “The Selling of Mexico: Tourism and the State, 1929-1952” in Gilbert Joseph et al., editors, *Fragments of a Golden Age. The Politics of Culture in Mexico since 1940* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001) 91. Dina Berger and Andrew Grant Wood, *Holiday in Mexico. Critical Reflections on Tourism and Tourist Encounters*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2009.

been declining commercially. State-led tourism, in this way, found fertile ground to develop a seaside economy that was already fully integrated into the Pacific. In this increasingly integrated region, maritime routes became conduits through which the social and economic dynamics of borderland regions had, for decades, exerted their influence in seemingly far-flung Pacific seaports in North America. Ellen Churchill Semple illuminates this process in an imaginative way. When a chaotic geopolitical boundary evolves “by a system of contraction,” she notes, “out of the wide waste zone to the nicely determined line, that line, nevertheless, is always encased, as it were, in a zone of contact wherein are mingled the elements of either side.” Scholars argue that this “wide waste zone” was quickly filled in by consumer capitalism in the borderland regions at land and at sea.<sup>56</sup>

In his pioneering book on the invention of the beach and the “discovery” and spread of the seaside holiday, Alain Corbin explores how desire was finely attuned to seaboard spaces as social practices and sensibilities transformed one another. The desire to enjoy the shore spread to more “tropical” places by the early twentieth century. Henceforth, the beach, the seashore, and the aesthetic qualities of the coast—the bay, the warm climate, inlets, mangroves, cliffs and views, and the gullied landscape—slowly began to be perceived as natural advantages. No longer were they seen, at best, as irrelevant niceties or as obstacles to development and civilization, at worst. This was partly because what many urban economists and urban historians of the New Economic Geography refer to as first nature advantages of geographic location, they were all in reality constructed, socially and culturally, around qualities that focused solely on location for commercial and industrial growth. The reinterpretation of Acapulco’s natural advantages, and the economic activities derived from them, could only be accomplished through a social and cultural

---

<sup>56</sup> Ellen Churchill Semple and Friedrich Ratzel. *Influences of Geographic Environment, on the Basis of Ratzel's System of Anthropo-Geography*. (United States: H. Holt and Co., 1911), 221. For a discussion on this quote and the broader aspect of geographical boundaries in the work of Churchill Semple see, McCrossen, *Land of Necessity*, 3-6

re-appreciation of the ecology of the place, nature, aesthetics, and consumption. Only then did a new economy emerge, but one based on different sources of urban and economic growth: services and consumption. Second nature, that is the self-reinforcing process of urban agglomeration, happened when Acapulco's coastal geography was reinterpreted, culturally, socially, and spatially; henceforward, the city was repurposed for different economic activities through increasing social and cultural interactions with the sea and the seashore.

The emergence of Acapulco as a tourist city, however, was not only the result of subtle social and cultural changes that transformed a declining commercial space into a tourist seaside economy. There was a great deal of boosterism involved in the twentieth century. Boosters actively transformed the city—urban planners, entrepreneurs, post-revolutionary generals, land developers, merchants—they all reshaped Acapulco in unexpected ways and in connection to the broader stage of the Pacific coast and markets in the Mexican heartland and North America. Acapulco, indeed, reveals a broader pattern of deep transformations taking place within the “wider waste zone” of the U.S.-Mexico Pacific borderlands. With the consolidation of the border, boomtowns on the west coast of North America sprung in an age of modern urban planning—when revolution in transports and communications, mass mobility, centrally-managed and bureaucratized forms of transforming cities and territories at an unprecedented scale—opened up several potential paths for economic growth in derelict ports. In the case of Acapulco, this became particularly evident after the opening of the first road that connected Mexico City to Acapulco in 1927. As a result, during Post-Revolutionary Mexico, Acapulco finally managed to successfully change its declining export base, rely more on its function as a transport hub and transform its economic core through the agglomeration of service industries that began to emerge as a tourist industry.

The turn to tourism as a response to the decline of a traditional economic function—fishing, maritime trade, or manufacture—is clearly something shared by many modern-day resorts and border towns. Urban historians of British ports have delved into this problem of industrial and commercial economic collapse and the invention of the seaside. For them, it is paramount to escape from a prevailing set of assumptions that regards seaside tourism as simply an “escape route from the decline of fishing and maritime trade.” The tourist industry was not the only path. J.K. Walton develops an interesting argument: conflict and tension between port and city is a frequent characteristic; and yet, the very existence of tensions suggests the presence of both economic activities, until eventually one disappears.<sup>57</sup> This tension played out in Acapulco when the transport and service sectors took over the economic base dedicated to trade, dismantling the last remnants of an ailing port that used to rely on commerce.

The Mexican seaside emerged from this protracted process of commercial decline and the spread of service economies and consumption markets along the Pacific coast. Historians of maritime history who focus on coastal redevelopment have argued that after the 1940s “technology made and then broke the traditional waterfront”, opening the way to a particular moment in history when waterfronts began cycles of commercial decline followed by a “spectacular resurrection”, as John Gillis notes in his study of the human seashore. In a remarkably short period, derelict waterfronts were bought up by developers, rotten piers were demolished, and the newly evacuated spaces were quickly put to “mixed use: partly residential, commercial, and recreational. In an era of increased globalization,” he further notes, “cities borrowed from one another. Waterfront

---

<sup>57</sup> J.K. Walton “seaside resorts and maritime history”, *International Journal of Maritime History*, 9 (1997), pp. 125-47 and *Resorts and Ports*, Peter Borsay and John K Walton, 13 These “stresses and strains” within and between different economies are often absorbed by spatial segregation. I would add that spatial segregation, moreover, became a defining feature of both port-cities and tourist cities, and urban segregation has its origin in this transition from port to resort.

development became formulaic in the same way that resort development had been.”<sup>58</sup> The last features of old commercial harbors, in this way, “were engineered out of existence,” he concludes. Only when the fragments of previous orders started converging in Acapulco around a distinctive set of services and markets can we speak of a tourist industry becoming a possibility in the 1940s. Acapulco’s urban structure was finally geared towards mass consumption and leisure, hence the rise of a boomtown.

In sum, this story offers new ways of thinking about the collapse and reinvention of a seaside economy. Acapulco reshaped and connected this new world that emerged in the second half of the nineteenth century, when Acapulco irreversibly lost its centrality in the Pacific, and began to decline commercially, becoming a port of call and later a tourist city. From a worm’s-eye view, Acapulco reveals small connections to population flows, the decline of commerce in the Pacific and the changing “web of seaport life,” shifting attitudes towards commerce and the shore, and the increasing sense of place in Acapulco as its bayside slowly became the beachside.<sup>59</sup> It explains why Acapulco progressively became a service economy and tourism industry that completely changed the nature of the Mexican seaside. From a bird’s-eye view, Acapulco reveals the deep transformation of the North American Pacific from the gold rush to the dawn of mass tourism. This became a closely connected world of integrative coastal networks that eventually tied the American and Mexican heartland to a system of borderland regions and interconnected seaports on the Pacific coast of North America. By the early twentieth century, this region became fully consolidated. After the construction of the Panama Canal in 1914, seaports like Acapulco were further integrated into growing markets, transportation networks, and population flows that, after the 1927 road, created a full circuit with American cities and Mexico City. Thus it is possible

---

<sup>58</sup> John R. Gillis, *The Human Shore: Seacoasts in History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 161 Doody, J.P. (2004) “Coastal squeeze’ - an Historical Perspective.” *Journal of Coastal Conservation*, 10/1-2, 129-138

<sup>59</sup> The “web of seaport life” is a term coined by Gary Nash in his *Urban Crucible*

to explore this particular vignette of urban change in Acapulco as part of the larger story of transition, displacement, and reinvention of world economies.

## CHAPTER 1

### **Acapulco and the Making of the Pacific Borderlands** *Migrants, Maritime Business, and the California Gold Rush, 1849-1852*

“Throughout the years of 1849 and 1851” Gold Rush migration swirled around Acapulco and ushered in “a new era” that “raised high hopes of progress,” noted a prescient observer from the Mexican Society for Geography and Statistics. He was passing through the Pacific port city, picking up on the mixed mood of expectation and confusion so prevalent at the time. Acapulco, he noted, “owing to the discovery of gold placers in Alta California” and to its enviable geographic location, has been “summoned by a natural order to enjoy the benefits of traffic originated by this universal revolution.”<sup>60</sup> Indeed, there is ample evidence to suggest that the declining world of commerce in the Mexican Pacific was deeply transformed by the California Gold Rush, with the rise of seaside service economies. Moreover, part of the story that shook Mexico between 1849 and 1855 is intimately connected to this seemingly distant transformation in the Pacific borderlands.

In this chapter I establish those intimate connections and argue that Acapulco began to function as a service port and economy on a maritime frontier that fostered circuits of exchange and human mobility. During the California Gold Rush, Acapulco acquired a position of prominence as a transit nexus within a revitalized interregional network of traffic and trade along the Pacific slope of the Americas, stretching from San Francisco to Panama, and from Panama to Valparaíso. As a result, a political and economic alliance flourished in Acapulco under the influence of Juan Álvarez, Ignacio Comonfort, and a tightly-knit group of—War of Independence—veterans in Mexico’s so-called “South,” modern-day Guerrero. Preserving

---

<sup>60</sup> Manuel de la Barrera, and M.M. Toro. “Noticia estadística del Distrito de Tabares perteneciente al Estado de Guerrero.” *Boletín de la Sociedad Mexicana de Geografía y Estadística*. VII (1859): 407–47.

Acapulco's newly-acquired position as a central transit point for migration and navigation was key for the survival of this alliance. Based on consular reports, steamship documents, ship manifests, land titles, merchant contracts, and customhouse records, this chapter examines the impact of the California Gold Rush on a nascent political and economic alliance that sought to transform Acapulco's old colonial institutions into a modern port adapted to the new realities of Pacific mobility in the 1850s. The result, I argue, was primarily the creation of a refueling port.

The present chapter consists of two parts: the first, "Pacific Mobility and the Rise of Migration and Maritime Traffic in Acapulco," explores how the creation of coastal and trans-Pacific steam routes served as new means of transportation for a mobile population of migrants that increasingly began circulating through Acapulco and Mexico's Pacific borderlands. The ensuing rise of a new maritime business in Acapulco dedicated to transport services, migration, and coasting trade is analyzed in this first section. The second part analyzes the political and economic impact of the Gold Rush on Acapulco, showing how boosters tapped into a burgeoning network of commerce and steamship migration, forging a powerful alliance of merchants, steamship entrepreneurs, consuls, and provincial landowners whose interests in transport services and maritime traffic began converging in Acapulco's customhouse.

### **"When the World Rushed in:"<sup>61</sup>**

### **Pacific Mobility and the Rise of Migration and Maritime Traffic in Acapulco**

Gold discoveries bred rumors of rising and falling fortunes. Upon arriving in San Francisco in the summer of 1848, the Swiss migrant John Sutter Jr. heard "some strange reports and altogether contradictory rumors" about his father: "some said he was the richest man on earth;"

---

<sup>61</sup> The title makes an explicit reference to one of the pioneering books on the California Gold Rush, J. S. Holliday and William Swain, *The World Rushed in: The California Gold Rush Experience* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1981).

others that he was “on the brink of ruin.”<sup>62</sup> His father, General Sutter, had settled in California in the 1830s. Having been seasoned in Pacific enterprises, General Sutter arrived with a large expedition of Kanakas from the Sandwich Islands to colonize the fertile valleys of New Helevetia. This odd assortment of settlers quickly drew the attention of Governor Alvarado who in no time rewarded Sutter with a land grant of nearly 49,000 acres at the mouth of the Sacramento River. There, General Sutter began to build a fort that one day would defend his future agricultural empire. But little did he know that gold would be discovered—allegedly for the first time—in what came to be known as Sutter’s Mill in one of the creeks that irrigated his property.<sup>63</sup> Now everything seemed full of promise, and Sutter’s property literally became a gold mine on which even greater fortunes could be envisioned.

But “for some obscure reason,” General Sutter recalled in his diaries—as that night’s fateful discovery began “preying his mind”—“I saw from the beginning how the end would be, yet I was determined with my thoughts of Empire.”<sup>64</sup> Despite his strenuous efforts to keep the discovery secret, the news eventually leaked out in the closing months of the Mexican-American War. In his *California Statement*, his son, Sutter Jr. recalled how within weeks the Coloma Valley had been overrun by bands of loiterers, squatters, prospectors, and businessmen; a “parcel of rogues and immoral men” who swiftly accomplished his father’s “utter moral, physical, and

---

<sup>62</sup> John Augustus Sutter Jr., “Statement Regarding Early California Experience” in Allan R. Ottley. *The Sutter Family and the Origins of Gold-Rush Sacramento*. (Red River Books ed. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2002), 81-129

<sup>63</sup> Heinrich Lienhart, *I knew Sutter* (Sacramento, California: The Nugget Press, 1939), 14-16. Lienhart was one of the pioneers who accompanied Sutter in his expedition around the Pacific Ocean, onboard of a Russian-American Company’s ships. James Peter Zollinger, *Sutter. The Man and his Empire* (London: Oxford University Press, 1939), 103. Indeed, it was such a generous land grant that, as Zollinger notes, it “raised the settler in the unclaimed wilderness to the status of a grand seigneur.” Donald Pisani, “Squatter Law in California, 1850-1858.” *The Western Historical Quarterly* 25, no. 3 (1994): 277-310. For a transnational approach to the figure of General Sutter see, Albert L. Hurtado. “Empires, Frontiers, Filibusters, and Pioneers: The Transnational World of John Sutter.” *Pacific Historical Review* 77, no. 1 (2008): 19-47.

<sup>64</sup> Bancroft Library, University of California at Berkeley, “Reminiscense of General John Augustus Sutter” a 1933 copy of the original document in BANC MSS, 88/52, Sutter/Link Family, Papers, 1849-1992, box 1, 7.

financial ruin.”<sup>65</sup> As his father’s fortune crumbled, Sutter Jr. decided to spend all of his energies founding the city of Sacramento, in competition with his father’s estate in New Helvetia. Until illness and court cases struck him, and the vast lands he had inherited from his father were all gone in a matter of months due to a mixture of misfortune and mismanagement. Ill and harassed, and evidently failing to save his father’s estate, he fled south to Panama in search of new enterprises, leaving his father and a trail of court cases behind him. In San Francisco he boarded the “California” steamer of the Pacific Mail Steamship Company and sailed south.

After navigating the coastline between San Francisco and Panama, he eventually landed in Acapulco, where the effects of the 1849 Gold Rush were already shaking the foundations of an old and dwindling colonial port struggling to overcome the fall of Spanish mercantilism. Sutter Jr. remained in Acapulco the rest of his life, becoming one of the seaport’s nineteenth-century boosters. Initially, he served as an agent for the Pacific Mail Steamship Company, then as Commercial Agent, and eventually as U.S. Consul. Throughout the remainder of his life—for nearly thirty years—Sutter Jr. became involved in the politics of Acapulco’s long and excruciating decline as a port city until his death in the late nineteenth century.

When Sutter Jr. left for Panama in 1850, the scramble for land, gold, and fortunes was in full swing. California’s landscape was shifting at a shocking speed, perhaps as rapidly as the fortunes of the Sutters and the rest of the ill-fated landed class who had settled prior to the Mexican-American war. “The Far West that emerged after the 1849 California Gold Rush,” notes David Igler, “featured an instant market economy, dynamic urban cores, and large corporate enterprise.”<sup>66</sup> In this process, rumors of the rise and fall of fortunes were ubiquitous and the Sutters were no exception. They eventually lost everything in the mayhem. Yet debts and court cases

---

<sup>65</sup> Sutter Jr., “Statement Regarding Early California Experience,” 81-129

<sup>66</sup> David Igler, “The Industrial Far West: Region and Nation in the Late Nineteenth Century,” *Pacific Historical Review* 69, no. 2 (May 1, 2000): 159–92. Carlos Arnaldo Schwantes, *Hard Traveling: A Portrait of Work Life in the New Northwest* (U of Nebraska Press, 1999).

lingered on for years, leaving an interesting trail of legal documents and family papers that reflect the diverse stories of gold rush migrants. Such documents shed light on diverse questions as to who they were, where they came from and what kind of business they founded, but most importantly, how their shifting fortunes took them from one place to the other along the Pacific coastline from San Francisco to Panama. In the end, the fall from grace of wealthy migrants like Sutter Jr. quickly filled the swelling ranks of what borderland historians have called an itinerant labor force of “hard travelers” who sought opportunity not only in California but in the bustling system of Pacific ports on which San Francisco’s economy largely depended for trade, migration, and traffic in the early 1850s.

Acapulco’s simultaneous transformation raises important questions about the close connection between Pacific mobility and state formation in Mexico’s seaports and coastal areas. In his book on state formation and “popular federalism” in Guerrero, Peter Guardino mentions how maritime traffic in Acapulco continued at low levels up until the 1840s when the number of San Francisco-bound ships drastically increased with the Gold Rush. But this activity, he further notes, resulted in a “short and shallow boom” in the Acapulco region that soon thereafter “settled into a sustained but modest business.”<sup>67</sup> Such “a short and shallow boom” has not been explored in-depth, nor has the impact that it might have had in Acapulco or, for that matter, in the rest of Mexico’s Pacific coast economies, declining commercially. Besides Jean Meyer’s monograph on the port city of San Blas and the rise of Manuel Lozada, the literature on the growth and spread of mid-nineteenth century popular liberalism in Mexico’s littoral has for the most part followed an inexplicable landlocked perspective, with notable exceptions, of course.<sup>68</sup> Acapulco and the entire

---

<sup>67</sup> Peter F. Guardino, *Peasants, Politics, and the Formation of Mexico’s National State: Guerrero, 1800-1857* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1996), pp. 114, 252.

<sup>68</sup> Such notable exceptions are Araceli Ibarra Bellón, *El comercio y el poder en México, 1821-1864: la lucha por las fuentes financieras entre el Estado central y las regiones*, 1. ed. (México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1998); and Jean A. Meyer, *Esperando a Lozada*. (Zamora, Mich.: El Colegio de Michoacán, 1984), 197-217. Mexico’s port-cities and littoral communities have been deeply shaped by what D. A. Brading identified as a “Liberal Crescent” that

system of new and competing ports that emerged with their connections to the Pacific World and the California Gold Rush, for instance, have been largely absent from these narratives. After all, the question is left lingering: how short and how shallow was this boom in Acapulco and what were its consequences? This calls for a reexamination of those deep changes taking place in seaports like Acapulco and those others like San Blas and Mazatlán that flourished along Mexico's Pacific coastline in the shadow of the 1849 California Gold Rush.

Overlapping with borderland historiography, such a reexamination also forces us to rethink the role of Mexico's Pacific ports in propelling San Francisco and California's early gold rush economy. This present chapter then seeks to serve as a corrective to such landlocked, incomplete

---

surrounded the interior of Mexico, but also by what Peter Guardino refers to as the "echoes of popular liberalism." That is, a long arc of highland and coastal social movement that spans from nationalist and liberation movements to strands of popular liberalism and autonomism from the Independence Wars to the mid and late nineteenth century in Mexico. The literature is extensive and here I have lumped together regional and national monographs that extend from the 1750s all the way to the 1860s. For the literature on Guerrero and its connections to popular liberalism and federalism see Guy P. C. Thomson, "Popular Aspects of Liberalism in Mexico, 1848-1888," *Bulletin of Latin American Research* 10, no. 3 (January 1, 1991): 265-92; Peter F. Guardino, *Peasants, Politics, and the Formation of Mexico's National State: Guerrero, 1800-1857* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1996), and "Barbarism or Republican Law? Guerrero's Peasants and National Politics, 1820-1846" *The Hispanic American Historical Review*, Vol. 75, no. 2 (May, 1995); Florencia E. Mallon, *Peasant and Nation: The Making of Postcolonial Mexico and Peru* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995); For an older social history that deals with similar topics see D. A. Brading, "Creole Nationalism and Mexican Liberalism," *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs* 15, no. 2 (May 1, 1973); D. A. Brading, *The First America: The Spanish Monarchy, Creole Patriots, and the Liberal State, 1492-1867* (Cambridge [England]: Cambridge University Press, 1991); Charles A. Hale, *Mexican Liberalism in the Age of Mora, 1821-1853* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968). For examples of regional monographs and studies of individuals like Santa Anna, Juan Alvarez or Ignacio Comonfort that do not take into account the formation of maritime markets and trades of commerce see Tomás Arzola Nájera, *La Herencia de Juan Alvarez: el estado libre y soberano de Guerrero*, Arzola Nájera, Tomás. *Colección Cultural Tlapehualense*; (Acapulco, Gro: Editorial Sagitario, 1997); Jan Bazant, *Antonio Haro y Tamariz y sus aventuras políticas, 1811-1869*, 1a ed. (México, D.F.: Colegio de México, 1985); Clyde Gilbert Bushnell, *The Military and Political Career of Juan Alvarez, 1790-1867, 1958*; Fernando. Díaz Díaz, *Caudillos y caciques*; Antonio López de Santa Anna y Juan Álvarez., [1. ed., vol. 15., Centro de Estudios Históricos. Nueva serie, 15 (México]: El Colegio de México, 1972); Genaro García, *Los gobiernos de Alvarez y Comonfort, según el archive del General Doblado. Documentos inéditos o muy raros para la historia de México*; (México: Vda. de C. Bouret, 1910); Moisés González Navarro, *Anatomía del poder en México, 1848-1853*, 2a ed., vol. [23], [Nueva serie] - Centro de Estudios Históricos ; (México: El Colegio de México, 1983); Rosaura Hernández Rodríguez, *Ignacio Comonfort: trayectoria política, documentos.*, [1 ed.], vol. 7, Instituto de Investigaciones Históricas. Serie de historia moderna y contemporánea, (México: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, Instituto de Investigaciones Históricas, 1967); Richard Abraham Johnson, *The Mexican Revolution of Ayutla, 1854-1855; an Analysis of the Evolution and Destruction of Santa Anna's Last Dictatorship*, Augustana Library Publications (Rock Island, Ill: Augustana college library, 1939); ] Gerald L. McGowan, *La Separación lel Sur o cómo Juan Álvarez creó su estado*, 1a ed., *Fuentes para la historia del Estado de México* ; (Zinacantepec, Estado de México: El Colegio Mexiquense, 2004); Luis Olivera, *Fondo Juan Alvarez*, 1. ed., Serie Guías (Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México. Instituto de Investigaciones Bibliográficas) (México: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1995); Jaime Salazar Adame, *Juan Alvarez Hurtado: Cuatro ensayos*, 1. ed. (México: Gobierno del Estado de Guerrero: Asociación de Historiadores de Guerrero : M.A. Porrua, 1999);

histories of mid-nineteenth century Mexico and California, both in the throes of the aftermath of the Mexican-American War. As for Mexico, popular movements, cross-class alliances, and state formation in Guerrero and Acapulco have to be situated within the larger picture of a boom in Pacific trade and human mobility in the 1850s. Historians have already begun to emphasize this global moment in the Pacific Ocean. Adam McKeown notes that during the two decades after the 1850s—the apex of Pacific integration—human mobility and trade entered a new period of growth. The 1848 European revolutions and the gold rushes in California and Australia brought millions of immigrants from Europe and Asia into Oceania and the Americas.<sup>69</sup> Gold and revolution were the pull and push forces in these population movements, and gold the impetus in this “promise” of trans-Pacific trade in the 1850s. But this also entailed a larger global boom that took the form of swelling or waning flows of commodities, old and new: indeed, cycles of “fictitious prosperity” of guano, sugar, copra, and cotton took hold of Peru and the South Pacific Islands; cacao in Ecuador; booming wheat cycles in Chile and America’s Southern Cone.<sup>70</sup> As a result, the number of indentured migrants rose and joined the whirling mass of migrant laborer populations circulating from one gold rush to the other. Moreover, the SS Bessemer, or paddle steamer, introduced in the second half of the nineteenth century to minimize and stabilize the rough-and-tumble movement of steamers at sea facilitated long trans-pacific voyages for steamship passengers.

Concurrently, transport communications underwent a technological revolution and transformed sail to steam navigation after the Napoleonic Wars, which meant that many of the

---

<sup>69</sup> See Adam McKeown, “Movement” in David Armitage and Alison Bashford, editors, *Pacific Histories: Ocean, Land, People* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014). For instance, “nearly a quarter of the mining population in each region was Chinese, as roughly 900,000 Chinese migrated across the Pacific to Australia and the Americas from the 1850s to the 1870s. This amounted to a quarter of all Chinese emigration during this period—and as much as 40 per cent in the 1850s during the gold rush heyday.”

<sup>70</sup> Paul Gootenberg initially borrowed the phrase “fictitious prosperity” from Peruvian historian Jorge Basadre. For two contrasting approaches to Peru’s guano boom—one stressing a national economic history while, the other, its maritime connections and ecological concerns—see Paul Gootenberg, *Imagining Development: Economic Ideas in Peru’s “Fictitious Prosperity” of Guano, 1840-1880*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993); and Gregory T Cushman. *Guano and the Opening of the Pacific World: A Global Ecological History*. Studies in Environment and History. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013.).

early 1849 gold rush migrants were increasingly traveling on steamships. By the early 1850s, steamer routes had been firmly established within East and Southeast Asia, and from Panama to San Francisco and the Northwest Pacific Coast. Steamship routes went either around Cape Horn or through the Isthmus of Panama connecting the Atlantic and Pacific economies. Moreover, the first trans-Pacific steamships began navigating from San Francisco to Sydney in the early 1850s, and by the 1860s regular routes were established across the Pacific.<sup>71</sup> Most importantly, the American Pacific Mail Steamship Company (PMSC) and the British Panama, New Zealand and Australia Mail dominated coastal and trans-Pacific steam routes.

One of Mexico's most important contractors in the Pacific was the Pacific Mail Steamship Company, which connected the coastal route from Panama to San Francisco calling at various ports along Mexico's Pacific Coastline. Acapulco, in this system of ports, received a preferential treatment and became the obligatory refueling stop and coaling station during the early years of the California Gold Rush [see Image 4 below]. As early as the 1850s, businessmen and Mexican authorities had already contracted with most if not all of the dominant American and British steamship companies from the mid-nineteenth century. It took several decades for Mexican entrepreneurs—only until the rise of Porfirian elites in the second half of the nineteenth century—to create national steamship routes in the Pacific, like the creation of the *Compañía Mexicana de Navegación del Pacífico*, a project initially designed to break the monopoly of the Pacific Mail Steamship Company in the late 1880s.<sup>72</sup>

---

<sup>71</sup> John Haskell Kemble, "The Gold Rush by Panama, 1848-1851," *The Pacific Historical Review* 18, no. 1 (Feb., 1949): 45-46. See also Aims McGuiness, *Path of Empire: Panama and the California Gold Rush, 1848-1856* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008); McKeown, "Movement," *Pacific Histories*.

<sup>72</sup> Ruth Mandujano López, "From Sail to Steam: Coastal Mexico and the Reconfiguration of the Pacific in the 19th Century," *International Journal of Maritime History* 22 (Dec., 2010): 247-276

Fortunately, a number of Mexicanist scholars have recently turned their attention to Mexico's Pacific history, uncovering the country's maritime ties to other Pacific rimlands.<sup>73</sup> The general line of interpretation in these new studies is that the Pacific Coast in Mexico, before the arrival of railroads in different corners of the country during the Porfiriato, was a much more dynamic and globalized landscape than previously thought. This chapter embraces this historiographical shift and analyzes how this new migrant population affected the institutions and economy of Acapulco. To address this problem, I will turn first to the question of how Acapulco experienced the rise of gold rush migration and how it created economic opportunities in maritime transport services.

---

<sup>73</sup> Juan Domingo Vidragas del Moral, "Navegación y comercio en el Golfo de California, 1740-1824", BA diss, Mexico, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1982; Jaime Olveda y Juan Carlos Reyes Garza, *Los puertos noroccidentales de Mexico*, (México: El Colegio de Jalisco, 1994); Deni Trejo, "Conformación de un mercado regional en el Golfo de California en el siglo XIX, en Secuencia, 42 (sep.-dic. 1998), pp. 117 145; Ines Herrera Canales, "Comercio y comerciantes de la costa del Pacífico mexicano a mediados del siglo XIX", Historias, 20 (abr.-sep. 1988) Perhaps the most interesting is Karina Bustos Ibarra, "El espacio del Pacífico mexicano: puertos, rutas, navegación y redes comerciales, 1848-1927" PhD diss., El Colegio de Mexico, Centro de Estudios Históricos, 2008; Miguel Angel Aviles, "A Todo Vapor: Mechanization in Porfirian Mexico. Steam Power and Machine Building, 1862-1906." PhD diss., University of British Columbia, 2010; Ruth Mandujano Lopez, "Transpacific Mexico: Encounters with China and Japan in the Age of Steam (1867-1914)", MA, diss., Mexico: UNAM, 2005. There is another literature that revolves around Araceli Ibarra Bellón, Wlather Berneck, and John Mayo's studies on commerce and contraband in the Pacific See John John Mayo, *Commerce and Contraband on Mexico's West Coast in the Era of Barron, Forbes & Co., 1821-1859*. (New York: Peter Lang, 2006.)

**Image 4: Map of the Navigation Routes, P.M.S.S.C., 1854**



Map of the navigation routes in a printed circular from the Boston Agent of U.S. Mail Steamship Company and the Pacific Mail Steamship Company, Dec 26, 1854. Via Panama Route Illustrated Sheet, 1854. See “Baja California Collection” in [www.rfrajola.com](http://www.rfrajola.com). Courtesy of Richard Frajola.

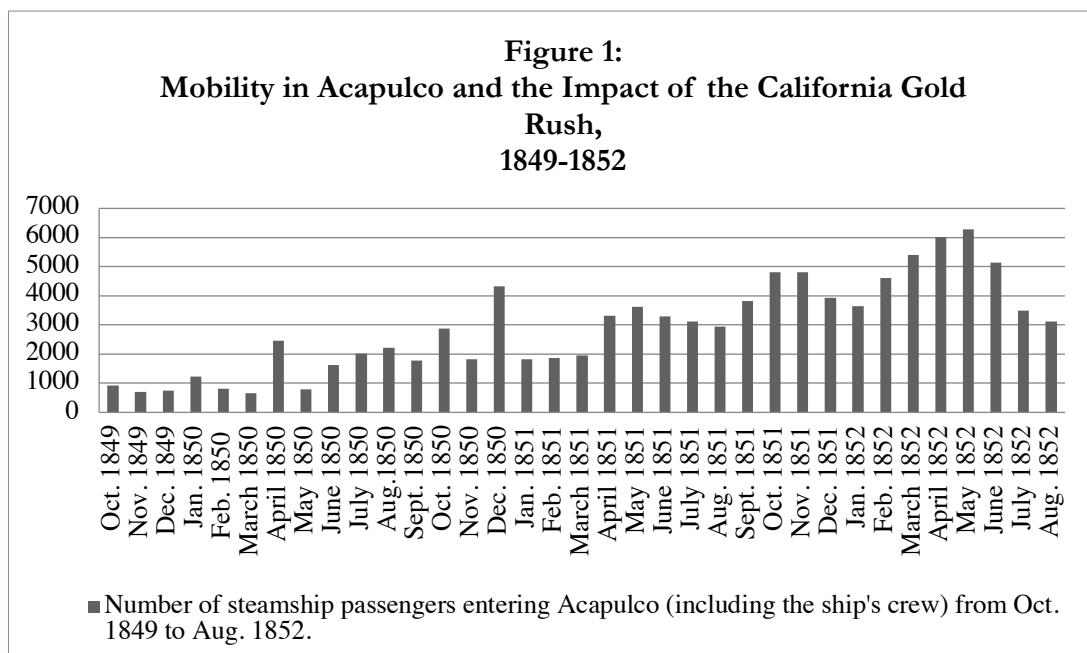
Travelers's accounts and diaries are a good source for understanding the dimension of renewed Pacific mobility. They also explain when and why a new floating population arrived in Acapulco. Coupled with ship manifests and customhouse records, all these documents give us a sense of the size, nature, direction, and movement of this migration. William Perkins, for instance, was one of the gold-seekers who travelled back and forth from San Francisco to Panama. His journal captures the details of this Pacific journey: the eleven-day voyage, the allure of gold, the ports of call, the seasick passengers, and the threat of cholera on the steamer “Winfield Scott.” Wading alongside the coast, the steamer, overcrowded with eight hundred passengers, navigated

its way to San Francisco. Too many tickets had been sold in Panama that spring, and the number of people exceeded the steamship's capacity. But this was not a rare incidence: being crammed stopped no one from boarding and embarking on an arduous voyage alongside the Pacific coastline from Panama to San Francisco.

Pioneers's journals are as vivid as they are revealing. The overcrowded conditions inside the steamer, particularly unbearable at night, often pushed Perkins to the deck to smoke, once witnessing an "immense sheet" of glowing plankton, like a "field of snow" surrounding the vessel "with myriads of fireflies on its surface." And several nights passed until finally "the cry of, Land!" was heard. Then came the eager search for the bay. After several days of searching for the entrance to Acapulco, Perkins's steamer entered the nearly "landlocked" harbor, "more like a mountain lake than a harbor," he noted. In one of his journal entries of spring 1852 he wrote that "by a lucky chance," as they waited to enter Acapulco's Santa Lucía Bay, he saw the dimensions of steamship traffic in the Pacific. The line of steamers mooring alongside the bay was impressive. Coinciding with his arrival in Acapulco, aboard the 'Winfield Scott,' was the larger but equally overcrowded steamship 'Golden Gate' from Panama, anchoring with 1,150 passengers, followed by the relatively smaller 'Independence' from San Juan, Nicaragua, with 750; closely behind in line came the 'New Orleans,' 475 passengers, and the 'Columbus' with 450, both from San Francisco. Once on the beach, as the horizon became dotted with steamships steering their way into the bay, Perkins got a clear "idea of the passenger trade between Panama and Nicaragua, and San Francisco," exclaiming in his journal that by dusk, in Acapulco, there were "nearly 4,000 fruit-ravenous men

on shore at this little place the same day!”<sup>74</sup> It is worth noting, for comparative purposes, that the number of inhabitants in the city of Acapulco barely reached 4,000 local residents in the 1850s.<sup>75</sup>

May 1852 was a busy month: once Perkins had sailed off on the ‘Winfield Scott,’ several steamships anchored in Acapulco the following week, and the number of people passing through the port kept rising, reaching unprecedented levels by mid summer. Altogether, in the course of three years, over 100,000 migrants poured into Acapulco’s harbor from the closing months of 1849 to late 1852.<sup>76</sup> Between a slightly longer period, from 1849 to 1856, around 611 vessels from Central America and California docked at the port, carrying nearly 228,000 passengers; 519 coasting schooners passed through the port around those years according to a report by the Mexican Society for Geography and Statistics.<sup>77</sup> [See Figure 1 below)



<sup>74</sup> William Perkins , Dale L. (Dale Lowell) Morgan, and James R. Scobie. *Three Years in California: William Perkins' Journal of Life At Sonora, 1849-1852.* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1964), 360. El paso de Perkins por Acapulco fue el 28 de abril de 1852, a bordo del “Winfield Scott”, p. 360. Also see the entry by the Captaincy of Acapulco

<sup>75</sup> See the end of this first section and Chapter 3 for a brief discussion of evidence and Acapulco’s demography during these years.

<sup>76</sup> Total: 101, 965

<sup>77</sup> M.M. Toro. “Noticia Estdística...”, 407-447; Elizabeth Jiménez García. *Historia general de Guerrero.* 1. ed. (México, D.F.: Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, 1998), p. 109-111

SOURCES: AGN, Movimiento Marítimo, Pasaportes y Cartas de Seguridad, 129, Vol. 19, monthly inventories of entries and departures “Relaciones de entradas y salidas” from Oct-Dec, 1849, Guadalupe Aguileta, Captaincy of the Port of Acapulco, to Minister of Foreign Relations, 276, 247, 268; Vol. 21, Guadalupe Aguileta to Minister of Foreign Relations, entries and departures for the entire year of 1850, 78-151; Vol. 25, Guadalupe Aguileta to Minister of Foreign Relations, entries and departures for the entire year of 1851, 1-80; Vol. 28, Agustín Marín, Captaincy of the Port of Acapulco, to Minister of Foreign Relations, entries and departures from January to August 1852, 196-407.

The fluctuating number of people crossing through Acapulco can be largely explained by three distinctive factors: seasonal changes in migration, cheaper ticket prices due to rising competition among steamship companies like the Nicaragua Line, and epidemics, mostly cholera outbreaks. But all throughout this period, despite the pronounced dips and spikes, there is clearly an exponential growth in the number of steamship passengers entering the seaport, rising from a monthly average of 800 in 1849 to 6,000 in the heyday of the 1852 Australian and Californian gold rushes, shortly after Perkins docked in Acapulco. Unfortunately, evidence gathered from Acapulco’s customhouse thins out after 1852, so it is difficult to assess the causes of a downward trend in migration passing through Acapulco, despite Australia’s new gold rush providing a new impetus for migrating. Yet the average number of passengers docking at the port coincides with the U.S. Consul’s approximations that after 1852 the number of passengers entering Acapulco stabilized around 4,000 every month, only to resume its slow decline through the remainder of the 1850s and 1860s, up until 1869 when overall Pacific migration peaked, with Acapulco’s customhouse reflecting this spike, followed by an abrupt decline that never recovered henceforth.<sup>78</sup>

But the question of who these migrants were and where they came from still remains—who, after all, were these “hard travellers,” in the words of borderland historians? There is some evidence from only a few years later. In the late 1850s ship manifests there are many lists of passengers carefully registered by the Mexican Consul in San Francisco, José Marcos Mugarrieta. In his registries, the consul provides ample information about Mexican passengers, including their

---

<sup>78</sup> Isaac McMicken to the Secretary of State, NAMP, *Despatches*, 1949, Mf. 143, roll 2, v.4, Acapulco, January 26, 1859

professions and where and when they settled and lived. As expected, a large number of miners and many small-time merchants, local retailers, and traders moved to San Francisco in the early 1850s, but went back and forth between Panama and California. But more unexpected is the fact that in the registries there is also a large portion of passengers registered as “*jornaleros*” and “*labradores*,” categories which refer to either day laborers, migrant workers, or disenfranchised dependent laborers who probably moved from one seaport’s hinterland to another; builders and several artisans like shoemakers and carpenters also appear on the lists of the Mexican consulate. The bulk of seasonal workers originally came from diverse ports and regions along the Pacific Coast in Mexico, and from these sources they seem to be moving constantly.<sup>79</sup> This agglomeration of sectors of society—possibly, most of them coming from ports and their hinterlands—came from a sector that sociologist Torcuato di Tella referred to as the “dangerous classes” of insurrection in Mexico’s chaotic mid-nineteenth century class structure of artisans and the disenfranchised.<sup>80</sup> Indeed, Mugarrieta’s ship manifests reveal this itinerant sector of society that was on the move within Mexico’s fractious territory, but one that can be equally interpreted as on the move from one seaport to the other in pursuit of different opportunities. This discussion will become particularly relevant in the next chapter when analyzing the development of the Revolution of Ayutla.

There is, moreover, another dimension of this migrant mobility. As soon as gold rush fever subsided and San Francisco became saturated, many seasonal migrants began circulating with ever-more frequency between San Francisco and Panama. Though one should not draw too many elaborate conclusions from these manifests, as they are patchy and do not throw enough data, they

---

<sup>79</sup> Bancroft Library, Latin Americana Collection, 69/93, José Marcos Mugarrieta Papers, 1837-1886, Box 8, Ship Papers L-Z, miscellaneous files, ship manifests 1859.

<sup>80</sup> Torcuato S. Di Tella, “Las clases peligrosas a comienzos del siglo XIX en México.” *Desarrollo Económico* 12, no. 48 (1973): 761–91.

still serve as snippets of information about a growing itinerant labor force that emerged around this time. Additionally, this data also points to a movement of migrants that was not unidirectional, with California as an end in sight, as many borderland historians assume. Tentatively, this was a floating population circulating through a complex system of Pacific ports that reigned supreme from the 1840s to 1869, until the transoceanic railway was finally completed. In an age when railroads had yet to connect the Atlantic and Pacific worlds, steamship routes offered the cheapest and quickest means of transportation. It is therefore not surprising to see this sector of society moving from one port to the other as mining and agricultural opportunities surged and vanished.

Even more difficult is to estimate the average number of Acapulco's floating population; a few sources worth mentioning indirectly shed light on this phenomenon. The Sociedad Mexicana de Geografía y Estadística makes reference to reports from the halcyon days of the gold rush that on several occasions more than 1,000 people—roughly a quarter of the size of the permanent population—remained in the port for two or three days. At times, when disaster struck and there was a shipwreck or a quarantine due to a cholera outbreak, entire groups of steamship passengers would stay for months in Acapulco and the coast of Guerrero. For instance, due to overcrowded conditions, the steamer 'Oregon' left behind 1,000 passengers in Acapulco during the summer of 1850, right before a quarantine, when cholera spread uncontrollably through the interior of Guerrero and the rest of Mexico in 1850.<sup>81</sup> On several other occasions, large groups arrived in Acapulco overland and could sometimes wait for days until they could board the next steamship. Moreover, the arrival of steamships most likely drew from Acapulco's hinterland large numbers of workers in the trade and transport sectors. In 1854 large numbers of carpenters flooding the port to repair vessels were recorded by the U.S. Consul.<sup>82</sup> During the year of 1856, once the gold rush

---

<sup>81</sup>Daily Alta California, Volume 1, Number 188, 7 August 1850; Sacramento Transcript, Volume 1, Number 71 & 73; 24 & 26 July 1850

<sup>82</sup> Charles L. Denman to the Secretary of State, NAMP, *Despatches*, 1949, Mf. 143, roll 1, v. 2, Acapulco, February 23, 1854

had subsided, the Pacific Mail Steamship Company gave out payments to 4,123 stevedores who regularly loaded and unloaded steamships docking at Acapulco's harbor, while an additional 1,440 peons were also hired to assist in the provision of water and coal.<sup>83</sup> If this was the case in 1856, one can only imagine—given the lack of direct evidence—the even larger numbers of stevedores and peons arriving in the port to unload ships during the climax of the gold rush.

Unfortunately, there is not enough evidence to present a detailed study tracing Acapulco's demographic patterns during these focalized years. But a slight population decline seems to be taking place in the city if we compare those scant accounts that mention the city's population during the mid-nineteenth century to those carried out in late colonial times. Alexander von Humboldt estimated a permanent population of 4,000 in the city which more than doubled its size to 9,000 when the Manila Galleon arrived once a year around December. Both a traveler's account in 1852 and the geographer Antonio García Cubas in 1861 locate Acapulco's population around 3,000 inhabitants.<sup>84</sup> This possible decline of 1,000 inhabitants might have been caused by a number of factors: recurrent cycles of revolution since the Wars of Independence, a trickle of permanent migration to California in the late 1840s and 1850s, and outbreaks of cholera that took their toll on the entire state of Guerrero, particularly during the year of 1850, and most likely Mexico's paltry nineteenth-century census information gathering. However, the larger picture of demographic patterns and dynamics in Acapulco and its surrounding regions will be analyzed in-depth in chapter 3. All in all, there is no significant population change in Acapulco, which points to the lack of solid economic growth in the region, and the persistence of a disconnected economic

---

<sup>83</sup> Manuel de la Barrera, and M.M. Toro. "Noticia estadística del Distrito de Tabares perteneciente al Estado de Guerrero." *Boletín de la Sociedad Mexicana de Geografía y Estadística*. VII (1859): 407–47.

<sup>84</sup> Alexander von Humboldt, Political Essay on the Kingdom of New Spain, Volume II, (New-York: I. Riley, 1811), 115; Antonio García Cubas, Memoria para servir a la carta general de la República Mexicana (México: 1861), 37; Letts, John M. California Illustrated Including a Description of the Panama and Nicaragua Routes. (New York, 1852.), 144.

geography in Guerrero and in the rest of Mexico for that matter. However, what stands out during these years, more so than Acapulco's slight demographic decline, is the interaction between Acapulco's regional politics and economy with gold rush migration and steamship traffic. I will turn now to the question of how the gold rush, and particularly the stimulus of migration, affected Acapulco both economically and politically when a revitalized Pacific network of interregional trade and traffic began connecting Mexico's ports on the Gulf of California and the Pacific Coast, a moment that opened up a window of opportunity for seaport economies in Acapulco, Mazatlán, San Blas, and Guaymas

### ***The Impact of the 1849 Gold Rush on the Political Economy of Acapulco***

Restating the main argument in this chapter, Acapulco rose to prominence as a traffic nexus within Mexico's bustling system of Pacific ports on which California's economy largely depended for trade, migration, and traffic in the early fever of the 1850s. A nascent alliance, with significant connections to the region and other ports in the Pacific, exploited the situation and tapped into this burgeoning network of trade and migration. Regional strongmen and their popular bases, merchants, steamship entrepreneurs, consuls, and provincial landowners, whose interests in transport services and maritime traffic began converging in Acapulco, sought to transform the decaying city into a port adapted to the new realities of Pacific mobility in the 1850s. Preserving its newly-acquired position as a central transit point for migration and navigation was key for the survival of this alliance. It prospered under the networks of influence of Juan Álvarez and Ignacio Comonfort, two radically different liberal statesmen—the former perceived as a radical *cacique* from the Independence Wars and leader of the popular movement in the South, the latter as a moderate liberal landowner from Puebla serving as the customs administrator of Acapulco from

1849-1853. Both Álvarez and Comonfort became presidents of Mexico after the Revolution of Ayutla (1854-55) and the subsequent liberal period of La Reforma.

There is a corollary to this main argument: gold rush traffic created a virtuous cycle that signaled a “new era [that] raised high hopes of progress” in Acapulco, as the aforementioned observer of the Sociedad Mexicana de Geografía y Estadística noted.<sup>85</sup> It showed all the elements of a virtuous cycle, at least in the eyes of Mexico’s gold-rush contemporaries. Increased migration passing through the port led to the flourishing of coasting trade and a booming business in maritime transport services, which generated the revenue needed to invest in public works, the so-called *mejoras materiales*, resulting in the expansion of an urban market in Acapulco that, in turn, attracted more migrants and travelers. Acapulco’s revamped customhouse increasingly channeled such flows, capitalizing on the benefits and opportunities generated by this mobile population.

The following section explores the moving parts of this fleeting cycle—its inherent virtues, contradictions, and shortcomings—and the actions carried out by Acapulco’s alliance to reap its benefits. Only through the collective actions of businessmen, merchants, and local strongmen—and there is a great deal of evidence signaling a convergence of interests in Acapulco—was this virtuous cycle made possible. A series of actions that set in motion deep political and commercial changes were important: firstly, Ignacio Comonfort carried out significant changes in seaport administration, enhancing the efficiency and autonomy of Acapulco’s customhouse, particularly at a moment when Juan Álvarez and other local strongmen finally managed to found the state of Guerrero in 1849. This created the necessary conditions for an expansion of Acapulco’s autonomy and its purview of seaport administration and finances. Secondly, the role of the Pacific Mail Steamship Company in increasing coasting trade was fundamental.

---

<sup>85</sup> Manuel de la Barrera, and M.M. Toro. “Noticia estadística del Distrito de Tabares perteneciente al Estado de Guerrero.” *Boletín de la Sociedad Mexicana de Geografía y Estadística*. VII (1859): 407–47.

The first signs of the gold rush coincided with the formation of the State of Guerrero in the spring of 1849. It was the culmination of a long-term process of social and political movements that had long-since sought to create a state in the “South.” The history of this trail of social and political movements, having its roots in the Wars of Independence, is long and complicated, and a number of scholars have already written excellent monographs on this period and problem. The consensus still stands: popular movements and projects of state-formation in Guerrero deeply shaped the course of early-nineteenth century national developments.<sup>86</sup>

Up until 1849, several projects for state autonomy in Guerrero had failed miserably due to a number of diverse reasons, most importantly, the Mexican-American War and the persistence of social revolts, political factions, instability, and divisions that generated an endless confrontation among regional strongmen on the coastal and interior regions, prominent among them were Vicente Guerrero, Juan Álvarez, the Galeana brothers, and Nicolás Bravo. With the foundation of the State of Guerrero, however, Juan Álvarez rose as the indisputable strongman and popular leader of Mexico’s “South,” seen as the natural inheritor of Vicente Guerrero who had been assassinated

---

<sup>86</sup> Peter Guardino, “Barbarism or Republican Law? Guerrero’s Peasants and National Politics, 1820-1846” *The Hispanic American Historical Review*, Vol. 75, no. 2 (May, 1995); Tomás Arzola Nájera, *La Herencia de Juan Alvarez: El Estado Libre Y Soberano de Guerrero*, Arzola Nájera, Tomás. Colección Cultural Tlapehuatlense; (Acapulco, Gro: Editorial Sagitario, 1997); Clyde Gilbert Bushnell, *The Military and Political Career of Juan Alvarez, 1790-1867*, 1958; Fernando. Díaz Díaz, *Caudillos y caciques: Antonio López de Santa Anna y Juan Alvarez.*, [1. ed., vol. 15., Centro de Estudios Históricos. Nueva serie, 15 (Méjico]: El Colegio de Méjico, 1972); Genaro García, *Los gobiernos de Alvarez y Comonfort, según el archivo del General Doblado, Documentos inéditos o muy raros para la Historia de Méjico*; (Méjico: Vda. de C. Bouret, 1910); Moisés. González Navarro, *Anatomía del poder en Méjico, 1848-1853*, 2a ed., vol. [23], [Nueva serie] - Centro de Estudios Históricos ; (Méjico: El Colegio de Méjico, 1983); Peter F. Guardino, *Peasants, Politics, and the Formation of Mexico’s National State: Guerrero, 1800-1857* (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 1996); Charles A. Hale, *Mexican Liberalism in the Age of Mora, 1821-1853* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968); Rosaura Hernández Rodríguez, *Ignacio Comonfort: trayectoria política, documentos.*, [1 ed.], vol. 7, Instituto de Investigaciones Históricas. Serie de historia moderna y contemporánea, (Méjico: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de Méjico, Instituto de Investigaciones Históricas, 1967); Richard Abraham Johnson, *The Mexican Revolution of Ayutla, 1854-1855; an Analysis of the Evolution and Destruction of Santa Anna’s Last Dictatorship*, Augustana Library Publications (Rock Island, Ill: Augustana college library, 1939); Gerald L. McGowan, *La Separación Del Sur o cómo Juan Álvarez creó su estado*, 1a ed., Fuentes para la historia del Estado de Méjico ; (Zinacantepec, Estado de Méjico: El Colegio Mexiquense, 2004); Luis Olivera, *Fondo Juan Alvarez*, 1. ed., Serie Guías (Universidad Nacional Autónoma de Méjico. Instituto de Investigaciones Bibliográficas) (Méjico: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de Méjico, 1995); Jaime Salazar Adame, *Juan Álvarez Hurtado: Cuatro ensayos*, 1. ed. (Méjico: Gobierno del Estado de Guerrero: Asociación de Historiadores de Guerrero: M.A. Porrúa, 1999); Guy P. C. Thomson, “Popular Aspects of Liberalism in Mexico, 1848-1888,” *Bulletin of Latin American Research* 10, no. 3 (January 1, 1991): 265–92.

in 1831. Thus Álvarez became governor and reigned supreme from 1849 to 1853 during the embattled liberal administrations of José Joaquín de Herrera and Mariano Arista.

One of my contributions to this extensive literature is to establish the connections between mobile populations in the Pacific and national and regional movements and revolutions in Guerrero that shaped the course of state formation in Mexico. But I will delve into these connections in the next chapter. For now, suffice to say that the atmosphere created by the California Gold Rush might well be fueling Guerrero's institutional transformations between 1849 and 1853. To reap the fruits of the gold rush the region could no longer continue to be administered by Toluca, the capital city of the faraway and politically distant central State of Mexico. During these years of separation and state formation, Guerrero's constitution, created in 1851, was discussed in tandem with the rise of gold rush migration in Acapulco, amid rumors of gold being discovered in Guerrero that spread like fire through the region. At some point, even Juan Álvarez believed such rumors when he gave in and invited prospectors to the region.<sup>87</sup> To bankroll and sustain this new political and financial autonomy, Juan Álvarez, acting as the newly-elected governor of Guerrero, sent a series of fawning letters encouraging powerful moneylenders like Manning and Mackintosh to buy mines in the state. But such offerings often ended in the selling away of futures and prospecting rights to mining in Guerrero.<sup>88</sup> After all, the region's untapped mineral resources weighed heavily on the aspirations and hopes of Guerrero's strongmen. But to access such untapped wealth investment in public works was desperately needed. Constitutional discussions explicitly made it their priority to carry out large infrastructural projects called *mejoras materiales*. The construction

---

<sup>87</sup> For such rumors see: Letter from Francisco Marín, Captaincy of Acapulco, to Jose Marcos Mugarrieta, Mexican Consul in San Francisco, August 16, 1860, Box 3, Correspondence and Letters, H-M, Francisco Marin in the Bancroft Library, Latin Americana Collection, José Marcos Mugarrieta Papers, 1822-1886, Banc 69/93 m; and a snippet of how travelers saw gold everywhere see Old Nick (pseud.). "Un paseo a México, 1859 y 1860." *Boletín de la Sociedad Mexicana de Geografía y Estadística* I (1869): 766-89, 778

<sup>88</sup> Juan Álvarez to Manning and MacKintosh, October 20, 1849, in Manning and MacKintosh Papers, García Collection, Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas at Austin; Tenenbaum, *Politics of Penury*, 109, 205.

of roads intended to connect Acapulco to the interior of Guerrero and eventually to Mexico City became an important project explicitly mentioned in the Constitution. But most importantly, the creation of Guerrero also meant the foundation of the District of Acapulco and its disassociation from the capital of the State of Mexico, which in turn meant more control by regional authorities and strongmen over Acapulco's federally-run customhouse. In a similar tenor, the municipality of Tepecoacuilco explained its reasons to join the State of Guerrero in a letter exalting the future possibilities found in the “immense coast” of Guerrero. They wished to see the mining “of diverse minerals that abound in a virgin mountain range;” to see “vessels from fellow republics and from all nations of the world” visiting Guerrero’s coast; to turn “Acapulco into the most frequented in the south coasts of the Republic”—“such bright and prosperous future,” concluded the letter sent from Tepecoacuilco’s offices, could only be attained through the creation of the State of Guerrero. Similar letters were sent from representatives of Tecpan, San Marcos, Zacatula, Acapulco, and countless others who wished to create local laws that would lead Guerrero, once again, to “the prosperity of a mining state.”<sup>89</sup>

Against this backdrop, we should understand the impetus behind Acapulco’s rehabilitated customhouse, its revamped finances and its far-flung networks of influence. There seems to be a positive correlation between the rise in the number of steamship passengers and an increase of total revenue collected in Acapulco during the years prior to the decline in migration, a downward trend that began towards the end of 1852. The yearly cash closings of Acapulco’s customhouse, from July 1849 to December 1853, reveal this correlation.<sup>90</sup> The customhouse reported a meager

---

<sup>89</sup> For a different perspective of the creation of the State of Guerrero see the State of Mexico archives: the Archivo Histórico del Estado de México and the Archivo de la Cámara de Diputados del Estado de México (CDEM), 162-3, file, 271 Letter from the Prefect of Acapulco to the Governor of the State of Mexico, April 1, 1848; “Representación del ayuntamiento de Tepecoacuilco relativo a su decisión de pertenecer al nuevo estado de Guerrero,” March 13, 1848 in McGowan, *La separación del Sur*, 2004, pp. 109-112

<sup>90</sup> Ignacio Comonfort Papers, 1821-1918, G470 a/b, *Inventario Aduana Marítima de Acapulco*, Benson Latin American Collection, General Libraries, University of Texas at Austin; and Rosaura Hernández Rodríguez. *Ignacio Comonfort: trayectoria política, documentos*, (México: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, Instituto de Investigaciones Históricas, 1967),

total value of \$38, 213.42 pesos for the first registered economic year, from July 1849 to June 1850, during which the gold rush spread, leading the Pacific Mail Steamship Company to sign a contract with the Mexican federal government in the first months of 1849. This contract granted Acapulco exclusive rights to serve as the Pacific company's primary coaling station. By June 1851, revenue only increased a few thousand pesos, \$40,644.02; but by June 1852 it had more than doubled, reaching \$105,316.87. Around this time, Pacific migration peaked, and the gold rush was in full swing. As a consequence, Acapulco began receiving a monthly average of six thousand steamship passengers. The total amount of revenue hiked up to \$160,164.94 with the cash closing of June 1853, and by December of that same year it peaked with \$201,360.87 pesos, only to start a slow decline in the following decades. In sum, total revenue collection in Acapulco's customhouse increased 400 percent in the course of three years, from July 1849 to December 1853.

But what explains this unprecedented increase, at least for nineteenth-century standards, since the collapse of colonial Acapulco in 1815? It certainly coincided with an abrupt rise in Pacific migration in 1849, which caused an increase in steamship traffic passing through Acapulco. But an increase in migration, and the thickening of steamship traffic as a result, does not necessarily lead to an increase in customhouse revenue. Correlation does not mean causation, and the causal relationship between migration and revenue collection is not obvious.

There were other factors at play: certainly, an improvement in seaport administration. It could be argued that customhouse corruption and Pacific contraband had been significantly reduced, if temporarily, when Ignacio Comonfort served as customhouse administrator from 1851 to 1853. After all, revenue collection significantly increased during these years. Comonfort used this fact as evidence to defend his career and reputation in the spring of 1853 when Santa Anna removed Comonfort from Acapulco's customhouse, accusing him of embezzlement and

smuggling. Comonfort faced a tortuous trial that eventually exonerated him. But this story will be explored in-depth in the next chapter. For now, suffice to say that the legal investigation of this trial produced an enormous number of testimonies, correspondence, and detailed accounts of Acapulco's customhouse and its ties to merchants and other port authorities.

Indeed, Alzuyeta, a Basque merchant who was summoned to testify, revealed Comonfort's efforts at redefining his relationship with the Spanish merchant houses that dominated the flow of coal leaving and entering the port. The Basque merchant reassured Comonfort's prosecutors that the customhouse administrator often treated him in the strictest of fashions. Comonfort's correspondence with the central government reveals his logic behind Acapulco's abrupt increase in revenue collection: not only had he tightened his grip on Mexico's Pacific trade, regulating and legalizing its flow, so he argued, but he had managed to increase the volume of trade, thereby collecting a higher revenue through taxation. The collection of revenue, as he told his prosecutors, had been responsibly transferred central to the government's paltry coffers. In this way, Comonfort presented himself as an indispensable player in saving Mexico's central administration from its chronically underfunded conditions and from the permanent state of fiscal emergency in which it toiled during the first half of the nineteenth century. Moreover, Comonfort had been able to placate Juan Álvarez who "loved him as his son", in the words of Guillermo Prieto.<sup>91</sup> Without Álvarez's blessing it was well-nigh impossible to run Acapulco's customhouse. But putting filial and putative relationships aside, both Álvarez and Comonfort did establish a close alliance, connecting the flows of capital and merchandise and the networks of merchants between the Hacienda of La Providencia (Álvarez's property), the governorship of Guerrero, and the Acapulco Customhouse.

While Comonfort's role in revamping Acapulco's customhouse was of some importance, it was not as significant as he professed. Due to a rise in maritime traffic, revenue was collected in

---

<sup>91</sup> Guillermo Prieto. *Memorias de mis tiempos*, V.II (Paris, Mexico: Vda de C Bouret, 1906), 364

larger amounts despite the flourishing of contraband in the Pacific.<sup>92</sup> Indeed, unsavory characters like the slaver and smuggler Custodio Sousa, who had played a central role in supplying Juan Álvarez with arms during the Mexican-American War, reappeared during Comonfort's administration when a number of wartime debts began to be paid. This relationship was further solidified during the Revolution of Ayutla.<sup>93</sup> A crackdown on smuggling was not the reason for an increase in revenue collection and any professed attempt to curb the hydra of smuggling was merely rhetorical.

Revenue collection increased because of Pacific trade and navigation, and the role of Comonfort and Álvarez was crucial. They masterfully articulated merchant interests with navigation business, and this explains why merchant houses, seaport consuls, and caudillos reigned supreme in Pacific ports during the mid nineteenth century in Mexico. On several occasions, for instance, cacao barons from Ecuador's second boom arrived personally in Acapulco to "supervise" contracts and transactions. Recurrently appearing in Acapulco's customhouse records is Antonio Luzárraga, an owner of the most powerful merchant house in Ecuador and frequent visitor of Acapulco who served as supervisor for cacao commercial transactions.<sup>94</sup> After Acapulco, he would continue his journey onto other ports like Mazatlán and San Blas, reactivating along the way Ecuador's extensive consular ties to circles of commerce and capital in the Pacific. Most importantly, Luzárraga, was one of the powerful agents of the Pacific Mail Steamship Company (PMSC) in South America.<sup>95</sup>

---

<sup>92</sup> "Contrabando en el Pacífico" and "Los filibusteros," *El Siglo XIX*, February 4, 1854.

<sup>93</sup> AGN, Gobernación Siglo XIX, Movimiento Marítimo, Vol. 25, February 1851, 1-80; Indeed, the relationship with this smuggler continued see: Ejército, México. *Cuentas de la comisaría y sub-comisaría del Ejército Restaurador de la libertad: que manifiestan los ingresos y egresos que han tenido en las fechas que mencionan*. Imprenta de Vicente G. Torres, 1856, p. 12, and Ana Buriano Castro and Araceli Medina, "En las redes del agio y la diplomacia: Francisco de Paula Pastor, representante de Ecuador en México (1832-1864), *Revista Mexicana de Política Exterior*, 88, 147-149.

<sup>94</sup> AGN, Movimiento Marítimo, vol 21, June 1850, 78-151; AGN, Hacienda Pública, Fondo Aduanas, Aduana Marítima de Acapulco, box 3133 D, 16-21, 1848-49.

<sup>95</sup> Ana Buriano Castro and Araceli Medina, "En las redes del agio y la diplomacia: Francisco de Paula Pastor, representante de Ecuador en México (1832-1864), *Revista Mexicana de Política Exterior*, 88, 147-149.

The virtuous cycle created in Acapulco was largely the result of the PMSC's decision to turn the port into its most important coal station and head office in Mexico. This decision catapulted Acapulco to prominence within a system of ports, stretching from Panama and Nicaragua to San Francisco, which became one of the most transited routes of migration and navigation in the Pacific world. As a result, merchant houses quickly established close ties with the PMSC and, in Acapulco, they leased lands to the company to store large amounts of coal and other provisions, all with the consent of Acapulco's newly-created municipal government in the state of Guerrero. Araceli Ibarra Bellón's detailed study of British Foreign Office reports sent by British consuls reveals the amount of coal flowing into Acapulco in the year of 1852. One report notes that 10,621 tons of coal entered Acapulco in 1852 through two steamship lines with an additional 5,000 tons through other private channels, most likely through the Spanish merchant house Alzuyeta & Co.<sup>96</sup> Comonfort himself was as involved in Acapulco's increasingly diversifying economy in transport services as these merchants. He acquired land in Guerrero and became an agent for several landowners on the Costa Chica, meaning that he served as a bridge between the powerful Pacific company and the interests of these regional landowners.<sup>97</sup> Comonfort tapped into a network of agents of the PMSC that quickly emerged after the company's foundation in 1848. John A. Sutter Jr., the Swiss gold rush migrant, and Antonio Luzárraga, the cacao baron, agents of the steamship line became integral players in Comonfort's profiteering network. When Comonfort served as customhouse administrator, his lands in Acapulco, comprising of an enormous expanse of coastal areas to the east of the bay called the Hacienda Las Playas, expanded

---

<sup>96</sup> Ibarra Bellón, *El comercio y el poder*, pp. 279-282, C. Wilthew, P.R.O. F.O. 50/263, pp. 59-61. Most likely it was rented out by the Alzuyeta House, deeply involved in the commerce and storage of coal, although it is only referenced as a "foreign company" in *Siglo XIX*, July 18, 1850; Californian newspapers mention Acapulco's Spanish merchant house when dealing with coal transactions.

<sup>97</sup> Guardino, *Peasants*, 182-5 who also makes reference to the following documents: Archivo General de Notarías del Distrito Federal (AGNDF), notary 242, May 19, 1839; AGNDF, notary 286, January 17, 1839

in tandem with the large swathes of land he rented out to the PMSC which stored coal and large amounts of provisions.<sup>98</sup>

The company was also gaining influence within regional and national political alliances in Acapulco, Guerrero, and Mexico. In this way, the powerful entrepreneurs Guillermo de Drusina and William Aspinwall were able to navigate through Mexico's protectionist maze.<sup>99</sup> In a decree of January 1849 the Pacific Mail Steamship Company was granted a disproportionate number of franchises, privileges, and concessions. The company was not obliged to hand ship manifests to port authorities in Mexico. The *derecho de tonelaje*, a tonnage tax, was waived, although captaincy fees, pilotage dues, and other services were not included; moreover, the company did not have to pay tariffs for the importation and storage of coal.<sup>100</sup> But Acapulco's relationship with the PMSC reflects a general pattern of lax dealings between the steamship company and diverse customhouses in the Pacific. As the governor of California wrote, "for a long time a system of liberality towards the Steamship Companies has prevailed" in San Francisco's Custom House; "carried too far," this system of liberality had resulted in several "irregularities and violations of law."<sup>101</sup> While these irregularities went unchecked in Mexico and perhaps further stimulated contraband, they were indirectly benefitting regional trade. In return for this liberality, Mexico's government granted its Pacific ports the right to use the company's steamships to export and trade

---

<sup>98</sup> "Escritura de las Playas Acapulco entre Juan Temple y la Compañía de Vapores del Pacífico" 1862, in Ignacio Comonfort Papers, 1821-1918, Legal Documents, Benson Latin American Collection, General Libraries, University of Texas at Austin. The history of the Hacienda Las Playas and the connection to the PMSC also appears in Sutter/Link Family Papers, 1849-1992 (bulk 1849-1964), BANC MSS 88/52 c; and John A. Sutter Papers, 1840-1870. BANC MSS C-B 631, Bancroft Library, University of California at Berkeley

<sup>99</sup> Lerdo de Tejada, Miguel. *Comercio exterior de México, desde la conquista hasta hoy*. (México: Rafael Rafael, 1853), pp. 38

<sup>100</sup> January 20, 1849. "Privilegios y franquicias concedida a los paquetes que van de Panamá a Alta California" Basilio José Arrillaga. *Recopilación de leyes, decretos, bandos, reglamentos, circulares y providencias de los supremos poderes de los Estados Unidos Mexicanos y otras autoridades de la union: Formada de orden del Supremo Gobierno*. (Mexico: J.M. Fernández de Lara, 1850), pp. 304-8

<sup>101</sup> Karen Elizabeth Jenks, "Trading the Contract: The Role of Entrepreneurs, Government, and Labor in the Formation of the Pacific Mail Steamship Company." (University of California, PhD diss., 2012), 151. The letter exchange she cites is Latham to Guthrie, 18 April 1956, HM 18953 "Letterbook," 222.

a great variety of national goods and staples. Steamships served as a network of mail, migration, and trade among ports on Mexico's Pacific Coast, which took advantage of several commercial opportunities developed by the steamship company.

The liberality with which concessions were given out to steamship companies, nevertheless, reactivated *cabotaje* or coasting trade in Acapulco and Mexico's Pacific Coast, and thus significantly compensated for poor communications and a weak commercial activity with the interior of Mexico. It provided a window of opportunity for businessmen and local authorities profiting from a surge in trade and Pacific mobility. Moreover, a permissive set of tariffs and storing regulations called the Ávalos tariff was passed in 1851 when General Mariano Arista's administration faced a merchant-led rebellion in Tampico and Tamaulipas that threatened to create yet another republic next to Texas. This meant that merchants in ports could store great amounts of goods for trade without paying duties.<sup>102</sup>

Vignettes of merchants illuminate these new opportunities in trade, partly created by the gold rush, and partly by the chaos of tariffs, regional insurrections, and revolving-door administrations. Before Edward Vischer moved to California, the renowned German lithographer of Californian landscapes had migrated to Mexico and lived for several years in Acapulco. His business was in the commerce of cacao and cotton when he experienced the first effects of the gold rush.<sup>103</sup> His employer, Heinrich Virmond, was a prominent German merchant of Acapulco who, in the words of Hubert Bancroft, became a businessman of "great enterprise" and "a skillful intriguer;" Virmond had "extraordinary facilities for obtaining the ears of Mexican officials, and was always the man first sought to solicit any favor."<sup>104</sup> Indeed, he forged a close relationship with

---

<sup>102</sup> Lerdo de Tejada, *Comercio*, 37; Navarro, *Anatomía del poder en México*, pp.250-257

<sup>103</sup> AGN, Movimiento Marítimo, vol 21, June 1850, 78-151; AGN, Hacienda Pública, Fondo Aduanas, Aduana Marítima de Acapulco, box 3133 D, 16-21, 1848-49. Bancroft Library, Charlotte Oakes, "The Vischer Family Papers: A Descriptive Catalog." Graduate Division of the University of California, 1950.

<sup>104</sup> Hubert Howe Bancroft, *History of California*, Volume V, 1846-48, (San Francisco: The History Company Publishers, 1886), 764.

politicians and caudillos from all walks of life, from Anastasio Bustamante and Lucas Alamán to Juan Álvarez, and became their confidant on Pacific and Californian affairs. After selling some of his lands to Juan Álvarez, Virmond began exploring the Pacific coast and developing close ties with businessmen in the Russian and Californian sea otter trade in the 1820s and 1830.<sup>105</sup> But the sea otter population was depleted and the fur trade had well-nigh disappeared by the 1840s. With the gold rush, Virmond quickly adapted his far-flung business networks to new opportunities in California and became one of the main merchants in Acapulco. Businessmen in the port could switch smoothly between enterprises and still make a formidable profit without bearing the economic costs of undergoing constant transitions. It was an unstable moment full of opportunities for businessmen and merchants living on Mexico's Pacific ports.

The first years of the gold rush, when San Francisco sprawled and its hinterland had yet to be developed, the costs of living for impoverished migrants soared, and this generated a vigorous demand for a dizzying array of cheaper services, goods, and staples unavailable in California. For San Francisco's booming population, it was cheaper to import basic goods such as wheat, hides, lumber, and citrus fruits from ports as far away as Acapulco, or even farther, from Guayaquil or Valparaíso. Even as late as 1856 the Pacific Mail Steamship Company still consumed over 56,000 citrus fruits in Acapulco and, taken together with a wide variety of goods, the steamship company spent nearly 22,000 on basic staples and goods provided by Acapulco's merchants that year.<sup>106</sup> As soon as John A. Sutter arrived in Acapulco in the early 1850s, when San Francisco's demand for imported fresh produce peaked, he was able to buy large plots of land near Los Órganos for the raising of cattle and the cultivation of citrus fruits—this, alongside his profitable activities as an

---

<sup>105</sup> Letter from Heinrich Virmond to Lucas Alamán, Mazatlán, February 21, 1831, Juan E y Dávalos Manuscript Collection, HD, 2823. 21.4821, Latin American Benson Collection, General Libraries, University of Texas at Austin; Jaime Salazar Adame, *Juan Alvarez Hurtado: Cuatro Ensayos*, 1. ed. (México: Gobierno del Estado de Guerrero: Asociación de Historiadores de Guerrero: M.A. Porrúa, 1999), 149

<sup>106</sup> Manuel de la Barrera, "Noticias del Distrito de Tabares," 417

agent for the Pacific Mail Steamship Company.<sup>107</sup> Soon after, he founded a small retailing store that served as a source of credit, which was around the time when Acapulco's recently-founded Spanish merchant houses—the Alzuyeta & Co., Fernández and Co.—began to grow roots in the region, forging alliances with larger merchant houses flourishing along Mexico's Pacific Coast; figuring prominently among them was the Casa Barrón Forbes & Co. in San Blas.<sup>108</sup>

Acapulco was becoming a relatively important urban market in the region, supplied by small-scale commerce in diverse goods. “The number of shops for the sale of goods seem in disproportion to the size of the town” noted Robert Greeley, a writer and traveler who visited the port three times—1854, 1857, 1863—in his lifetime; along the principal business-street, he notes, “everywhere money is abundant. Rich and poor alike are extravagantly fond of displaying it.”<sup>109</sup> While certainly an exaggeration, the circulation of so many goods, merchants, and traders in such a small town was what most impressed careful observers like Greeley. Indeed, the local market flourished every time a steamship arrived, and there is evidence from previously mentioned travelers that an urban market was expanding in the port. Small traders and merchants who depended on maritime traffic were multiplying along with the transport sector, which was also teeming with the activity of stevedores, peons, muleteers, boatmen, and packers. As the *Siglo XIX* commented in a report on the effects of the gold rush in Acapulco: the port “which had remained in oblivion and obscurity, since commerce with the Philippines ceased, is being reanimated today and starts showing some signs of life...we have presented this report [to show] how movement,

---

<sup>107</sup> See land titles in John Sutter Jr. Collection, Box 316, Acapulco Material; and box, 315, Business Papers California State Library, California Room;

<sup>108</sup> For excellent studies on the Casa Barrón Forbes & Co. see Araceli Ibarra Bellón, *El comercio y el poder en México, 1821-1864: la lucha por las fuentes financieras entre el Estado central y las regiones*, 1. ed. (México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1998), 422-38. Jean A. Meyer, *Esperando a Lozada*. Zamora, (Mich.: El Colegio de Michoacán, 1984), 197-217

<sup>109</sup> Robert F. Greeley, “Scenes in Acapulco.” *Appletons' Journal of Literature, Science and Art (1869-1876)* VI, no. 129 (Sep 16, 1871): 324.

change, and commerce can bring life to populations, almost miraculously and at any moment.”<sup>110</sup>

But the report was missing a vital element in this equation: the gold rush was bound to finish.

## Conclusion

Acapulco’s boom was as credibly real as it was short-lived. Yet Acapulco’s story is also that of Mexico’s commercial decline in the Pacific World. After all, it was “a short and shallow boom.” Acapulco, without a productive hinterland, never grew beyond its status as an important port of call. The port of call became subject to the whirlwind of gold-rush migration and dependent on the whimsical cycles of a faraway mining economy that was destined to cease. In the end, the 1849 California Gold Rush generated a new but very unstable circuit of trade and migration that eventually failed to create a strong regional economy in Acapulco.

Without solid connections to the interior of Mexico, and despite its proximity to San Francisco and its fickle bonanza, the situation in Acapulco was bound to create superficial economic growth. Once the gold rush subsided, Acapulco’s hinterland remained as poor and stagnant as before; the city grew meagerly, and its urban market continued to be as disproportionately large as before. No population boom or significant urbanization ever took place; in fact, there is evidence that a slight demographic decline was experienced during these years. Revenue collection at the customhouse peaked then declined when the excitement of the 1850s had passed, resuming its long-term pattern of decline. Hearsay of gold discoveries in the region all proved to be mere rumors. Competition among Mexico’s Pacific ports was fierce. San Blas, Guaymas, and Mazatlán skyrocketed in the system of seaports while Acapulco’s authorities held fast to an illusory position of power: a privileged coaling station within the nascent scramble for San Francisco’s expanding market.

---

<sup>110</sup> *Siglo XIX*, “Acapulco”, June 18, 1850

But the gold rush *did* generate a brief virtuous cycle of economic and political renewal, the story of bonanza and the creation of a new coasting steamship economy that has been overlooked by historians. It was a credible window of opportunity, after all, considering the rumors of prosperity that gold discoveries constantly bred. The 1849 California Gold Rush spurred mass migration and generated a bustling system of ports in the Pacific. This inadvertently cemented a strong and long-lasting alliance in Acapulco that profited from coasting commerce and maritime traffic, reinforcing Guerrero's place as an independent state within a waning federal system. By 1852 an insurrection began in Jalisco as General Mariano Aristas's government began to stumble its way into a coup that deposed him later that year, paving the return of Santa Anna.

As the aforementioned observer noted only a few years later after the gold rush's heyday: "throughout the years of 1849 and 1851 a new era rose before the port and raised high hopes of progress; but it all turned out to be ephemeral."<sup>111</sup> Perhaps another story could have unfolded. But it turned out to be a story of missed opportunities; and yet, it is a story marked by powerful political alliances taking roots in an effervescent social context in the South. Such alliances, by 1852, could not grapple with Acapulco's sudden bust; and from then onwards they resorted to other means. Ignacio Comonfort and Juan Álvarez's alliance exploited the port's paltry customs revenues to bankroll yet another insurrection in 1854, and the consequences of such a decision, unexpectedly, reverberated across the entire country. Had Acapulco kept declining slowly but steadily, as it had done since the Wars of Independence, the consequences of its implosion would not have been as momentous as they were—but this remains in the realm of the counterfactual. What we do know is that the California Gold Rush created in Acapulco a fleeting (exogenous) boom that could only

---

<sup>111</sup> Manuel de la Barrera, "Noticia Estadística Del Distrito de Tabares", 416.

lead to an unforeseen bust, and a spiraling revolution thereafter. It is to this story of revolution and the final unraveling of Acapulco as a prime Pacific port city that I will turn to in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER 2

### The Revolution of Ayutla and the Scramble for Port Cities: Caudillos, Maritime Traffic, and Pacific Markets in Mid-Century Mexico, 1853-55

“The Custom House is naturally plebeian, but plebeian like smallpox, like a thorn, like a mosquito that pesters your dreams,” mused Guillermo Prieto in his memoirs. His role as public servant had led him to the world of the customhouse, the underbelly of seaports and backwater frontiers.<sup>112</sup> It was a “mansion of noise,” a “great movement of mules and carts rushing in and out through the doors to the deafening sound of hammers and wedges; the tumult of loaders rolling and transporting barrels; customs inspectors, with manifests in hands, crosschecking bills, examining merchandise, quarrelling with masters and servants; and the mass of *indios*, *indias*, muleteers, store clerks,” and stevedores that stormed into the offices, all jostling for the attention of bookkeepers, collectors, administrators, and “doctors of the law.” Yet amid this “great movement” the world of the customhouse, “plebeian” as it was, remained attractive, luring Prieto and many others of his time into its chaotic offices, for the customhouse could speak out loudly “like Don Donato de Bretón—‘I have Money.’”

In this way, “in the prerogatives of officials, in the aspirations of high-ranking personalities to positions of leadership and their connections to the richness of trade, the Custom House reached an exalted position of eminence,” commented the poet and public servant—“its intervention in business was of paramount importance.” But this created an underworld where Mexico’s infamous mid-nineteenth century *agiotistas* or speculators reigned supreme. A cast of moneylenders,

---

<sup>112</sup>All translations are mine. The following description of the customhouse is based on the memoirs of Guillermo Prieto, the protégé of Andrés Quintana Roo who commissioned Prieto to serve as customhouse administrator in Campeche, see Prieto. *Memorias de mis tiempos ...* (Paris: Vda. de C. Bouret, 1906) V I, 218-227; V II “vampiros del tesoro” “filibusteros del contrabando y merodeadores del tesoro,” pp. 343, 377. For this fascinating description of the world of the customhouse see V I, 218-227. Also quoted in Araceli Ibarra Bellón, *El comercio y el poder en México, 1821-1864: la lucha por las fuentes financieras entre el Estado central y las regiones*. 1. ed. (México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1998), 59-61.

caudillos, merchants, businessmen, consuls, and speculators—that is, “smuggling filibusters,” in Prieto’s colorful description, and “vampires of the treasury”—“threatened to devour everything” through a series of reprisals and extortion: and from this world, “behold, a struggle of theft, of scams, of lies and indignities without tale.”

Guillermo Prieto’s colorful description may well be the stirring scene behind the Revolution of Ayutla, 1854-55, when the world of the customhouse, a veritable frontier regime, ran through the nineteenth century as one of Mexico’s great forces. Those fortunate enough to gain control of customs revenue—hence control of ports and frontier towns and their connections to mobile labor pools, privateers, capital, trade, and illicit markets—altered the course of major revolutions, shaped the patterns of popular upheaval, and tilted Mexico’s power balance in long processes of state formation. In this way, the world of mid-nineteenth century Acapulco is also the world where the Revolution of Ayutla unfolded, and retelling this story from the perspective of maritime history means exploring those meaningful connections between revolution, population flows, and changing markets in the Pacific.<sup>113</sup>

The present chapter explains why a seemingly irrelevant fiscal conflict, in this case, a struggle over customhouse revenues in Acapulco, unleashed a regional rebellion that morphed into a national revolution toppling the last dictatorship of Antonio López de Santa Anna (1853-55). As explored in the previous chapter, the 1849-52 California Gold Rush had turned Acapulco into a

---

<sup>113</sup> The history of seaports is an integral part of maritime history. A focus on seaports provides an invaluable geographical framework for studying transregional history, beyond the nation-state, and the far-flung connections to commerce, migration, markets, and other port-cities. In his seminal study of the Mediterranean, Fernand Braudel has an interesting analysis of the life at seaports and coastal communities, conceived as ephemeral crossroads completely dependent on commerce and traffic: “all ports, by definition, stand where land and water meet” facing both ways. Fernand Braudel *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II.* [1st U.S. ed.], V. I, (New York: Harper & Row, 1972). 317; For a collection of essays on different forms of maritime history see Jerry H. Bentley, Renate. Bridenthal, and Kären Wigen. *Seascapes: Maritime Histories, Littoral Cultures, and Transoceanic Exchanges.* (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2007); and Jerry Bentley, “Sea and Ocean Basins as Frameworks of Historical Analysis.” *Geographical Review* 89, no. 2 (April 1, 1999): 215–24.

coveted seaport within a system of ports that stretched from San Francisco to Panama. A number of seaports that dotted Mexico's Pacific littoral and the Gulf of California became points of articulation among merchants, consuls, businessmen, and moneylenders, on the one hand, and alliances of peasants, caudillos, and military factions, on the other. But by 1852, gold rush traffic and trade had undergone, once again, a profound transformation in the Pacific world. Gold fever subsided in California and shifted to Australia, redrawing gold rush markets over the lines of dwindling migratory and commercial networks between San Francisco and Panama. Guerrero's coastal regions are a case in point in this connection between Pacific markets and revolution. For several decades, the Acapulco Customhouse had served as the motor behind the permanent mobilization of the Army of the South, first under the command of Vicente Guerrero then under Juan Álvarez, Florencio Villareal, and his collaborators who had been challenging Mexico's central power since the 1830s. Yet something must have changed behind this logic of permanent mobilization. It had started since the "Wars of the South" in the 1830s, perhaps even earlier, since Vicente Guerreros's popular insurrection in 1814; and yet there is a nagging idea that something changed by the 1850s.

From the perspective of Acapulco, this chapter argues that gold rush markets entered a period of uncertainty and volatility in the 1850s. As a result, political and social unrest became intertwined with commercial discontent in Mexico's Pacific ports. Such rising tensions erupted into the scene of increasingly contested national politics under Santa Anna's dictatorship. In a backwash movement, the receding flows from gold rush markets in California abruptly flooded Mexican Pacific ports with miners, businessmen, prospectors, and mercenaries who brought with them cash, gold, and large amounts of merchandise, ammunition, and arms. Thus the stakes in Mexico's Pacific markets became even higher; as a result, the nature and degree of intensity of political struggles over its customhouses changed drastically.

For those in charge of administering the economy and politics of Mexican Pacific ports, it no longer became a question of regulating gold rush migration and reaping its benefits, but one of political and economic risk as insurgents, merchants, and their popular movements began to tap into black markets and deal with increasing numbers of castaways from the dwindling traffic of the California Gold Rush. The question in national politics was not merely about state formation, nor was it solely about different state projects proposed by Mexico's warring social forces and their ideological struggles, as proponents of popular liberalism suggest. The reigning question in the 1850s was also about access to changing markets: who in the end would be able to tap into the chaos of gold rush markets and bankroll risky ventures against the central government. This question arose with full force as Mexico entered yet another moment of fiscal and political instability in the early 1850s.

### **Historiography of the Revolution of Ayutla**

The triumph of the Revolution of Ayutla is a matter of paramount importance in Mexican history, but for historians the consensus ends there. Strong disagreements arise when assessing the reasons for its importance, partly because defining its legacy has stood as a matter of contention, which has yet to produce a systematic analysis of the causes of the Revolution of Ayutla itself. Often—with some noticeable exceptions—historians distribute its causes to support a preferred outcome of the Revolution (i.e. the inevitable triumph of liberalism, the origins of La Reforma, the irruption of peasants into processes of state formation, or a shift in political and popular culture). At times, the history of Ayutla has led to teleological narratives that miss some crucial factors explaining why, when, and most importantly *where* the Revolution happened in the first place. Even the very idea that this mass uprising might represent a revolution could be questioned;

in this chapter, I do not wish to judge the “revolutionary credentials” of the Ayutla movement.<sup>114</sup> Suffice to say, for now, that although the nature of this movement is still contested, the Revolution of Ayutla did bring about systemic change, and for that simple reason studying its causes is worthwhile.

A review of the literature can be roughly categorized into four different interpretations of the causes and genesis of the Revolution of Ayutla: 1) the traditional, nationalist approach to political and ideological history; 2) the thesis on caudillos and revolution; 3) the fiscal and commercial explanations of the movements; 4) and finally, the “popular liberalism” thesis, the most recent revisionist approach to the Revolution of Ayutla. The traditional—somewhat Whiggish—approach to Mexico’s nineteenth century sees the Revolution of Ayutla as part of a long history of ideological struggle. It entails a narrative of the inevitable progression of Mexico’s history towards greater political and economic freedom, a process that culminated in the triumph of Mexican liberalism under the *República Restaurada*. From such a perspective, the liberal project was bound to prevail in this historical struggle, an interpretation that retained its appeal well into the first half of the twentieth century. Historians like Edmundo O’Gorman argued in 1954, during the celebration of the first centennial, that the Revolution of Ayutla was important because it synthesized two conflicting utopias that had been long since envisioned in Apatzingán and Iguala: that of a liberal republic versus a conservative monarchy, respectively.<sup>115</sup>

A history of political power that focuses exclusively on the actions of mythical individuals like Santa Anna and Juan Álvarez runs parallel to the titanic ideological struggle proposed by earlier scholars. Ideology and the great deeds of statesmen were seen as the fount of historical change. This view of the Revolution was popularized by Anselmo de la Portilla, Niceto de

---

<sup>114</sup> I do not wish to present a rehash of the “Great Rebellion” debate that took place among historians of the Mexican Revolution.

<sup>115</sup> Edmundo O’Gorman, “Precedentes y sentido de la Revolución de Ayutla.” *Seis estudios históricos de tema mexicano*. Vol. 7. (Biblioteca de la Facultad de Filosofía y Letras, Xalapa: Universidad Veracruzana, 1960)

Zamacois, Guillermo Prieto, Mariano and Vicente Riva Palacio, Lerdo de Tejada, Justo Sierra, Emilio Rabasa, and many other nineteenth-century historians, generals, jurists, politicians, and men of letters: some, like Portilla, were writing as early as 1856, others like Prieto, Vicente Riva Palacio, and Lerdo de Tejada had been active participants in the events of Ayutla.<sup>116</sup> Most of them serve as important first-hand accounts of the revolution. Guillermo Prieto, for instance, went as far as writing entire romances and poems dedicated to the Plan of Ayutla and the war of La Reforma, most telling is his “Muy verírifico y muy entrador romance del Plan de Ayutla.”<sup>117</sup>

Elements of this romanticized history can still be found in the work of twentieth-century social scientists and historians like Jan Bazant, Clyde Bushnell, and Fernando Díaz Díaz. Bushnell, for instance, describes Juan Álvarez as a “Christian gentleman,” a follower of Mexico’s ideological streaks of republicanism, all the more to question the representation of Álvarez as an “illiterate Indian caudillo.” By contrast, Díaz Díaz, more concerned with elucidating new Weberian types of charismatic rule found in the political culture of *caciquismo* and *caudillismo* in Mexico, concludes that “the Plan of Ayutla was but the rallying cry of a group of courageous men, inspired by the defense of their personal interests.”<sup>118</sup>

---

<sup>116</sup> Anselmo de la Portilla. *Historia de la revolución de México contra la dictadura del General Santa-Anna, 1853-1855*. Facsímil de la ed. mexicana de 1856. (Clásicos de la historia de México. México D.F.: Biblioteca de México, Fundación Miguel Alemán, 1993); there is also the monographs on the State of Guerrero and the gargantuan 22 tome history of Mexico by Niceto de Zamcois who had a fascination with the “South,” Guerrero, and Alvarez’s troops of “pintos,” see his brief monograph on Guerrero, “Estado del Sur” in Niceto de Zamacois. *Vindicación de México: antología / Covarrubias, José Enrique*. (México: UNAM, Coordinación de Humanidades, 2007) For the presidency of General Mariano Arista (1851-53), the Santa Anna dictatorship (1853-55), and the Revolution of Ayutla see volumes 13 and 14 in Niceto de Zamacois. *Historia de Méjico desde sus tiempos más remotos hasta nuestros días...* (Barcelona: J.F. Párres y compa., 1878.); Francisco Bulnes. *Juárez y las revoluciones de Ayutla y de Reforma*. (1. ed. México, 1905); for another example of late nineteenth century Porfirian liberal historians seeing a direct link between the Revolution of Ayutla and the period of La Reforma see Justo Sierra. *Juárez; su obra y su tiempo*. (México: Editorial Porrúa, 1970.)

<sup>117</sup> Guillermo Prieto. 1818-1897. *Colección de poesías escogidas: publicadas e inéditas*. (México: Tip. de la Oficina impresora de estampillas, 1897), 1-89

<sup>118</sup> Clyde Gilbert Bushnell, The Military and Political Career of Juan Álvarez, 1790-1867, (PhD diss, 1958), p. 47; Fernando Díaz Díaz. *Caudillos y caciques; Antonio López de Santa Anna y Juan Álvarez* (México: El Colegio de México, 1972), p. 261

However, the emerging picture of the Revolution, by the 1960s, was that of a naked power struggle among self-interested actors worthy of ahistorical analyses of

ational choice theory; a story of *Realpolitik* that discounted the moral, cultural, and ideological underpinnings of political actions and regarded “caudillos as unprincipled opportunists who mimicked political discourse to hide personal ambitions.”<sup>119</sup> Peasants and popular movements in this story became mere pawns in this power struggle, and caudillo-peasant relations became yet another variant of patronage models. This became the predominant view of the Ayutla movement up until the 1980s, a story reduced to nothing more than a “complicated dance, in which Santa Anna sought to neutralize Álvarez and the latter reacted,” as critics of this interpretation contend. “In this version,” Peter Guardino argues, “the revolt had no particular ideological agenda and was a purely defensive reaction by a regional strongman against attempts to eliminate him.”<sup>120</sup>

Scholars have approached caudillos in many different ways, and the literature on this topic is too varied and too broad to analyze in-depth in this chapter. But critics of the view of caudillos as greedy and unpredictable—somewhat mythical—rulers, as “men on horseback” according to Charles Chapman, have often overlooked more nuanced analyses that focus on the workings of *caudillismo* in very specific socioeconomic, cultural, and institutional contexts in the mid-nineteenth century. Studies of the social, regional and political bases of caudillo mobilization have produced several interesting interpretations. Charles Walker, for instance, argues that peasant and caudillo politics are intimately linked; that only by linking these two historical actors can “the difficult path to political stability and state formation be understood.”<sup>121</sup> In his view, one element

---

<sup>119</sup> Donald Fithian Stevens. *Origins of Instability in Early Republican Mexico*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991), p. 2.

<sup>120</sup> Peter F. Guardino. Peasants, Politics, and the Formation of Mexico’s National State: Guerrero, 1800-1857. (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1996), 184-5

<sup>121</sup> Richard Morse, John Lynch, Paul Gootenberg, Charles Walker, and most recently Jeremy Adelman, have all delved into the elusive historical realm of caudillos. Richard Morse provides a culturalist explanation that saw caudillos as a revenant of Spanish patrimonialism. Charles Chapman and John Lynch saw caudillos as a sociopolitical phenomenon emerging from the power vacuum left after the collapse of the Spanish Empire. Charles Walker. *Smoldering Ashes: Cuzco and the Creation of Republican Peru, 1780-1840*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999.),

missing from earlier monographs on caudillos is a detailed examination of the processes behind the forging of alliances, the creation of bureaucratic and fiscal structures, and the cultivation of a culture of political compromise through rituals, elections, laws, constitutions, commercial codes, and patronage networks. In a similar vein, Jeremy Adelman explores the legal and cultural underpinnings of Juan Manuel Rosas' alliance of merchants and landowners in Buenos Aires. From a neo-institutionalist approach, Adelman dispels the myth that such regimes represented mere lawlessness and anarchy, emphasizing instead “a constitutional spirit [that] emerged from the caudillo regime of quasi-law.”<sup>122</sup>

During the debt crisis of the 1980s, the so-called “forgotten decade” in Latin America, many economists and economic historians turned their attention to earlier decades of commercial and financial instability.<sup>123</sup> The connections between fiscal crises, patterns of regional rebellion, and political instability were drawn to explain how “Mexico was politically unstable during the early republic because its leaders mistakenly believed they could finance the government mostly from the proceeds of taxes levied on foreign trade.”<sup>124</sup> According to Barbara Tenenbaum, the Revolution of Ayutla gained momentum when the relationship between moneylenders and Santa Anna worsened and powerful bankers and merchants began financing the revolution.

The relationship between the rule of caudillos and shifting fiscal structures and commercial policies has been interestingly expounded by Paul Gootenberg who notes, from a more structuralist

---

4-8; Halperin Donghi, Tulio. “El surgimiento de los caudillos en el marco de la sociedad rioplatense posrevolucionaria.” *Estudios de Historia Social* 1.1 (October 1965): 121–149; Charles Chapman. “The Age of the Caudillos: A Chapter in Hispanic American History.” *Hispanic American Historical Review* 12.3 (August 1932): 281–310; Richard Morse. “Toward a Theory of Spanish American Government.” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 15.1 (January 1954): 71–93

<sup>122</sup> Jeremy Adelman. *Republic of Capital: Buenos Aires and the Legal Transformation of the Atlantic World*. (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1999), 165

<sup>123</sup> Malcolm Deas. “The Fiscal Problems of Nineteenth-Century Colombia.” *Journal of Latin American Studies* 14, no. 2 (1982): 287–328; Tulio Halperin Donghi, *Guerra y finanzas en los orígenes del estado argentino (1791-1850)*. (Buenos Aires, República Argentina: Editorial de Belgrano, 1982.); and Barbara Tenenbaum. *The Politics of Penury: Debts and Taxes in Mexico, 1821-1856*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1986.

<sup>124</sup> Barbara Tenenbaum, *The Politics of Penury: Debts and Taxes in Mexico, 1821-1856*. (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1986), xii, 137

perspective, how “the subterranean world of militarist finance shaped [trade] policy in three major ways: out of the practical limits of free-trade liberalism, from the specific nature of short-term finance tools, and from the larger symbiotic merchant caudillo political embrace.”<sup>125</sup> Indeed, from this perspective, Gootenberg explains how commercial policy before the Age of Guano in Peru was shaped by the “peculiar emergency means of mobilizing finance” for militarist ventures in the periphery, some seeking to capture the central state, other to resettle old tariff and commercial disputes.

The present chapter draws heavily from these latter interpretations to understand the forging of a cross-class alliance under Ignacio Comonfort, Juan Álvarez, Tomás Moreno, and Florencio Villareal in Guerrero and Acapulco. In different studies of public finances, commerce, and insurrection, historians like Donald Stevens, John Coatsworth, Araceli Ibarra Bellón, and Richard Sinkin have noted that “the strength of the liberal opposition to conservatives lay in the high levels of political support concentrated in port-cities and among regional caudillos in the north and south ends of the country.”<sup>126</sup> Indeed, Mexico’s port-cities and littoral communities were deeply shaped by what D. A. Brading identified as a “Liberal Crescent” in Mexico, but also by what Peter Guardino refers to as the “echoes of popular liberalism.” That is, a long arc of social liberalism that spans from nationalist and liberation movements to strands of popular liberalism and autonomism to more radical twentieth-century forms of social organization, like agrarianism and socialism.<sup>127</sup>

---

<sup>125</sup> Paul Gootenberg, “Politics of Emergency Finance in Peru” in Vincent C. Peloso, and Barbara A. Tenenbaum. *Liberals, Politics, and Power: State Formation in Nineteenth-Century Latin America*. (United States: University of Georgia Press, 1996), 155; For a more detailed exposition of this argument see Gootenberg. *Between Silver and Guano: Commercial Policy and the State in Postindependence Peru*. (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1989.)

<sup>126</sup> Jon Coatsworth. “Los orígenes del autoritarismo moderno en México,” *Foro Internacional*, 16 (Oct-Dic, 1975): 205-32, pp. 212- 213; Richard Sinkin, *The Mexican Reform, 1855-1876: A Study in Liberal Nation-Building*. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1979); Ibarra Bellón, *el comercio y el poder en México*; Donald Stevens. *Origins of Instability in Early Republican Mexico*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991.)

<sup>127</sup> D.A. Brading, “Creole Nationalism and Mexican Liberalism” *Journal of International Studies and World Affairs*, vol. 15, No. 2 (May, 1973), 185. I further conceptualize this Liberal Crescent as composed of two

This geography of regional rebellion was further elaborated in the 1980s and 1990s when historians presented a more nuanced and rounded vision of peasant and Indian participation in politics. Popular politics and political culture were reinterpreted under the lens of state formation. In a clear allusion to Theda Skocpol's seminal collection of essays on the nature of the state, "bringing the state back in without leaving the people out" was one of the revisionist approaches that scholars like Peter Guardino, Florencia Mallon, Charles Walker, and Guy Thompson adopted when analyzing the role of popular liberalism in processes of state formation. "State formation, nineteenth-century national politics, the manner in which peasants' political action changed with independence, and the efforts of Mexico's political elite to transform the countryside—are all fundamentally linked," notes Guardino. Thus in his view the Ayutla movement and the popular federalist project, backed by a resilient cross-class coalition in Mexico, "arose from the animosity of large parts of Guerrero's society to the specific model of the state promoted by Antonio López de Santa Anna" and his allies during his last dictatorship (1853-55).<sup>128</sup>

---

different streaks, which I will name the territorial and the cross-temporal arcs of Mexican liberalism. Both shaped urban politics in Acapulco and redefined its position as a gateway to the global circulation of goods, capital, ideas, and people. By a "territorial arc" of liberalism I refer to the preferred but fairly basic core-periphery model that illustrates the broad ideological cleavages, conflicts, and allegiances crisscrossing the early Mexican Republic. In this model of political geography, the colonial heartlands of Mexico City, Puebla and the Bajío, where institutions like the Church had a stronger presence and there was a marked social differentiation, formed the conservative center while, in its surroundings areas, there was an outlying "Liberal archipelago" of states (Oaxaca, Guerrero, Michoacan, Jalisco, Zacatecas, San Luis Potosí and Veracruz), which I would also add conformed an "economic archipelago" of badly interconnected regional markets and economies, most of them, in fact, economic frontiers (Veracruz and Zacatecas less so than Guerrero and Oaxaca, for instance). Although this "cartography of political sympathies" explains broad national cleavages, it fails to acknowledge an important strand of rural conservatism that combined with different forms of urban liberalism in provincial towns and ports Benjamin T. Smith, *The Roots of Conservatism in Mexico* Catholicism, Society, and Politics in the Mixteca Baja, 1750-1962 (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2012), 156-7; Peter Guardino, "Barbarism or Republican Law? Guerrero's Peasants and National Politics, 1820-1846" *The Hispanic American Historical Review*, Vol. 75, no. 2 (May, 1995), 213

<sup>128</sup> Gilbert Joseph and Daniel Nugent. *Everyday Forms of State Formation: Revolution and the Negotiation of Rule in Modern Mexico*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 1994), 12; Theda Skocpol *et al*, *Bringing the State Back in*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985); Guardino, *Peasants and Politics*, 132,179-80, 210. The literature on popular liberalism is enormous, but see the following for a comprehensive overview, Thomson, Guy P. C. "Popular Aspects of Liberalism in Mexico, 1848-1888." *Bulletin of Latin American Research* 10, no. 3 (January 1, 1991): 265–92; Mallon, Florencia E. *Peasant and Nation: The Making of Postcolonial Mexico and Peru*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995.

This last interpretation has remained the predominant view of the Revolution of Ayutla. While the path-breaking findings that emerged from this body of scholarship should not be dismissed, shortcomings should nonetheless be pointed out. First, the focus on peasant participation in processes of state formation has at times romanticized the story of revolution and exaggerated the causal mechanisms of ideology and popular politics. This explanation often ends up working to the exclusion of other important contexts and factors previously explored by earlier scholars: most importantly, earlier monographs on the fiscal, commercial, and transnational dimensions of the revolution that have been largely ignored in the literature of state formation and popular liberalism. Second, while the Revolution of Ayutla might have had a profound impact on national politics and the path of nation-state building that Mexico took from the 1850s onwards, the Revolution, like many others, was deeply shaped by a transnational dimension that was equally important. When taken together, Mallon and Guardino's monographs on Puebla, Morelos, and Guerrero produce a homogenizing picture of the Mexican countryside that overlooks earlier accounts drawing fundamental differences between coastal and inland movements. Frontier economies, ports, and transit cities like Acapulco were crucial players in this story, as many scholars have argued, and their connections to larger transnational markets are absent from these unusually landlocked narratives put forth by proponents of popular federalism.

### **The Logic of Pacific Markets and Revolution in Mid-Nineteenth Century Mexico**

This analysis delves deep into the causes of the Revolution of Ayutla and presents a rather different interpretation that emphasized the historical relationship between civil wars and access to frontier and maritime markets in mid-nineteenth century Mexico. It focuses on Acapulco and

---

Mexico's Pacific ports and shows how the reconfiguration of gold rush markets in the Pacific was one of the deeper causes of the Revolution of Ayutla. Particularly after 1852, the California Gold Rush served as a market for revolutionary enterprises. Together with chapter 1, I argue that the lead-up to the revolution and the nature of the conflict itself—the patterns of insurrection, the particular fiscal and commercial clashes that exacerbated age-old rural tensions—was partly the story of Acapulco and other Pacific ports rising as autonomous enclaves that blocked Santa Anna's dictatorship (1853-55) from tapping into several different markets created by the gold rush economy.

Advancing a maritime explanation of the Revolution of Ayutla entails an approach that is partly transnational, partly commercial, and partly fiscal. Partly transnational in that it questions the land-locked and nationalistic views of the Revolution and instead emphasizes the reorientation of Mexico's Pacific Coast towards the Californian economy during the gold rush in the late 1840s and 1850s. The factors causing turmoil in gold rush markets after 1852 were all intimately linked to the revolution. Fiscal and commercial in that it focuses on the politics of customhouses, tariff struggles, and commercial policies vis-à-vis this reorientation towards the California Gold Rush and its economy, exploring their interaction with merchants, caudillos, and cycles of popular insurrection.

Boiling down the history of complex revolutions to simple narratives can only lead to implausible moncausal explanations. Bearing this in mind, the present story suggesting the importance of these three interrelated fiscal, transnational, and commercial dimensions does not exclude other factors when explaining the causes of the Revolution of Ayutla. First, popular discontent was a pressing reality. Burdensome taxes, land conflicts, and a renewed yearning for autonomous municipal government all combined to exert an enormous pressure in what Tutino

sees as the long cycles of compression and decompression in the Mexican rural economy.<sup>129</sup> Competing political and ideological projects, although less stark as some authors would have it, did play an important role in this wave of popular discontent. Finally, the complicated, tit-for-tat dance between strongmen and caudillos was important in the escalation of tensions. After all, one cannot ignore the fact that the renewed strength of the Army of the South arose from the accidents and plights of Santa Anna's increasingly weak dictatorship. But all of these factors weigh differently and the timing of their consequences matter. The connection, however, between gold rush markets and cycles of insurrection—a crucial connection that was articulated by cross-class alliances in seaports and customhouses—was the constant factor decisively shaping the genesis and outcome of the revolution.

The present section further develops the central argument, defines its concepts and explores its moving parts while bringing together different strands of the rich historiography on the Revolution of Ayutla. When understanding the connections between maritime markets, seaports, and revolution in mid-nineteenth century Mexico, two relationships must be explored: first, the relationship between gold rush markets in the Pacific and Mexico's fiscal structures; second, between insurrection and emerging structures of political and economic risk.

### **Seaports, Fiscal Structures, and the nature of Gold Rush Markets in the Pacific**

The years between 1849 and 1852 spurred thousands of new businesses, banks, and financial institutions that spread all along the Pacific Coast from California to Central America and beyond. It stimulated rapid agricultural expansion in regions and nations as far as Chile and Australia, which experienced intense wheat cycles as a result. It also quickened the volume of

---

<sup>129</sup> John Tutino. From Insurrection to Revolution in Mexico: Social Bases of Agrarian Violence, 1750-1940. (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1986) pp., 242-258.

trade and commerce between the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans, creating demands for new forms of transportation and navigation, which in turn increased the volume of transoceanic migration and traffic, opening up new markets for different agricultural regions in Mexico and Central America.

Demand for staples was enormous. Under the federalist administrations of José Joaquín de Herrera (1848-51) and Mariano Arista (1851-53), Pacific migration, maritime traffic, and coasting trade boomed between San Francisco and Panama. Chapter 1 has already explored the importance of gold rush migration in stimulating traffic and trade through a system of Mexican ports that articulated an instant Pacific market economy dependent on gold discoveries. The California Gold Rush can also be seen as the westward expansion of the Market Revolution in the United States that reactivated an erstwhile dwindling Pacific economy. Such elements shaped the dynamics of what I have referred to as the “gold rush markets” in Mexico, the United States, and Central America, all connected through the Pacific.<sup>130</sup>

There were, however, two sources of volatility in the mining industry and commercial markets of the Californian economy, after 1852, when the gold rush began subsiding. First, the development of agriculture in California, as a result of the decline of mining, meant that San Francisco and other urban clusters began depending less and less on the importation of basic staples that had been earlier drawn from Mexico’s booming coasting trade. This set in motion a downward trend in commerce and navigation that significantly affected Mexico’s Pacific ports and regions. This dynamic is explored in the previous chapter. The second source of instability was the crash of the labor market in California and the continuing pressures of new (although dwindling) migratory waves that resulted in the increasing proletarianization of California’s miners, on the one hand, and the emergence of filibusterism in the 1850s, on the other. These two

---

<sup>130</sup> For an excellent study on the economic history of the gold rush see James Rawls, Richard J. Orsi, et al, *A Golden State. Mining and Economic Development in Gold Rush California*. Vol. 2. California History Sesquicentennial Series; (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1999)

aspects constitute what I refer to as the elements of “volatility” in gold rush markets that sent ripple effects through the system of ports in Mexico and Central America.

Historians of the gold rush often use the insights of Louise Amelia Smith Clappe, author of *The Shirley Letters*. Widely regarded as one of the most acute observers of the conditions of mining in California between 1851 and 1852, Clappe wrote in the spring of 1852 that “gold mining is Nature's great lottery scheme...A man may work in a claim for many months, and be poorer at the end of the time than when he commenced; or he may ‘take out’ thousands in a few hours. It is a mere matter of chance . . . And yet, I cannot help remarking, that almost all with whom we are acquainted seem to have lost.” Indeed, there are estimates that fewer than one out of twenty gold seekers returned home richer than when they left. Whereas by the end of 1848, 6,000 miners, including the Sutters, as explored in the previous chapter, had produced 10 million worth of gold; by the end of 1852, three years later, 100,000 migrants had produced 80 million worth of gold. The ratio between the amount of gold being found and the number of migrants was shifting at a shocking speed. As historian James Rawls notes, “those who prospered in the gold rush... were entrepreneurs who learned well the axiom that the main chance for success lay not in mining gold but in mining the miners.” This often resulted in squatter riots like the one in Sacramento in 1850 that spread like fire through many ramshackle mining camps aptly named Poverty Hill, Skunk Gulch, and Hell's Delight.<sup>131</sup> This situation, moreover, coincided with a series of acts against foreign miners, most noticeably, the Foreign Miners Tax of 1850 which pushed out large numbers of impoverished migrants and miners into Mexico. Those ambitious, hard travelers eventually gave up when they came to realize that the prospect of amassing a fortune in California was an illusion.

---

<sup>131</sup> Louise Amelia Knapp Smith Clappe, *The Shirley Letters: Being Letters Written in 1851-1852 from the California Mines* (Berkeley, Calif.: Heyday Books, 1998), 113 quoted in James Rawls, Richard J. Orsi, et al, *A Golden State. Mining and Economic Development in Gold Rush California*. Vol. 2. California History Sesquicentennial Series; (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1999), 5-8; the estimates comes from Oscar Lewis. *Sea Routes to the Gold Fields; the Migration by Water to California in 1849-1852*. [1st ed.]. (New York: A. A. Knopf, 1949.) 229.

Their frustration quickly turned into different instances of French and American imperialistic ventures in Mexico and Central America.

Against this backdrop, the presence of freebooters became pervasive in the 1850s. Their colonizing and prospecting enterprises took them from California and San Francisco to the northwestern frontier of South California, Sonora, and Baja California down to Mexico's Southwest Pacific Coast, and all the way down to Central America, as far as Nicaragua. William Walker, after failing to found a new republic and retain Baja California, moved his expedition to Central America where he proclaimed himself president of Nicaragua for a fleeting moment. But to carry out their forays, filibusters often piggybacked on the slow but steady movement of migrants circulating between Panama and San Francisco.<sup>132</sup> Migrants, miners, laborers, volunteers, and mercenaries, in this way, were all indistinguishable in the eyes of port authorities. "How insignificant, dear, is a marquis in his sailor suit," wrote a French filibuster upon arriving in the homogenizing poverty of miner camps.<sup>133</sup> Filibusters like the French-Algerian Count Gaston de Raousset-Boulbon and Charles de Pindray came in the guise of real or phony French nobility, and so did wealthy Californian prospectors, Spanish merchants, smugglers, and contrabandists who all looked the same in the eyes of Mexican customhouse collectors and navy officers.

As the mining economy in California changed, markets were drawn and redrawn over the lines of coasting trade and migration networks that stretched along Mexico's Pacific littoral. But a question still remains: how did the volatility and uncertainty of gold rush markets interact with

---

<sup>132</sup> Joseph Allen Stout. *Schemers and Dreamers: Filibustering in Mexico, 1848-1921*. (Fort Worth: Texas Christian University Press, 2002), 15-17. When in 1851 Joseph Morehead's freebooters arrived in Mazatlán, lightly armed and with scarce ammunition, and then realized that port authorities had been forewarned of a filibuster invasion, which meant that they had planned accordingly a hostile and heavily armed reception, Morehead's party quickly changed plans and claimed they were peaceful miners in search of mining fields. The captaincy, unimpressed, eventually let them in but later rounded up everyone in Mazatlán, migrants and filibusters alike, perhaps also some laborers and merchants from other Mexican ports ended up in the round-up, and sent them all as far away as possible on the next steamship

<sup>133</sup> Margo Glantz. Un folletín realizado: la aventura del conde de Raousset-Boulbon en Sonora. (México: Secretaría de Educación Pública, 1973), p. 15

political instability and the fiscal structures of the Mexican state in the mid-nineteenth century? A suitable answer is to analyze the contours of a multiplicity of—black and gray—markets and how they were shaped by fiscal rules, commercial codes, and protectionist regimes.<sup>134</sup> This became particularly important because the question of access to such lucrative markets and traffic networks exacerbated fiscal and political instability in the early 1850s.

By the time Mariano Arista's federalist government began to crumble, a succession of revolving-door presidents gripped the country's central administrations, exacerbating the general fiscal and commercial crisis of the 1850s. As Paul Gootenberg notes, “protectionism thrived in a seedbed of endemic instability.” The collapse of Spanish imperial mercantilism quickly gave way to what historians and economists call “an inconsistent neo-mercantilism” that saw several newborn nation-states like Mexico hemmed in by foreign and domestic wars. Merchant loans, custom bonds, and higher revenue-maximizing tariffs became the “fiscal instruments of emergency finance” that kept tottering republics afloat during the first half of the nineteenth century.<sup>135</sup> The inconsistency of taxing on foreign commerce became a consistent nightmare for merchants and their regional cronies who often resorted to smuggling, reinforcing the networks of black and gray markets. Tariff laws and commercial codes, in this way, became hostage to swaying political fortunes, foreign wars, regional rebellions, and ad hoc fiscal reforms.<sup>136</sup> In these dire conditions, scholars conclude that “weak governments, under attack from within and without,

---

<sup>134</sup> The definition between black and gray markets is a blurry one. But the basic distinction lays in the difference between the channels through which merchandise is bought or sold. Black markets deal with prohibited commodities or merchandise exchanged outside legal channels of trade; while gray markets are prohibited goods smuggled through legally established channels in order to evade taxation and regulatory rules of trade. For an interesting historical exposition of the connections among popular rebellion, banditry, and parallel markets, shadow economies, or illicit trade see Michael Kwass. *Contraband: Louis Mandrin and the Making of a Global Underground*. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2014.), 86-7, 358-363

<sup>135</sup> Gootenberg. Between Silver and Guano, p.135

<sup>136</sup> Indeed, between 1821 and 1867, Mexico was rocked by several foreign invasions— by Spain (1829), France (1838), the United States (1846-48), and France (1862-67), the secession of Texas (1835) and countless other unsuccessful secessions and revolts. Coatsworth and Leticia Reina documented and analyzed 13 major regional revolts, and at least 60 peasant rebellions and indigenous “caste” wars.

abandoned internal taxes that required an extensive and loyal bureaucracy and concentrated tax collection efforts instead on a few ports and mines.” In some cases, it is not an exaggeration to affirm, as some economic historians have, that tariff “was the main source of government income in all [of Latin American] countries and virtually the only source in a few republics” during the first half of the nineteenth century.<sup>137</sup>

As Mexico’s under-resourced state became progressively dependent on customs revenue, different governments under the pressure of chronic fiscal crises were forced on several occasions to grant private actors the right to administrate customhouses and collect revenue. These “vampires of the treasury” would, in turn, make loans to the government, which were paid with customs bonds, hence jeopardizing any substantial collection of revenue in the future. This vicious cycle of debt and weak public finances that Barabara Tenenbaum identified as “the politics of penury” neutralized any attempt by governments to lower tariff since most creditors often protected their interest by keeping and promoting exorbitantly high tariffs.<sup>138</sup> John Coatsworth and Geogffrey Williamson show their counterintuitive findings in a study on several fiscal measures in Latin America and how they prolonged the life of protectionism throughout the nineteenth century and into the twentieth. “Mexico’s first tariff law in 1821 imposed a 25 percent ad valorem tariff on all imports and prohibited no more than 10 items. Federalists, seizing power in 1823, raised rates and multiplied prohibitions, and the ratio of tariff duties to imports averaged 36 percent for the 1820s. It then rose to 45 percent under conservative rule in the 1840s and peaked at 46 percent under liberal rule in the 1870s and 1880s.<sup>139</sup> By the 1840s, too many had invested too much and for too

---

<sup>137</sup> Luis Bertola and Geoffrey Williamson “Globalization in Latin America before 1940” in Victor Bulmer-Thomas *et al.*, *The Cambridge Economic History of Latin America: Volume 2, The Long Twentieth Century*. (Cambridge, Mass: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 11, 30

<sup>138</sup> Tenenbaum, *Politics of Penury*; Graciela Márquez Colín, “Protección y cambio institucional: la política arancelaria del Porfiriato a la Gran Depresión.” (Mexico City: Unpublished manuscript, El Colegio de México, 2001),

<sup>139</sup> Robert Potash, Mexican Government and Industrial Development in the Early Republic the Banco de Avío. (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1983), 13-14

John h. Coatsworth and Jeffrey G. Williamson. “Always Protectionist? Latin American Tariffs from Independence to Great Depression.” *Journal of Latin American Studies* 36, no. 2 (2004): 205–32.

long in this system of protectionist rule, and any alteration—in government, in tariff laws, ideology, in stability—did not result in any significant shift in Mexico’s fiscal structure. After all, it kept depending heavily on tariffs, import quotas, subsidies, and other measures to extract customs revenue and protect infant industries.<sup>140</sup>

A tricky question is how to define the contours of illegal markets and smuggling within this bigger picture of commercial and fiscal policies. Each seaport created its respective illegal markets, evolving in the shadow of shifting commercial regulations, laws, statutes, codes, and edicts in Mexico. For this reason, protectionism and its shifting trade regimes cannot be understood without an analysis of the shadow economies they created—be it the so-called grey or black markets.

Recurrent disputes over customhouses served as the main points of inflection in long process of fiscal and institutional change, and insurrections were directly related to this change. A morass of protectionist rules, rent-seeking contracts, privileges, and exemptions constantly shaped and reshaped the contours of black and grey markets. In this way, nineteenth-century customhouses reigned supreme in a world that Lerdo de Tejada identified as Mexico’s “maze of tariffs,” prohibitions, concessions, and privileges.<sup>141</sup> The question was not about who would cut this Gordian knot, but rather, who would keep weaving it, harnessing each and every of its strings to gain an upper hand in Mexico’s delicate power balance that tied the center to its regions. A group of actors in seaports—moneylenders, caudillos, merchant houses, administrators, consuls,

---

<sup>140</sup> But the assessment that protectionism thrived on endemic instability holds true only for the first half of the nineteenth century. When we think of the bigger picture, instability begins to matter less and less as a decisive factor in shaping protectionist fiscal policies. The causes of protectionism changed: customs revenue, while still an important source for public finances, was no longer the priority; industrialization, rather, and the protection of infant industries that began with the policies of Banco Nacional de Avío in the 1830s became, by the 1870s, the main engines of protectionism. This became one of the main concerns of finance ministers Matías Romero and José Yves Limantour.

<sup>141</sup> Miguel Lerdo de Tejada. *Comercio exterior de México, desde la conquista hasta hoy*. (México: Rafael Rafael, 1853), pp. 38

army and navy officers— often served as intermediaries between changing markets and governments, local and central.

Before moving on to the next section, it is important to sound two notes of caution about any analysis that touches on smuggling and the formation of black markets. First, it is nearly impossible to accurately quantify and qualify the volume, source, and nature of this phenomenon. Second, this was not a new phenomenon in the Pacific. Historians of eighteenth-century Spain have emphasized a direct correlation between efforts to crack down on smuggling and the militarization of public order. Others have produced interesting analysis on this period, tracing how the gradual dismantling of mercantilism and the rise of a Hispanic American commercial world in the Pacific, what the author calls the *lago indiano*, can also be reinterpreted as the formation of extensive black markets that can be carried over into the first half of the nineteenth century.<sup>142</sup> Thus both the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries are intimately connected regarding this phenomenon, revealing a distinctive boom in contraband that entailed the formation of illegal markets during a clearly defined period spanning from the 1750s to the 1850s.

## **Revolution and the Structures of Political and Economic Risk**

Borderlands historian Brian DeLay identifies a hemispheric pattern of insurrection formed around structures of political and economic risk in the nineteenth century. Drawing from an extensive literature in the political sciences in which many authors have established links between civil wars and natural resources, DeLay argues that “like most other insurgents around the hemisphere at the time, Mexico’s were cash-poor and sought to arm themselves not with silver or

---

<sup>142</sup> Miguel Ángel Melón Jiménez. Los tentáculos de la hidra: contrabando y militarización del orden público en España (1784-1800). (Sílex Universidad. Madrid: Sílex, 2009); Mariano Ardash Bonialian. El Pacífico hispanoamericano: política y comercio asiático en el imperio español, 1680-1784: la centralidad de lo marginal. 1a ed. (México, D.F.: El Colegio de México, 2012) 165, and the last chapter on the era of “comercio libre” in the Pacific during the eighteenth century.

gold but with promises—promises about what they would do with things like mining concessions, tariff revenues, commercial policies, and government contracts when (that is to say, if) they managed to seize power.”<sup>143</sup> In his work on the history of the flow of arms in Mexico, DeLay identifies a nascent futures market financing peripheral insurrections. “Because insurgents came looking not just for guns but also for the money with which to buy them, and because if successful their project would have had such far-reaching geopolitical implications, their schemes inevitably became entangled in thick webs of intrigue.” Indeed, it was commonplace for contemporary observers like Guillermo Prieto to identify such extensive webs of intrigue weaved by Mexico’s *agiotistas*, the reviled embodiment of economic and political speculation in the mid century. Anyone could be considered an *agiotista* since, as DeLay notes, “these webs linked manufacturers, merchants, financiers, shipping concerns, politicians, diplomats, and assorted hustlers alert to opportunities.” But such complex deals often proved exceedingly difficult to put together under conditions of high risk, unaccountability, and uncertainty. If they succeeded, notwithstanding, they could often reset political regimes of inequality, significantly altering the power balance between the center and its peripheries. Naturally, ports-cities and border towns often played a fundamental role in this dynamic, and their inherent instability and changing fortunes were partly the result of this role.

Yet one methodological dilemma remains unsolved, how can we document such risky ventures and transactions if most took place under the secrecy of thick webs of political intrigue and economic speculation? A close study of the logbooks and accounts of the Ejército Restaurador

---

<sup>143</sup> Brian DeLay. “How Not to Arm a State.” *South California Quarterly* 95, no. 1 (February 1, 2013): 5–23, pp. 8-9. There are some examples of the extensive literature on civil wars, natural resources, and the political economy of conflict in the political sciences that Brian DeLay is drawing from, see Michael L. Ross, “How Do Natural Resources Influence Civil War? Evidence from Thirteen Cases.” *International Organization* 58, no. 1 (2004): 35–67; and his unpublished manuscript on "Booty Futures: Africa's Civil Wars and the Futures Market for Natural Resources" Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Political Science Association, 2002.

de la Libertad both reveals the insurgent army's source of finance and the changing webs of moneylenders, merchants, and speculators who participated in the Revolution of Ayutla. But there is another source: court cases and legal disputes between Mexico's new government and irregular contractors. There is a link among legal disputes over such contracts, changing notions of national sovereignty, and the evolution of international law. As will become evident towards the end of this chapter, there are several instances of risky political transactions between Mexico's insurgents and foreign merchants and speculators. Such cases saw the light when one side of the contract did not fulfill its part due to "changes in the operating conditions of foreign enterprises" that arose out of risky political processes, "either directly through war, insurrection or political violence, or through changes in government policies that affect[ed] the ownership and behavior of the firm."<sup>144</sup> Fierce international legal disputes over national sovereignty and broken contracts emerged as a result, which set in motion a process of documentation of these cases when they entered the realm of international courts.

The gold rush to California created a vigorous market for the bankrolling of popular insurrections from Acapulco and other ports in the Pacific. Guerrero and *El Sur* are a classic example of the logic of a prolonged and uninterrupted popular mobilization that was partly dependent on sources of finance from coastal provinces, ports, and their connections to changing Pacific markets. Gold rush traffic introduced a new impetus for mobility of labor pools drawn from different classes of mulatto sharecroppers, Indian village peasants, parish priests, small retailers and merchants, muleteers, and landowners. As the previous chapter shows, the bulk of seasonal workers, *jornaleros*, for instance, originally came from diverse ports and regions along the Pacific Coast in Mexico, and from these sources they seem to be moving constantly.<sup>145</sup> Torcuato di Tella,

---

<sup>144</sup> Virginia Haufler. Dangerous Commerce: Insurance and the Management of International Risk. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), p. 5

<sup>145</sup> Bancroft Library, Latin Americana Collection, 69/93, José Marcos Mugarrieta Papers, 1837-1886, Box 8, Ship Papers L-Z, miscellaneous files, ship manifests 1859.

Peter Guardino, Niceto de Zamacois, and Juan Álvarez himself have produced variegated descriptions of the social composition of movements in Acapulco and its coastal provinces in Guerrero. Most of them point to a very malleable and shifting alliance between the elites and the popular classes who composed the army of *pintos*. Scholars of popular liberalism argue that “it is not only impossible to explain peasant politics without understanding elite politics, it is impossible to explain elite politics without taking into account the activity of Mexico’s poor.”<sup>146</sup> This agglomeration of classes came from a sector that sociologist Torcuato di Tella referred to as the “dangerous classes” of insurrection in Mexico’s chaotic mid-nineteenth century class structure of artisans, small-time merchants, *arrieros*, and the disenfranchised, landless peasant classes in port-cities and their rural hinterlands.<sup>147</sup> Although this rich historiography provides the present study with a backdrop of the nuances of a chaotic mid-nineteenth century class structure that constantly spurred popular mobilization, this chapter will not delve into a fine-grained source analysis of popular movements that historians of social history have erstwhile provided.

### **The Plight of Santa Anna’s Dictatorship, 1853-55** *Black Markets, Pacific Seaports, and the Politics of Fiscal Emergency*

The years of 1852 and 1853 saw the complete collapse of federalism, tottering from one crisis to the next amid the revival of peripheral rebellions, tariff struggles, and rumors of Santa Anna’s return. During the closing months of 1852, a series of military insurrections and popular rebellions in Jalisco and Michoacán closed in on the federalist government as the ruling coalition found itself increasingly isolated, with fewer and fewer allies to rely on. When the ports of Veracruz and Tampico joined the fractious opposition to federalism, Mariano Arista’s

---

<sup>146</sup> Guardino, *Peasants, Politics*, 211-213; “Estado del Sur” in Niceto de Zamacois. *Vindicación de México*

<sup>147</sup> Torcuato S. Di Tella, “Las clases peligrosas a comienzos del siglo XIX En México.” *Desarrollo Económico* 12, no. 48 (1973): 761–91. His study of these two lower tier of society comes from a census carried out in Mazatlán in the 1850s.

administration (1851-53) was doomed. Earlier, the opposition had rallied around the Plan of Jalisco, which called for tariff reductions, the repeal of Arista's policies and the general reordering of Mexico's fiscal structure. They called for the return of centralism, basically paving the way for Santa Anna to return to power. Failing to declare emergency powers and suffocate the rebellion, Arista was deposed amid barrack revolts and rural rebellions in January of 1853. His successor, the moderate Juan Bautista Ceballos from the Supreme Court, became interim president and declared temporary dictatorial powers. Seeking to gain popularity among commercial circles, Ceballos passed a new tariff decree that made generous concessions to ports and commerce. The Ceballos Tariff replaced the extremely high duties fixed by the 1845 decree with a new series of lax trade regulations; some of its new provisions, particularly articles 15 and 16, granted ports extensive privileges and concessions. These new regulations seemed favorable for Acapulco and many other ports: thirty days of storage for merchandise, and new regulations that required duties on imports to be paid in cash at ports, and reduced duties on a wide variety of goods, from textiles to cotton and fruit. The Ceballos Tariff, moreover, reduced duties on silver exports to 4 per cent.<sup>148</sup>

Guillermo Prieto, who had served as minister of finance under Arista, had left a series of instructions and recommendations to his successor, explicitly advising the new minister not to allow military commanders to intervene in the affairs of customhouses and, instead, delegate this intermediary role to more local powers like those of General Ávalos in Matamoros, several different colonies in Guaymas, and various brigades in Pacific ports. Moreover, Prieto explained that the absence of consuls in South America was one of the most important factors stimulating

---

<sup>148</sup> Memoria de hacienda y crédito público, (Mexico: Imprenta de gobierno. 1870), 390-93; Enero 24 de 1853, Decreto del gobierno. Prevenciones acerca del arancel de aduanas marítimas. 'Se observen en las aduanas marítimas y fronterizas las prevenciones siguientes, que además de alzar las prohibiciones, abrazan igualmente la diminución de derechos; bajo la inteligencia de que, por lo que toca al permiso de introducir víveres, el gobierno determinará que cese aun antes de expedir el nuevo arancel reformado, si así fuere conveniente.' Decimaquinta. Todos los referidos derechos, así como el de internación, que se seguirá cobrando hasta aquí, se pagarán de contado en los puertos, entendiéndose en esta condición el tiempo suficiente a practicar las liquidaciones, el que no excederá de 30 días útiles. Decimasexta. Se concede al comercio treinta días de almacenaje, pagando seis y medio centavos diarios por bulto. Decimasetima. Se reduce el derecho de exportación de plata." Juan B Ceballos; Díaz Díaz, Caudillos y caciques, 261.

contraband in the Pacific. His solution was to reactivate the consular network and send instructions to consuls and port authorities to homogenize fiscal procedures and prices. This would allow “order to appear amidst so many ups and downs.”<sup>149</sup> But the *Trait d’Union* quickly pointed out the root causes of instability, hitting the nail on its head. According to the French newspaper, there were three main problems in the country: a personal, a political, and a commercial problem. The first and second problems— the animosities between *santannistas* and the opposition, together with the disputes between monarchism and republicanism, and between centralism and federalism— had been “temporarily” solved with the coup against Arista which, in their eyes, had dealt a final blow to federalism. But the third problem, the commercial aspect, was both systemic and insurmountable. It entailed a permanent struggle between ports and the interior of Mexico, and this was precisely the situation that increasingly threatened Ceballos’ interim government: caught between the industrialists of Puebla and Mexico City and the merchants of Tampico and Veracruz.<sup>150</sup> Pacific ports were yet to be seen entering this spiraling struggle.

In the meantime, Ignacio Comonfort gave up his position as administrator of the Acapulco Customhouse in search of new opportunities. He had already served in Acapulco under Mariano Arista’s administration between 1851-53, and now Ceballos had appointed him to a new position. Comonfort, summoned to the capital by Ceballos, would serve as head of the Oficialia Mayor de Hacienda. But chaos reigned when he arrived in Mexico City. Yet another plan, this time the Plan of Arroyo Zarco, was proclaimed. A military rebellion in Mexico City deposed Ceballos, imposing a new general, Manuel María Lombardini, an adherent of Santa Anna’s faction. The new *santannista* puppet-president quickly repealed the Ceballos Tariff and restored the unpopular 1845 tariff system which dealt a severe blow to many commercial interests in Mexico’s ports,

---

<sup>149</sup> Guillermo Prieto, Instrucción que deja Guillermo Prieto sobre los negocios pendientes en la secretaría que estuvo a su cargo, a su sucesor el Exmo. Sr. Ministro de Hacienda Lic. D. José María Urquidi. (México: Imprenta de Vicente G. Torres, 1853), 3, 7.

<sup>150</sup> González Navarro, *Anatomía del poder*, 332-35; *Trait d’Union*, January 15, 1853.

particularly those in the Pacific. It was precisely at this moment of renewed fiscal and political instability—coupled with a new cycle of revolving-door administrations—that Lerdo de Tejada dubbed Mexico’s trade policy a “maze of tariffs,” prohibitions, concessions, and privileges that made it impossible for ports and merchants to know which tariff system governed their transactions.<sup>151</sup> Each port operated at will with its own tariff, giving life to a plurality of fiscal systems and trade policies tailored to the specific needs of ports and their local markets and alliances.

Santa Anna’s imminent return threatened to destroy this lax plurality in commerce, a situation which, seen from the fiscal perspective of public finances, was chaotic. Yet in February of 1853, Lombardini squandered Mexico’s central coffers to repay the army, spending money lavishly despite the fact that revenue collection in customhouses had yet to recover from Veracruz’s prolonged uprising that spelled the downfall of Arista and Ceballos. In February, for example, “the customhouse at Veracruz produced only eighteen pesos and the one for Tabasco gathered \$861”<sup>152</sup> This meant that the weight of revenue collection fell on the shoulders of Mexico’s Pacific ports, exacerbating the uncertainty of the situation. Lombardini as a response prorogated Acapulco’s contract as a port of deposit for the next ten years, reinforcing the power of local authorities and the extensive commercial ties that Comonfort, as customhouse administrator, had built throughout the years of gold rush trade and migration to California under Arista’s administration.<sup>153</sup>

However, the emergency of militaristic fiscal politics deepened: without Veracruz, tariff revenue for the central state, now commanded by *santannista* generals, was virtually non-existent. Yet there was the nagging idea in the mind of central authorities—an idea born out of the boon of

---

<sup>151</sup> Miguel Lerdo de Tejada. *Comercio exterior de México, desde la conquista hasta hoy*. (México: Rafael Rafael, 1853), pp. 38

<sup>152</sup> Tenenbaum, *Politics of Penury*, 120

<sup>153</sup> Memoria de Hacienda 1870,

the fading gold rush years—that if only the Mexican state were able to rollback the system of smuggling in the Pacific, it would then be able to collect bountiful amounts of revenue. But the reality of the situation was different and its assessment could not have been more distorted. It was the worst of both worlds: a harsh situation of diminishing trade in the Pacific, as gold rushes all around began subsiding, on the one hand, and an increasing hemorrhage of smuggling in the Pacific that continued to finance broad coastal coalitions and insurrections, on the other hand.

### **Consolidating the ‘Liberal Crescent’: Caudillos, Agiotistas, and Smuggling in Pacific Customhouses, 1853-54**

In a series of strongly worded articles, the *New York Times* condemned the English “wholesale system of plunder” along Mexico’s Pacific Coast.<sup>154</sup> The American daily had been publishing several reports from Aspinwall uncovering a scheme that involved 5,000,000 dollars in Mexican silver smuggled into England. Initially, the reports confirmed that an English man-of-war, the “Calypso”, had been sent out to the Mexican Pacific Coast to protect English interests. But as reports kept coming in, the vessel seemed to be changing its original mission and, instead, began “mousing” along the coast. For the last six months, the vessel, beginning its journey in Guaymas in the Gulf of California and slowly sailing its way down to Panama, had called at every port and clandestinely collecting silver, avoiding the export duty of 5%. The sum of silver smuggled out of the country onboard the Calypso belonged to several traders on the Mexican Pacific Coast whose remittances came from goods purchased in Europe which were then smuggled into Mexico by a network of traders protected by “English consuls and English men-of-war.”

Although some historians like John Mayo and Walther Bernecker have tried to estimate the dimensions of this system of smuggling in the mid-nineteenth century, it is well-nigh

---

<sup>154</sup> *New York Times*, “English Smuggling in Mexico,” Oct 29, 1859; Walther Bernecker, *Contrabando: ilegalidad y corrupción en el México del siglo XIX*. México: Universidad Iberoamericana, 1994, pp. 127-29

impossible to quantify its scale, let alone the amount of money that was systematically drained through the established channels of grey markets.<sup>155</sup> Yet the scheme and the story of the Calypso, noted the *New York Times*, was “but an illustration of the manner in which the English have conducted business on the Mexican Pacific Coast for the last twenty-five years.” What was certainly discernable was the pernicious influence that smuggling had on the permanent state of emergency that haunted the central government’s finances. The *NYT* was quick to point out to this problem. “It seems incredible that England, claiming to be the most powerful and just nation on earth, should year after year detail her ships-of-war to the Pacific coast, there to carry out a degrading and disgraceful system of smuggling, by which the Mexican nation is robbed of the little it has wherewith to pay the national debt.” The report reflected not only on the vicious cycles of Mexico’s financial system, but also revealed the rising competition between American and British foreign interests along Mexico’s Pacific Coast—in this way, it was paramount for the United States to “entirely break up that combination of trading and smuggling which has long controlled that portion of the Pacific coast, and give the business to the Americans, to whom it legitimately belongs.” Imperial rivalries have left a rich trail of reports and diplomatic sources that often illuminate competing networks of commerce. Reading them together and crosschecking their information provides a relatively complete and well-balanced picture of the shifting world of alliances among merchants, bankers, caudillos and their popular bases, showing how they aligned with markets in various patterns along Mexico’s Pacific Coast.

Smuggling and the formation of black and grey markets in seaports and frontiers served as the indispensable glue allowing caudillos to build broad cross-class coalitions maintain popular mobilizations. Santiago Vidaurri in Nuevo León, Manuel Lozada in Tepic and San Blas, and Juan

---

<sup>155</sup> John Mayo. “Consuls and Silver Contraband on Mexico’s West Coast in the Era of Santa Anna.” *Journal of Latin American Studies* 19, no. 2 (1987): 389–411; Bernecker, *Contrabando*, 127-29

Álvarez in Guerrero comprised part of the ‘Liberal Crescent’ that D.A. Brading identified in the geopolitical distribution of mid-nineteenth century Mexico.<sup>156</sup> It is no coincidence that different classes converged in seaports, forging political movements in places like Mazatlán, San Blas, and Acapulco at a time when contraband and filibusterism flourished as never before in the Pacific, or so was the opinion in the press in Mexico City, which increasingly drew comparisons between different historical moments. Smuggling and mercenaries and the “insatiable thirst for gold” in California, noted the *Siglo XIX*, brought echoes from earlier eras.<sup>157</sup> In the more popular *calendario* or almanac literature of the 1850s, the same issues were picked up in a more playful tone as satirical cartoons proliferated in the popular press and engaged in the era’s political controversies.

**Image 5: El testamento de Don Año de 1852**



Litography by Niceto de Zamacois in *El testamento de Don Año de 1852. Escrito por D. Cualquiera de la Verdad. Albeitar y sangrador de S.S. M.M. El Rey Trampaviva y Bolsallena* (Mexico: Imprenta de Juan R Navarro, 1853)

<sup>156</sup> Brading, “Creole Nationalism and Mexican Liberalism”; also see Richard Sinkin, *Liberal Reform*, 37-8

<sup>157</sup> “Contrabando en el Pacífico” and “Los filibusteros,” *El Siglo XIX*, February 4, 1854.

By the spring of 1853, the fall of Lombardini was as inevitable as the return of Santa Anna. The printing press, picking up on the situation since Arista's administration, circulated a series of almanacs that played along with the game of factional politics and revolving-door executives. Around the time, the *calendario impolítico y justiciero* began circulating its issue with illustrations by Niceto de Zamcois, another man of letters like Guillermo Prieto, who was fascinated by the newly-created *Estado del Sur*, Guerrero. Besides the ineptitude of public servants—presidents, ministers, and congressmen—the corruption of customhouse inspectors, the *vistas de aduana*, was another popular trope. [See image 5 above] In one of the almanac's satirical cartoons, the *vista de aduana* appears towering over a port as he stands—telescope in hand—trying to zoom in for a close-up of a line of vessels mooring off the shore, but conveniently failing to see past the cloud of gold and silver that generously pours down and fills his pockets and coffers: *Nada se ve, las nubes impiden descubrir los objetos. Los vistas que no ven, sienten el peso de las onzas*, read the inscription.<sup>158</sup>

Corruption and smuggling were rampant in customhouses. Although not new or surprising, it was time and again a shocking reality for central administrations naively thinking that there was a magic trick to stop the fiscal hemorrhage. The problem was structural, as Ibarra Bellón and Tenenbaum's studies remind us. Even worse was the situation in the Pacific; San Blas is a case in point. Manuel Lozada, San Blas's regional strongman, had managed to forge a broad-church alliance between his popular base—of peasants and Indians—and other local caudillos, while articulating broad networks of English consuls, bankers, and the powerful merchant house of Barrón & Forbes Co. that had significantly benefitted from the boom in gold rush trade and traffic. Now, with retreating commerce and fiscal chaos, Barrón & Forbes and Manuel Lozada were

---

<sup>158</sup> “The [customhouse] overseers who do not see feel the weight of the ounces. Custom House inspector”, read the inscription.” In Jaime Soler. *Los pinceles de la historia de la patria criolla a la nación mexicana 1750-1860*. 1 ed. (Mexico, D.F.]: Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes, 2000)

growing impatient before the situation, increasingly resorting to contraband. In his excellent monograph on the story of Lozada, historian Jean Meyer's establishes a temporal connection by noting that Pacific "contraband in the nineteenth century, as in the eighteenth, became inseparable from big business."<sup>159</sup> Smuggling stands as a pervasive force in Meyer's story of the rise and fall of Lozada—otherwise called *El Tigre de Álica*, perhaps as colorful a name as Juan Álvarez's *La Pantera del Sur*. Like his counterpart in Guerrero and Acapulco, Lozada throughout the 1840s and 1850s controlled the seaport of San Blas and the entire Tepic region as well as parts of Jalisco and Zacatecas, what later became the modern-day state of Nayarit. Lozada would eventually become one of the many adherents of the Revolution of Ayutla, joining Juan Álvarez's Army of the South when both the San Blas caudillos and moneylenders made a sudden swerve in the closing months of the Revolution and completely turned the tide of insurrection against Santa Anna's dictatorship. But once the relentless logic of revolution had been set in motion it proved very difficult to stop: Lozada would then turn the insurrection, this time, against Ignacio Comonfort's presidency in 1857.

The power of Barrón, Forbes, & Co. had been on the rise in 1853 since the ill-fated conservative presidency of Manuel María Lombardini. As the trading house grew closer to centralist administrations, it gained one of its most resolute detractors, the French Minister Plenipotentiary, André Levasseur who left a rich trail of diplomatic sources, letters, and reports. He assiduously attacked the San Blas trading house and its patriarch, Eustace Barrón, whose Scottish origins linked him to financial circles in England, a permanent source of suspicion for the French Minister. But another source of suspicion was the firm's ability to intervene in Mexico's emergency finances, and this ran contrary to the French's increasingly interventionist interests.

---

<sup>159</sup> Jean A. Meyer, *Esperando a Lozada*. Zamora, Mich.: El Colegio de Michoacán, 1984, p. 206.

When Santa Anna returned to power in the spring of 1853, amidst a swirl of scares and rumors of renewed French filibustering activities in the Pacific, Levasseur provided an eloquent characterization of Santa Anna's plight:

The Treasury is empty; all the sources of public finance are depleted or mortgaged; public debt is insurmountable; the delay of payments to the army and the administration is considerable, and, above all, the gravity of the every-day political situation creates the need for urgent expenses. It is impossible to resort to public credit: it has long since gone! In this dreadful situation, what can Santa Anna do? Speculators (*agiotistas*), perceiving and understanding [Santa Anna's] difficulties, try to exploit them for personal advantage. They surround him, harass him, ensnaring him in their webs. A company—led by Escandón, de la Torre, Barrón and other plotters, who have become rich through smuggling and usury—has just introduced a project which, through a loan of nine million pesos to the Treasury, [Santa Anna] would relinquish control over the administration of customs and the rest of State revenues.<sup>160</sup>

Antonio Haro y Tamariz, the finance minister, joined the outcry and called out the “maleficent influence” of this bank; agreeing to the terms of such a deal would bring about an “unprecedented monetary crisis” and the “most fatal consequences for the nation.”<sup>161</sup> Santa Anna’s situation worsened when Lucas Alamán, the experienced and well-respected conservative historian and minister of Foreign Relations, died the summer of that same year. Alamán’s untimely death happened a few months after Santa Anna’s Faustian deal with the San Blas bankers, leaving a weakened cabinet fractured by the rivalry of two ministers—mediocre statesmen in Levasseur’s eyes. But Santa Anna’s plan to hand over the administration of customhouses to moneylenders and merchant houses was not new. In the past, *agiotistas* and “vampires of the treasury,” to borrow Prieto’s colorful description, had constantly rattled the fiscal system with similar propositions and scandals, and Levasseur had been one of such rattlers. His vehement opposition to the scheme between Santa Anna and Barrón was not fortuitous. Both Barrón and Levasseur had been locked

---

<sup>160</sup> André Levasseur to French Minister of Foreign Relations, April 27, 29, 1853. in Lilia Díaz, *Versión francesa de México. Informes diplomáticos*, 1853-57, (El Colegio de México.; *Memoria de Hacienda*, 1870,) 406; Meyer, *Esperando a Lozada*, 206. André Levasseur was the French Minister Plenipotentiary and Envoy Extraordinary to Mexico, 1848-1854

<sup>161</sup> Speech of Antonio Haro y Tamariz before congress, *Memoria de Hacienda*, 1870, 407-410

in the familiar story of an imperial race between England and France in the nineteenth century, and Levasseur was losing ground to British mining interests in the Pacific and northeastern frontiers.

Tenenbaum and Meyer have carefully traced the story of this rivalry. Jecker, Torre & Co., a company that had established a cozy relationship with filibusters and French interests—certainly closer to the French Minister’s interests—had been operating from Mazatlán and Nayarit, serving as tax collectors for the central government since before the Mexican-American War. The merchant house had also been supervising the collection of import surcharges in return for 3 per cent of all tariff receipts, while aiding French merchants in their handling of customs duties and shipments. In 1850, at the height of the California Gold Rush, Levasseur had convened with Jecker, Torre & Co. to create a joint-stock company to relocate and settle French migrants in Sonora to work in the mines. The company was supposed to finance the venture with up to 30,000 pesos. But in response, Eustaquio Barrón and William Forbes, together with Spanish and American consuls on the Mexico’s Pacific coast, fought back with a mining and trading firm of their own, the Sociedad Exploradora de Metales de Sonora (Forbes-Oceguera Company). Eventually, “their excellent local connections as well as contacts with high ranking officials in the capital” outweighed those of Levasseur’s, and the Sociedad Exploradora quickly defeated filibusters, the French Minister, and Jecker, Torre & Co. who eventually gave up and abandoned the project.<sup>162</sup> But the fierce competition between these two clusters of commercial interests persisted, increasingly involving regional strongmen like Lozada, Álvarez, Santos Degollado, Vidaurri, and their respective social bases.

It was exactly at this juncture—of competing interests coming to a head in the summer of 1853—that the controversy over the finances of Acapulco’s customhouse escalated into an

---

<sup>162</sup> Tenenbaum, Politics of Penury, 110-111; Meyer, Esperando a Lozada, 206

outright confrontation between Ignacio Comonfort and Santa Anna. Acapulco's business was closely intertwined with the mining companies aforementioned. Going back a few months in time, when Arista explained his dire situation in a letter to Comonfort, thanking him for his services as customs administrator, the embattled president urged Comonfort to use customs revenue to pay off a series of debts the government had with the powerful Jecker, Torre & Co. based in Mazatlán.<sup>163</sup> Arista resigned the very same day he sent his letter to Comonfort in January 1853, which meant that Comonfort ended his tenure as administrator of the Acapulco Customhouse and was left wandering from one office to the other in Mexico City during the brief period of confusion that marked the months between the fall of Mariano Arista and the return of Santa Anna in the spring of 1853.

Once in power, Santa Anna appointed Comonfort to the Mazatlán Customhouse, appointment he categorically refused due to his frail health, as he explained in a letter to the finance minister. But Santa Anna was determined. He offered a new position, this time once again as administrator of the Acapulco Customhouse, appointment Comonfort refused as vehemently as he had with the previous appointment. But this time Santa Anna would not put up with Comonfort's reticence, with his frail health and modesty, and went ahead and ratified the appointment without Comonfort's permission. After all, large amounts of revenue often turned customhouses into coveted "trainings schools" where an entire class of mid-nineteenth century administrators forged their careers in Mexico, and Santa Anna was well aware of this system.<sup>164</sup>

---

<sup>163</sup> Mariano Arista to Ignacio Comonfort, Acapulco, January 5, 1853 in García Archives Collection, Ignacio Comonfort Papers, file 6, Correspondence, Jan. 1853- Dec. 1856. Benson Latin American Collection, General Libraries, University of Texas at Austin.

<sup>164</sup>He recalled in his memoirs how Comonfort had sent him adulations and fawning letters requesting an appointment to the Acapulco Customhouse in the years of 1847, before the Mexican-American War, and once again in 1853 see Antonio López de Santa Anna. *Mi historia militar y política: 1810-1874; Memorias inéditas.* (México: Vda de C. Bouret, 1905), 118-120; Comonfort Papers, file 6, Correspondence, Jan. 1853- Dec. 1856. Benson Latin American Collection, General Libraries, University of Texas at Austin.

The two never met in Mexico City despite attempts by Comonfort to have an interview with Santa Anna. The former returned to Acapulco's offices to resume the administration of the customhouse. But from then onwards, there was little coordination between the Acapulco Customhouse and the central government.<sup>165</sup> But his time around, upon Comonfort's return, conditions had changed drastically in Acapulco, and they had changed for worse. The decline of mining had sent the Californian economy into a tailspin by 1853, before it readjusted to the new realities of a subsiding gold fever. Worse still, particularly for Acapulco and other Mexican Pacific ports that depended on commerce with San Francisco, the decline of mining signaled the development of an agricultural economy in California. Thus San Francisco and most of the growing urban centers that dotted the Californian landscape could now tap into an easily accessible breadbasket in California's hinterland, relying less on imports of overpriced basic staples from Mexican ports.

Even though commercial relations with San Francisco and coasting trade kept flourishing along Mexico's Pacific Coast and the Gulf of California, the reality for the Acapulco Customhouse, after 1852, had changed. It was not as favorable as before. As explored in the previous chapter, the yearly cash closings of Acapulco's customhouse, from July 1849 to December 1853, reveal a positive correlation between steamship migration and revenue collection. Total customs revenue increased 400 percent in the course of three years as it jumped from a meager total value of \$38, 213.42 pesos for the first registered economic year, from July 1849 to June 1850, to a total of \$201,360.87 pesos by December of 1853.<sup>166</sup> But migration abruptly

---

<sup>165</sup> Several letters between Comonfort and authorities in Santa Anna's dictatorship, see García Archives Collection, Ignacio Comonfort Papers, file 6, Correspondence, Jan. 1853- Dec. 1856. Benson Latin American Collection, General Libraries, University of Texas at Austin; Hernández, *Ignacio Comonfort*, 26-7

<sup>166</sup> The following narrative has been elaborated from two sources: Ignacio Comonfort Papers, 1821-1918, G470 a/b, *Inventario Aduana Marítima de Acapulco*, Benson Latin American Collection, General Libraries, University of Texas at Austin; and Rosaura Hernández Rodríguez. *Ignacio Comonfort: trayectoria política, documentos*, (México: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, Instituto de Investigaciones Históricas, 1967),

diminished after the summer of 1852: from a monthly average of nearly 6,000 gold seekers passing through Acapulco in the spring of 1852 to less than 1,000 by the early fall of the same year. This turn of events began to unwind the virtuous cycle of increasing trade, traffic, and migration and increasing revenue for merchant houses and customhouses in the Pacific.

Santa Anna's mistake was to confound diminishing revenue in the Acapulco Customhouse with increasing contraband. The source of this slump in revenue was diminishing coasting trade, although probably both factors, smuggling and dwindling trade and traffic after the summer of 1852, were interrelated. Based on this assessment, the natural reaction was to crack down on Acapulco's port authorities when Santa Anna threatened to dismiss Comonfort, accusing him of facilitating corruption and contraband through a series of irregular payments to the U.S. consul, to agents of the Pacific Mail Steamship Company, and to other merchants. Comonfort retorted that customhouse corruption and smuggling had been significantly reduced when he had served as customhouse administrator under Marian Arista's administration. After all, revenue collection significantly increased during these years, and Comonfort used this as evidence to defend his career and reputation in the spring of 1853. But the "facts" and evidence of plummeting customhouse revenues remained. This led Comonfort to face a tortuous trial that eventually exonerated him. The legal investigation of this trial produced an enormous number of testimonies, correspondence, and detailed accounts of Acapulco's customhouse and its ties to merchants and other port authorities. Indeed, Alzuyeta, a Basque merchant who was summoned to testify, revealed Comonfort's efforts at redefining his relationship with the Spanish merchant houses that dominated the flow of coal leaving and entering the port. The Basque merchant reassured Comonfort's prosecutors that the customhouse administrator often treated him in the strictest of fashions.

Santa Anna, however, guiding his actions by ulterior motives, was left unimpressed by the smoke and mirrors of the trial, and in February of 1854 forced Comonfort to resign. In no time, Santa Anna also dismissed Florencio Villareal and named a *santannista* officer as military commander of the port in its stead. He moreover “granted rights to explore Guerrero for gold, all without informing Álvarez.”<sup>167</sup> The reaction by Guerrero’s authorities came soon thereafter, proclaiming the Plan of Ayutla in March of 1854, a plan whose intended forceful voice, however, got lost in the constant buzzing of regional *pronunciamientos* at the time.

Twentieth-century historians have not treated the Plan of Ayutla kindly. Edmundo O’Gorman has been particularly scathing: it “is a document so abundant in declamatory trivialities: on the zeal for liberty, on patriotic abnegation... a document so choke-full of demagogic blandishments... so filled with partisan resentment and thoughtless politics that it is hardly distinguishable” from the rest of proclamations that came before it.<sup>168</sup> Indeed, the Plan de Hospicio, the Plan de Jalisco, and the Plan de Arroyo Zarco were all different proclamations that flooded the political scene of regional rebellions and pronouncements in less than a year. Yet the Plan of Ayutla, as O’Gorman concludes, and the way its message reverberated across the country has long since picked the interest of past and contemporary historians. Peter Guardino, agreeing with O’Gorman, argues that the Plan of Ayutla was an “umbrella document” that served as a “purposefully vague” yet persuasive clarion call to all opponents of Santa Anna’s dictatorship. But Guardino would disagree with O’Gorman’s reading that there are two conflicting utopias driving the Plan of Ayutla, arguing instead that historians have often fruitlessly looked at the document for signs of liberalism.

---

<sup>167</sup> Portilla, Historia de la Revolución de México, 38-45; Richard Johnson. The Mexican Revolution of Ayutla, 1854-1855; An Analysis of the Evolution and Destruction of Santa Anna’s Last Dictatorship.(Rock Island, Ill: Augustana college library, 1939), 41; Tenenbaum, Politics of Penury, 129; Guardino Peasants, Politics,184.

<sup>168</sup> Edmundo O’Gorman, “Precedentes y sentido de la Revolución de Ayutla.” *Seis estudios históricos de tema mexicano*. Vol. 7. (Biblioteca de la Facultad de Filosofía y Letras,. Xalapa: Universidad Veracruzana, 1960), 103. My translation.

Despite the vagueness of the document, Guardino sets himself to the task of looking for signs of “popular federalism,” identifying specific references to the abolishment of taxes in the Plan of Ayutla. This reading allows him to produce a fine-grained legal analysis of the republican wording of the text.<sup>169</sup> One such reference is the specificity of a tax mentioned in the text—in fact, the only one that was explicitly mentioned in Guardino’s reading—the *capitación*, or head tax levied on rural communities by Santa Anna’s dictatorship, perhaps one of the most widely repudiated rural taxes at the time. This interpretation follows an old historiographical thread. The story of Santa Anna’s quixotic taxes and decrees has been a common trope in several different accounts focusing on this era. Carmen Vázquez Mantecón, in her study of how the paradoxes of Santa Anna’s dictatorship led the Mexican state to a new “crossroads” by 1853, explains the fall of Santa Anna by taking at face value what the Plan of Ayutla proclaimed. Her conclusions are thus predictable: both the Plan and the Revolution of Ayutla were the result of “a widespread protest against the excessive rise in taxes, against the imposition of forced loans, against favoritism and the amassing of large fortunes at the expense of the misery of the people.” Echoing O’Gormann, she further notes a “liberal spirit” in the document, a spirit that nevertheless got lost in the internal divisions of Mexico’s fractious mid-nineteenth century liberalism. While Guardino correctly points out that this document should not be mistaken as a liberal proclamation, he still builds off of Vázquez Mantecón’s conclusion that the Revolution had sprung from a massive rebellion against the slew of high taxes levied by Santa Anna on the rural population. Ports, tariff revenue, commercial discontent, and the fact that sixty per cent of state revenues at the time came from taxes on imports is never mentioned in their narrative.

---

<sup>169</sup> Carmen Vázquez Mantecón, *Santa Anna y la encrucijada del Estado: la dictadura, 1853-1855*. 1a ed. (México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1986), pp. 215-220; Guardino, *Peasants, Politics*. 184-186

Reflecting on the Plan of Ayutla's articles, Guardino concludes that elements of popular federalism can be found in the document's specific call for the cessation of the *capitación*. Indeed, article 6 of the original text explicitly mentions the abolition of this head tax which, as Guardino points out, had been a “key demand of the 1840s peasant movements in Guerrero.” Yet this is not the only tax that is explicitly mentioned: the original article also mentions the cessation of taxes on *sorteos* and the issuing of passports, the latter so crucial for navigation and commerce. Moreover, when one takes a closer look at the Plan's reviewed and definite version—the version of the plan rewritten by Comonfort in Acapulco a few days later—only then does the cessation of a fresh list of taxes appear: taxes on *sorteos*, passports, *capitación*, and *derecho de consumo*, and a series of other taxes that may “undermine a republican system,” according to the reviewed plan.<sup>170</sup>

Guardino's selective reading of the text—with the purpose of presenting the text as steeped in a republican legal tradition with elements of popular federalism—surprisingly leaves a series of omissions that affect the general logic of his argument. Most importantly, he omits mentioning a crucial dimension of the document, the commercial and fiscal dimensions of the Plan. Trade and tariffs were very important, but even more so was the question of who would administer maritime and frontier customhouses, and this aspect cannot be overlooked in any reading of the Plan of Ayutla's text. Article 6 and 7 (of both the original and amended versions of the Plan, respectively) served as clarion calls “[article 6] to protect the freedom of internal and external trade [by] issuing observable tariffs; maritime customhouses, in the meantime, would be governed under the [tariff]

---

<sup>170</sup> Both Plans, the original one signed in Ayutla and the revised and amended version signed in Acapulco can be found in Anselmo de la Portilla. *Historia de la Revolución de México contra la dictadura del General Santa-Anna, 1853-1855* [e-book]. (México D.F.: Fondo de Cultura Económica USA, Inc; 1993.) Available from: eBook Collection (EBSCOhost), Ipswich, MA. Article 8: “cesan desde luego los efectos de las leyes vigentes sobre sorteos, pasaportes, capitulación, derecho de consumo y los de cuantas se hubieran expedido, que pugnan con el sistema republicano.”

system] published under the administration of Mr. Ceballos.”<sup>171</sup> Article 7 of the amended Plan of Ayutla in Acapulco is even more telling. It was rewritten through a series of discernable commercial interests that Ignacio Comonfort and Juan Álvarez had carefully cultivated during the gold rush years. Not surprising are the names of those who undersigned it: port authorities who had built their political fortunes on a wide network of merchants, moneylenders who had eagerly participated in the gold rush boom. Furthermore, Article 7’s wording is far from vague, particularly when it comes to emphasizing its intent of returning to the system of customhouse liberality fostered by Juan B. Ceballos’s tariffs.

The narrative of a clash between free trade and protectionism, between liberalism and conservatism, is tempting. Some historians have interpreted it this way, taking once again at face value the Plan of Ayutla. The dispute, however, is more over the degree of centralization of regimes of protectionism; over who should be left to the discretion of central or regional authorities to set the rules of the game. It is a dispute over the kind of tariffs that would govern ports on the Pacific littoral, a realm beyond the control of the Mexico City-Veracruz axis. In sum, there is a simmering fiscal war unfolding in the text of the Plan of Ayutla, a tariff dispute reflecting rising tensions between central and regional powers.

By means of tariff revenue and their harnessing of maritime markets strongmen in seaports financed regional rebellions, and Guardino and other historians of popular liberalism have overlooked this dimension that links commercial disputes with popular insurrections. Yet

---

<sup>171</sup> [Article 6] “...proteger la libertad del comercio interior y exterior, expediendo a la mayor brevedad posible los aranceles que deben observarse, rigiendo entretanto para las aduanas marítimas el publicado bajo la administración del señor Ceballos.” [Article 7] “Siendo el comercio una de las fuentes de la riqueza pública, y uno de los más poderosos elementos para los adelantos de las naciones cultas, el Gobierno Provisional se ocupará desde luego de proporcionarle todas las libertades y franquicias que a su prosperidad son necesarias, a cuyo fin expedirá inmediatamente el arancel de aduanas marítimas y fronterizas que deberá observarse, rigiendo entre tanto el promulgado durante la Administración del señor Ceballos, y sin que el nuevo que haya de substituirlo pueda bastarse bajo un sistema liberal.”

contemporary observers quickly picked up on this link between commercial discontent and widespread political unrest. The French Consul Alphonse Dano wrote in April of 1854, a few weeks after the proclamation and dissemination of the Plan of Ayutla, that for a plan so full of “commonplaces [that are] usually employed in documents of a similar nature... only Article 7 has been skillfully conceived with the obvious purpose of attracting ports and commercial interests.”<sup>172</sup> Indeed, the struggle was turning into a fight over who would become the custodian of commercial codes, interests, and privileges in the Pacific.

In no time, Santa Anna’s government responded with Mexico’s first commercial code, counteracting everything that the Plan of Ayutla’s sloppy articles on trade and tariffs had proposed—all siren calls to ports and commerce. The Minister of Justice, Teodosio Lares, a prominent figure in Santa Anna’s cabinet, passed an unprecedented national—and centralizing—commercial code.<sup>173</sup> The code consisted of nearly 2,000 articles arranged in an adaptation of the 1829 Spanish Code and the Napoleonic Code of 1808. But it was short-lived, lasting for only a year and a half until it was eventually repealed in December of 1855 by Ignacio Comonfort’s first attempt at capturing the presidency, in the chaos of transfer of power after the fall of Santa Anna. This ill-fated code came to be known as the *Código Lares* and its comprehensiveness is but a reflection of Santa Anna’s aggressive project to restore fiscal, territorial, and commercial centralization in Mexico. In the section on navigation, maritime commerce, and the rules governing the transaction of merchant vessels, for instance, the 1854 Commercial Code explicitly listed several measures to correct “the disorders that are being committed at Pacific seaports with

---

<sup>172</sup> Alphonse Dano to French Minister, Mexico, April 1, 1854, in Díaz, *Version francesa*, 107.

<sup>173</sup> Another centralizing decree focused on administrative centralization was the *Ley para el Arreglo de lo Contencioso Administrativo*. Robert C. Means, “Mexican Commercial Law, 1854-1884,” 2 *B.C. Int'l & Comp. L. Rev.* 299 (1979); for a bigger picture of the changing nature of fiscal and commercial policies and the role that commercial roles played see Oscar Cruz Barney, *El comercio exterior de México, 1821-1928: sistemas arrancelarios y disposiciones aduanales*. Vol. 246. Doctrina Jurídica; (México: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, Instituto de Investigaciones Jurídicas, 2005.).

regard to merchant vessels,” all of them using and “abusing the national flag,” changing and selling boats at will, while continuing in open sea navigation and commerce without the proper requirements and permissions.<sup>174</sup>

The *Código Lares* dealt a severe blow to merchant’s interests in the Pacific as John Mayo notes in his study of Barrón Forbes & Co. during Santa Anna’s era.<sup>175</sup> Merchant houses could no longer re-export merchandise; instead, a series of centralizing procedures had to be followed, which made the enterprise of smuggling a little bit harder. Furthermore, a navigation act was passed by the dictatorship which prohibited the use of foreign vessels to re-export merchandise from other countries; the use of gold coins in commercial transactions was also banned.<sup>176</sup> But now the British merchant house had no leverage. Santa Anna had balked, eventually dismissing the Faustian deal that Haro y Tamariz had so forcefully denounced before congress. Instead, the Gadsden Purchase or the *Venta de la Mesilla* was signed, fulfilling the United States’s ambitions to build a transcontinental train that would eventually connect east and west, bringing San Francisco’s economy into the country’s fold. But revenue from this purchase did not move as fast as the wave of popular discontent that followed in reaction to the treaty. Payment came in too little and too late: the purchase was repaid in its entirety by the end of 1855, when the Revolution of Ayutla had nearly triumphed and all war expenses had drained the dictatorship.

Going back to the summer of 1854, when the commercial code was passed, small rebellions were sprouting everywhere. Gordiano Guzmán, one of the old surviving leaders of the Independence Wars, declared his movement in the neighboring state of Michoacán in favor of the

---

<sup>174</sup> José I. Tornel y Mendivil. *Manual de Derecho Mercantil Mexicano, O Sea, El Código de Comercio de México*. (México: Imprenta de Vicente Segura Arguelles, 1854), pp. 40-43

<sup>175</sup> John Mayo. *Commerce and Contraband on Mexico’s West Coast in the Era of Barron, Forbes & Co., 1821-1859*. (New York: Peter Lang, 2006.), 270-73. Most of his sources come from the British consulate in San Blas. Barrón was the consul at the time the *Código Lares* was passed.

<sup>176</sup> John Mayo. *Commerce and Contraband on Mexico’s West Coast in the Era of Barron, Forbes & Co., 1821-1859*. (Peter Lang, 2006), 270-71

Plan of Ayutla. But the reaction was brutal and the hastiness of his execution on the hands of one of Santa Anna's generals unleashed a new cycle of rebellions that could no longer be controlled in the state. While Michoacán slipped into rebellion, Acapulco remained completely disconnected from the center since the proclamation. Not even news from the port had been able to reach Mexico City, and as a result several excruciating months had passed since then, leaving central authorities completely in the dark regarding current affairs in the South, San Francisco, and in the northeastern Pacific world at large.

Diplomatic and commercial circles in the capital observed this waiting game between Mexico City and Acapulco with an increasing sense of alarm. "According to my reports, this pronouncement is not— as it sometimes happens— a simple protest against the central government: it is a real revolution," wrote the prescient consul Alphonse Dano to the French minister of foreign relations; this, bearing in mind that the dispassionate report was written in the heat of implausible rumors and wild speculations that agitated the metropolitan press as the spring of 1854 progressed. In Acapulco and Guerrero "all *santannista* authorities have been arrested and replaced with disgruntled opponents," Dano went on to report. "General Álvarez invokes those free trade and federalist ideals that current tariffs have destroyed in all ports on the Pacific and Gulf of California. This last aspect of his program [Article 7 of the Plan of Ayutla reformed and amended in Acapulco] will not cease to echo in San Blas, Mazatlán, and Guaymas." Moreover, he considered the possibility that Acapulco's call could resonate in faraway commercial circles, perhaps as far as Tampico and Matamoros. "The situation regarding commercial affairs is intolerable," concluded the French observer. "If General Santa Anna decides not to satisfy [such] commercial interests, Mexico will soon have a revolution."<sup>177</sup>

---

<sup>177</sup> Alphonse Dano to French Minister, March 5, 1854 in Diaz, *Versión francesa*, 102-105

While authorities in Veracruz and Mexico City kept fumbling with a rebellion in the South, the tariff struggle in Acapulco was slowly moving in the direction of a full-blown uprising. Another ticking bomb exploded. Distant rumors of a foreign invasion abruptly poured in from San Francisco. It took a couple of weeks for mail and news carried by steamship companies to reach Mexico City—normally through Acapulco—but the port had been blocked by Álvarez’s forces, which meant that other routes had to be scouted first. But once they finally reached the capital, the entire situation collapsed into widespread panic as Mexico City confirmed reports of a new wave of filibusterism turning, in a rapid succession of events, into a full-scale invasion in the Pacific involving 2,000 armed migrants—French exiles pushed by the United States’ slew of nativist-oriented exclusion acts and taxes against foreign miners. Above all places, Sonora and Baja California were immediately at risk. But filibusters—opportunistic by nature—could also serve as privateers and join forces with a disgruntled coalition of rebels, popular forces, moneylenders, and merchants in Acapulco and other Pacific ports. The scenario was as feasible as it was daunting for central authorities, and fears materialized when Count Gaston Boulbon de Raousset disembarked in Guaymas and communications were allegedly established between French filibusters and Guerrero’s rebels. The “shameful rebellion of the South [has] made common cause with wretched adventurers and pirates” and they both plan “to overthrow the current order of things”—was one of the stories ran by Mexico City’s *santannista* press.<sup>178</sup> In response, Santa Anna took a leap into the dark, blockaded all Pacific ports, gathered his troops and marched off into the rugged and impenetrable mountains of the South, stirring up deep, age-old tensions in rural Guerrero. The section that follows tells a well-known story of revolution, but retold from the perspective of Acapulco: that is, a story of spiraling insurrections and roiled Pacific markets.

### The Revolution of Ayutla, 1854-55

---

<sup>178</sup> *El Universal*, April 12, 1854

### *Gold Rush Networks, Pacific Markets, and Cycles of Insurrection*

As markets receded, the backwash of the California Gold Rush reinforced the rising tide of filibusterism, trapping Mexico in a delicate situation in the spring of 1854: on the brink of a full-blown armed conflict between Acapulco's authorities and Santa Anna's dictatorship. Filibustering activities in the Gulf of California, the product of an unstable labor market in California, coupled with new migration movements and rising nativism against foreign miners, it all served as the spark that blew up the entire situation in Mexico's northeastern frontier and Pacific ports. Underlying fiscal tensions in Acapulco erupted in the form of insurrections as Santa Anna's troops marched into Guerrero and were eventually caught in a long war of attrition with the Army of the South throughout the summer of 1854. Even though Santa Anna returned triumphantly to a welcoming celebration, full of pomp and circumstance in Mexico City, the situation in Guerrero was left unchanged, perhaps made even worse by Santa Anna's troops who, failing to besiege the seaport, left a trail of razed towns on their way back to the capital, between Acapulco and Chilpancingo. By the end of the summer, as a result, the uprising had snowballed into a full-blown insurrection as it gained more adherents in deep rural Guerrero and Michoacán. Elsewhere, new bouts of discontent were becoming ubiquitous.

The United States and Mexico, after the Mexican-American war, had entered a period of arms market decompression, when the tight, war-time concentration of arms began to loosen, sending flows of arms directly into the hands of privateering expeditions. The combined effect of gold mines in California reaching a point of exhaustion and the resilient flow of migration into California turned the prospect of making a fortune ever more distant. Many gold-seekers and prospectors often returned empty-handed, hence joining the steady flow of ill-starred migrants increasingly turning their ambitions to other areas. Count Raousset, Charles de Pindray, Napoleon Zerman, and countless other French migrants and gold seekers had fled the wave of revolutions

that shook the core of Europe in 1848. Once in San Francisco, they nonetheless failed to amass a fortune and remained as poor as they were when they arrived. The Foreign Miners Tax of 1850 served as a pushing force dissolving the community of nearly 30,000 French migrants who increasingly poured into Sonora and the Gulf of California, all taking with them their unfulfilled and soured ambitions.<sup>179</sup>

A mix of geological reports often stoked such ambitions, feeding the rumors of untapped and unimaginable wealth and natural resources being discovered in faraway places. A pioneer commenting on the report of gold discoveries by Sir Roderick Murchison, a famous geologist at the time, eagerly noted that “there is not a country in the world in which gold has not been or may not be found.”<sup>180</sup> Such migrants more often than not emulated both General Sutter in California and Stephen F. Austin in Texas who, in their eyes, had combined a mixture of good luck and revolutionary zeal that had led them to amass great fortunes. Moreover, there were constant rumors of gold being discovered in Acapulco and Guerrero, which exacerbated tensions between Juan Alvarez and Santa Anna, both waging a silent war over the distribution of prospecting rights based on dubious scientific and geological reports.<sup>181</sup>

Thus even before the outbreak of the Revolution, filibusterism and privateering, together with the flow of smugglers and disgruntled gold seekers, entered the country via ports and frontier towns. The gold rush years had turned this into a pervasive phenomenon. Both Mariano Arista and Santa Anna had failed to placate filibustering raids in Sonora and Baja California. Particularly

---

<sup>179</sup> Rufus Kay Wyllys. “The French of California and Sonora.” *Pacific Historical Review* 1, no. 3 (1932): 337–59. Malcolm J. Rohrbough. *Rush to Gold: The French and the California Gold Rush, 1848-1854*. The Lamar Series in Western History. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), 207-211

<sup>180</sup> William Perkins, Dale L. (Dale Lowell) Morgan, and James R. Scobie. *Three Years in California: William Perkins' Journal of Life At Sonora, 1849-1852*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1964), 350-53

<sup>181</sup> One of such stories was the case of another gold rush merchant, Edward Lee Plumb, whose dealings with Alvarez, Comonfort, and Santa Anna regarding consular appointments, navigation contracts, and prospecting rights in Tehuantepec and Acapulco escalated tensions between both opposing camps, see Frank A. Knapp. “Edward Lee Plumb, Amigo de México.” *Historia Mexicana* 6, no. 1 (1956): 9–23; More information might be found in the. “Edward Lee Plumb Papers, 1825-1903.” Mixed material, 1903 1825. Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. Library of Congress, but I haven’t been able yet to look into these papers.

evident and embarrassing was the moment of panic when Santa Anna took power in the spring of 1853 in an atmosphere of rumors of William Walker and Count de Raousset disembarking with two thousand men in La Paz and Guaymas which sparked off the rearming of all of the California Gulf Coast. But the situation had been completely quelled, if momentarily, when Walker was defeated at La Paz and Lucas Alamán gave Raousset a passport, granting him rights to colonize land and exploit mines in Sonora as a means to stave off renewed raiding waves from the Apaches.<sup>182</sup>

Mariano Arista had earlier on adapted a similar strategy in 1852, entangling Raousset in a web of mining interests spun by merchants houses like those of Jecker, Torre & Co. Rufus Kay Wyllys notes that the transition of power with the overthrow of Arista and the establishment of Santa Anna's dictatorship was "a heaven-sent opportunity to Raousset, whose plans for a punitive expedition had not prospered in San Francisco; and in the summer of 1853 we find him again in Mexico City, making new frontier colonial propositions to Santa Anna." The dictator, however, easily discerned the real motives of the adventurer and rejected his offers to bring armed colonists to Sonora. Now, enraged at this treatment Raousset in a series of letters published by Mexican and Californian newspapers, openly declared war against Santa Anna, and instead tried to join in the schemes of Mexico's revolution in Guerrero.<sup>183</sup>

---

<sup>182</sup> Levasseur certainly exaggerates his influence within Santa Anna's cabinet, but he was present during all of the dealings regarding Raousset expeditions, leaving rich and vivid accounts of the recurrent panic that swirled Santa Anna's cabinet and the different attempts to solve the problem of French filibustering raids in the Pacific, see reports from Levasseur to French Minister from April 1, 1853 to 18 July, 1853 in Díaz, *Versión francesa*, pp. 31-53; For the role of Acapulco see Agustín Marín to Captaincy of Acapulco, Filibusters, folder 69, box 886, June 28, 1853, California State Library, Manuscript Collection, Count Gaston de Raousset-Boulbon. Mentions that Raousset, on the Golden Gate, disembarked on Acapulco from San Francisco on his way to Mexico City; folder 73, Juan Alvarez to Commanding General of Guerrero, July 1, 1853, microfilmed from Secretaría de Guerra y Marina. Archivo General, Fracción Pimera, Legajo 16. Año de 1853-55. Operaciones Militares. Filibusteros. Carpeta General, asuntos históricos; folder 75, July 8, 1853 Captaincy of Acapulco to [...]; folder 76, Comandancia general de Guerrero, July 8, 1853.

<sup>183</sup> Wyllys, "The French of California and Sonora," pp. 356-9; The main sources are drawn from Glantz's *Un folletín realizado*, pp 126-134; large extracts from Raouuset panegyrist/biographer were drawn from Joseph Henri de Collet La Madelène, *Le Comte Gaston De Raousset-Boulbon: Sa Vie Et Ses Aventures (d'après Ses Papiers Et Sa Correspondance)*. (Alençon: Poulet-Malassis et de Broise, 1856); we learn from Raousset's communication with Guerrero's authorities through the first-hand account of Alfred de la Lachapelle, *Le comte de Raousset-Boulbon et*

Santa Anna's army spent the entire summer of 1854 fighting incessant waves of filibustering expeditions in Baja California and Sonora led by Walker and Count Raousset. Most damaging was the latter's invasion of Sonora, via Guaymas, as this stirred up old military tensions among the commanding generals in Sonora, Sinaloa, and Jalisco. Count Raousset was eventually captured and executed in Guaymas in August of 1854, but his foray had unleashed a parallel, internecine civil war fought out by different military factions, caudillos, landowners, bankers, merchants, and peasant rebellions along the northwestern Pacific coast. Plácido Vega in Sinaloa, from Mazatlán, initiated an insurrection and adhered his movement to the Plan of Ayutla. In San Blas, the House of Barrón Forbes & Co. struck a deal with Manuel Lozada which consisted in providing arms and full financial support to the caudillo's movement; in exchange, the *Tigre de Álica* would protect the house's commercial interests in San Blas and the Pacific. This parallel movement, showing more autonomy from the Army of the South, had important ramifications for the development of the War of La Reforma (1857-1861) and, in equal parts, it proved to be a pounding headache for both Santa Anna's dictatorship and for the liberal presidencies that succeeded him.<sup>184</sup>

As the revolution spread through many different regions in Mexico, Acapulco's rebels began tapping into those extensive commercial networks so carefully cultivated by Álvarez and Comonfort during the gold rush years. Between the summer of 1854 and the spring of 1855, Comonfort served as the liaison between Guerrero's insurrection and those commercial and financial circles that from then onwards guaranteed a steady flow of capital, war-time supplies,

---

*l'expédition de la Sonore; correspondance-souvenirs et oeuvres inédites pub.* (Paris: E. Dentu, 1859), 162, 145-167. Lachapelle was one of the French gold rush migrants who had joined the filibustering expeditions of Charles Pindray and founded the Cocospera French military colony in Sonora; Lachappelle later joined Raousset forces until the latter's execution in the late summer of 1854; *Daily Alta California*, September 24, 1854. Reforma Mexico, p. 33, 162.

<sup>184</sup> Leticia Reina. *Las rebeliones campesinas en México, 1819-1906*. 1a. ed. (México, D.F.: Siglo Veintiuno Editores, 1980.) See section on Lozada's movement; Meyer, *Esperando a Lozada*.

privateers, and arms entering Acapulco via New York and San Francisco. His popularity among Guerrero's leaders, consuls from various nations, and national and foreign merchants serving both commercial and diplomatic roles, turned him into a key player articulating revolutionary interests with commercial circles linked to gold rush markets.

Several prominent merchants and diplomats stand out in this unexplored connection: Gregorio Ajuria, John Temple, Charles Denman, Juan Alzuyeta, and W.D. van Brunt. A series of vignettes of these merchants and diplomats illuminate the connections between the Revolution of Ayutla and the gold rush.<sup>185</sup> Temple, Denman, and Van Brunt had all served as U.S. consuls, vice-consuls, and agents of the Pacific Mail Steamship Company in the port. Denman served as the U.S. consul in Acapulco during the Revolution of Ayutla. John Temple had amassed a fortune and large swaths of land in the port of Acapulco and California, building an extensive network of financial and commercial interests in Mexico, New York, California, and Mexican Pacific ports. Originally from Massachusetts, Temple had moved to Los Angeles and established as a merchant in 1827 in what used to be Mexico's Upper California. When the gold rush set in, Temple's fortune expanded, becoming one of the gold rush-leading merchants when he began supplying San Francisco and the booming mining regions on the northeastern Pacific with staples, livestock, and many other goods sold at inflated prices due to the initial scarcity that dominated the first phase of California's mining economy. From then onwards, Temple and Comonfort established land-

---

<sup>185</sup> This section on the business and commercial networks between the gold rush and the Revolution was written based on a miscellaneous body of sources. Throughout the research and writing process, at different stages, I was able to find two very valuable but not very well-known monographs that filled in an otherwise patchy narrative and collection of primary sources: see first, John Augustus Sutter and Allan R. Ottley. *The Sutter Family and the Origins of Gold-Rush Sacramento*. (Red River Books ed. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2002) I also sifted through the biographer's papers which contain valuable information on all of these networks in Acapulco, California State Library, Allan Ottley Papers, MSS-VA, Box, 2212 Personal Papers: Biography/Correspondence; 2215 Publications. John A Sutter Jr. Correspondence-Research; second, Donathon Olliff, *Reforma Mexico and the United States: a Search for Alternatives to Annexation, 1854-1861*. (University, Ala.: University of Alabama Press, 1981.)

holding ties in the huge hacienda of Ejido Viejo in what came to be known as Las Playas, east of the bay of Acapulco.<sup>186</sup>

Temple, moreover, had forged strong family ties to Spanish merchants like Gregorio Ajuria who had married the former's daughter. Ajuria, in turn, had operated from Mazatlán and benefitted from coasting trade, using gold rush markets for basic staples as a launching pad to amass an enormous fortune. By 1854 he had become one of Mexico's prominent moneylenders at the time. The other Spanish merchant, Juan Alzuyeta, was significantly less important, but he can be linked to the business of steamship traffic and navigation as he profited from the importation and distribution of coal to steamships calling at the port. He also had formed solid ties to Ecuador's diplomatic circles in Mexico at a time when the South American country experienced a second cacao boom. On several occasions, during the heyday of the gold rush, cacao barons from Ecuador's boom arrived personally in Acapulco to supervise contracts and transactions. Recurrently appearing in Acapulco's customhouse records is Antonio Luzárraga, an owner of the most powerful merchant house in Ecuador, an agent of the Pacific Mail Steamship Company, and frequent visitor and supervisor of Acapulco's commercial transactions with cacao.<sup>187</sup> After visiting Acapulco, Luzárraga would continue his journey on to Mexico City, reactivating along the way Ecuador's extensive consular ties to different commercial circles in Mexico and to the Orden of Guadalupe, an imperial revenant from Iturbide's time that came back with full force under Santa Anna's dictatorship. Yet Comonfort benefitted the most from such ties to Spanish-Ecuadorian

---

<sup>186</sup> "Escritura de las Playas Acapulco entre Juan Temple y la Compañía de Vapores del Pacífico" 1862, in Ignacio Comonfort Papers, 1821-1918, Legal Documents, Benson Latin American Collection, General Libraries, University of Texas at Austin. The history of the Hacienda Las Playas and the connection to the PMSC also appears in Sutter/Link Family Papers, 1849-1992 (bulk 1849-1964), BANC MSS 88/52 c; and John A. Sutter Papers, 1840-1870. BANC MSS C-B 631, Bancroft Library, University of California at Berkeley

<sup>187</sup> AGN, Movimiento Marítimo, vol 21, June 1850, 78-151; AGN, Hacienda Pública, Fondo Aduanas, Aduana Marítima de Acapulco, box 3133 D, 16-21, 1848-49.

commercial circles. Juan Alzuyeta, the Basque merchant who had defended Comonfort in the trial against him, now also served as vice-consul of Ecuador in Acapulco.

While Santa Anna was busy dealing with filibuster raids in Sonora and Baja California, Comonfort was commissioned by Juan Álvarez to set sail for San Francisco and New York in search of 500,000 in loans. He also received the legal endorsement of the U.S. and Ecuadorian consuls who guaranteed free passage—through Santa Anna’s porous and impossible blockade—to purchase arms, munitions, supplies, and to hire eighty “intelligent artillerymen regardless of nationality.”<sup>188</sup> Comonfort then left in May of 1854 for California—onboard a steamship of the Pacific Mail Steamship Company, most likely—reactivating all of his ties to commercial circles in New York and California, all of them associated with the gold rush.

Part of the story can be reconstructed because of the scandal that the Swiss migrant John Sutter Jr. provoked in Acapulco after he had decided to migrate to the port.<sup>189</sup> Escaping from the chaos and arbitrariness of the gold rush lottery; court cases and squatters had been picking away at his inheritance as the previous chapter illuminates. Now, Sutter was determined to make himself visible in Acapulco. The son of the famed Swiss migrant—son of the elder General John Sutter on whose land gold was discovered allegedly for the first time in California—launched a mini coup against the U.S. consul Charles Denman in Acapulco and revealed Comonfort and Juan Álvarez’s plot. If we follow the sequence of events, this scandal probably led to Santa Anna’s expedient decision, in the middle of a full-blown invasion of Guaymas, to involve France and Mexico’s

---

<sup>188</sup> Denman. Instructions signed by Álvarez at La Providencia, Guerrero, 17 May 1854 certified by American Consul Charles Denman, Acapulco 23 May 1854, in García Archives Collection, Ignacio Comonfort Papers, box D, folder 11: Legal Documents; Anselmo de la Portilla, *Historia de la Revolución de México contra la dictadura del general Santa Anna. 1853-1855* [1856], México, INEHRM, 1987, p. 157.

<sup>189</sup> Ottley. *The Sutter Family*, United States Consulate (Acapulco, Mexico), and National Archives Establishment (U.S.). *Despatches From United States Consuls in Acapulco, 1823-1906*. (Washington: National Archives, 1949) Microfilm collection at the University of Chicago, Consuls Francis Rice and Charles Denman, rolls 1 and 2; especially roll 2, Charles Denman is deeply involved in describing these convulsed years, January 10 1854—December 31, 1855

consuls in San Francisco in an international scandal in the Pacific, when the consuls Patrice Dillon and Luis del Valle were found recruiting and arming two thousand migrants in California.

Santa Anna's plot in San Francisco eventually failed, while Comonfort's in the end succeeded. Both Gregorio Ajuria and John Temple loaned 500,000 to the insurgent army, including ammunition, arms, and the "intelligent artillerymen" he was looking for. The sum loaned through an imbroglio of commercial transactions involved companies in both New York and San Francisco. The success of this scheme, based on very risky transactions, served as a pulling force that drew increasingly large volumes of capital and war-time supplies from the arms market and financial circles in San Francisco and New York, and from mobile labor pools in the Pacific. Temple, moreover, loaned Santos Degollado's rebellion smaller sums of money; Diego Álvarez, the son of Juan Álvarez, returned with a warship, large supplies of arms and ammunition which were paid in the form of mining rights, bonds of the internal debt, and large sums of money collected from customs revenue in Mazatlán, Acapulco, and many other ports. In exchange for customs contribution to the war, Álvarez and Comonfort tapped into rising commercial discontent under Santa Anna and issued a reduction of 12 per cent in all the goods imported through Pacific ports that fell under the regions controlled by the Army of the South, including Manzanillo which had recently fallen under the influence of the insurrection. Alcabalas, *derecho de consumo*, and many other burdensome taxes were suspended; commercial circles in ports had not experienced this mixed blessing of naval blockades and liberality in trade since the United State's occupation of Mexico.<sup>190</sup>

As the summer of 1855 progressed, U.S. and Californian newspapers began reporting increasingly plausible rumors of American volunteer companies participating in the revolution:

We learn that Mr. Frank Schaffer, late Captain of the Marion Rifles, of this city [San Francisco], and Mr. George Frank Lemon, late Lieutenant in the same company, have received commissions from

<sup>190</sup> Erik Velásquez. *Nueva Historia General De México*. (México, D.F.: Colegio de México, 2010.), 449; Rosaura Hernández, *Ignacio Comonfort*, pp. 126-35.

Álvarez to join the republican army...it will be remembered that Col. Wheat, an old Californian, has already joined the Álvarez army with the commission of Brigadier General... A few more Californians among the copper colored braves of Guerrero will give the Santa Anna troops enough to take care of. The last New York papers record the movements of certain Mexican officials in that city in raising Yankees to fight Mexican battles. The disappointed Acapulco gold hunters having joined the revolutionists...[and] whipped out four or five times their number, the Mexicans are beginning to recall the operations of '46 and '47 and to wish for their long rifles and quick revolvers in deciding the question in favor of Álvarez and Comonfort.”<sup>191</sup>

But the revolution was drawing to a close, and questions of national sovereignty began to ring as loud as before the Mexican-American War, especially when French filibusters like Juan Napoleon Zerman were, once again, entering the scene, but this time, directly sending arms and mercenaries to the Army of the South.

These intricate schemes were revealed only after the revolution had triumphed. Promises made to those schemers who, in the eyes of the general public were perceived as threatening national sovereignty, bringing back fresh memories of annexation, were ignored and left unfulfilled by Álvarez and Comonfort. Bonds to foreign merchants and privateers, and the insurance mechanisms established by both leaders' war-time, insurgent alliance, were very informal. Most of these contracts were ignored by revolutionary authorities once the highly-indebted Army of the South had triumphed in the closing months of 1855. Naturally, they shirked any responsibility in these affairs. But this provoked a flurry of court cases promoted by foreign merchants, privateers, and bankers who had funded insurrection. Having failed to bind the contract with Mexico's new government, they often resorted to foreign courts, and the intensity of legal disputes often reached new heights when contracting privateers were arrested for having violated Mexico's national sovereignty. This was the case of the ill-fated French-Genovese privateer, Juan Napoleon Zerman who was arrested and jailed for several months, and that of the San Francisco

---

<sup>191</sup> Daily Alta California, Volume 6, Number 152, 18 June 1855, “Californians in the Mexican Army.”

businessman, Samuel L. Denison, who spent months in Mexico City trying and failing to press his unpaid claim of \$170,000.<sup>192</sup>

Meanwhile, Santiago Vidaurri rose up in arms in Nuevo León in the summer of 1855 and joined the insurrection in Ciudad Victoria led by the governor of Tamaulipas against the *santannistas*. This rebellion in the northeast, moreover, reactivated the transnational network of liberals in exile like Melchor Ocampo and Benito Juárez; among them, Eligio Romero, who had arrived earlier in Acapulco, now served as the bridge between both warring camps against Santa Anna.<sup>193</sup> The official reaction to this collusion was brutal and the consequences were fateful: the dictatorship, floundering, making one bad decision after the next, ordered the arrest and execution of several foreign merchants, passing at the same time a decree aimed at Mexico's prominent moneylenders who would have to forcibly loan half of their fortunes to the dictatorship. The fallout between Santa Anna and Mexico's moneylenders sent shockwaves through the patterns of insurrection in the country's various regions. Henceforth, "moneylenders made their rapprochement with the leaders of the Ayutla movement," notes Tenenbaum, "and large sums started to appear in their accounts as 'loans from sources unknown.'" Indeed, a close study of the accounts reveals the normal war-time flow of loans turning into a flood of capital pouring into the Army of the South. "This change in loan policy" she concludes, "helped to transform a regional revolt into the national movement for change known as 'the Reform.'"<sup>194</sup>

---

<sup>192</sup> Juan Napoleon Zerman, *Manifestación que hace a todas las naciones con especialidad a la República Mexicana ...y el de sus conciudadanos que compusieron la expedición Zerman.* (Mexico: Imprenta del Trait D'Union, 1858); Samuel L. Denison letters, 1856-1869. MANUSCRIPTSMCII: Box 24: Folder 10, Bancroft Library, University of California at Berkeley. Eugene Keith Chamberlin, "Baja California After Walker: The Zerman Enterprise." *The Hispanic American Historical Review* 34, no. 2 (1954).

<sup>193</sup> For an interesting recent study on these matters see Pablo Muñoz Bravo, "'Largo y sinuoso camino'. La incorporación a la Revolución de Ayutla de los liberales exiliados en Estados Unidos." *Signos Históricos*, 31, Jan-July, 2014, 160-190; Rosaura Hernández, *Ignacio Comonfort*, p.31

<sup>194</sup> Cuentas de la Comisaría y Sub-Comisaría del Ejército Restaurador de la libertad: que manifiestan los ingresos y egresos que han tenido en las fechas que mencionan. (Imprenta de Vicente G. Torres, 1856.); Tenenbaum, *Politics of Penury*, 119-140; Alexis de Gabriac to French Minister, December 23, 1854 to 28 August, 1855, Diaz, Versión francesa, pp. 157-210

## Conclusion

Santa Anna's dictatorship was doomed when Santiago Vidaurri entered the stage. Nuevo León, Tamaulipas, and the Sierra Gorda were all drawn into the revolution, causing a domino effect of insurrections all along the northeastern frontier and the Gulf of Mexico. Santa Anna resigned in December of 1855, and Juan Álvarez took over the presidency under an unstoppable wave of revolution that continued for years, renewing in different forms under further cycles of revolution, reaction, civil wars, and foreign intervention in the late 1850s and 1860s. A similar story like the present one could be retold from the perspective of Atlantic markets in the Gulf of Mexico: Mississippi and Texas's slaving economy, the cotton boom, and frontier markets influencing the insurrection of Vidaurri in Nuevo León, including all of their connections to the liberal exile communities in New Orleans and Brownsville that Acapulco had briefly tapped into. And yet the revolution was initially articulated and spearheaded by Álvarez and Comonfort from Acapulco: from its connections to mass uprisings in rural Guerrero and to gold rush markets in the Pacific World.

By the 1850s, Mazatlán, Guaymas, Acapulco, and San Blas increasingly struggled to mediate between the relentless logic of revolution and the volatility of gold rush markets in the Pacific in mid-nineteenth-century Mexico. Acapulco's customhouse and port authorities, in their attempt to regulate a new era of Pacific mobility and migration in the 1840s and 1850s, stepped into the maelstrom of smuggling, filibusterism, and the expansion of a black and grey markets—of arms, ammunition, merchandise, capital, and mercenaries—spreading its networks from San Francisco to Panama. Such networks fuelled in significant ways cycles of insurrection in Guerrero.

The history of struggles over seaports (and mining regions), the mainstays of public finance around this time, fuelled in many different ways all of those protracted and bitter conflicts that

marked the first half of the nineteenth century in Mexico. This pattern of seaport-led insurrection becomes even more contrasting when compared to the Mexican Revolution and the spearheading role of the frontier in Chihuahua, Sonora, Coahuila, and their connection to U.S. markets in the unfolding cycles of insurrection. Telling the history of the Revolution of Ayutla without taking into consideration the intricate connections of maritime frontiers to ports, merchants, and volatile markets in the Pacific is like telling the Mexican Revolution in the north without considering the role of the border. Both approaches would produce incomplete pictures of revolution.

In sum, the importance of maritime frontiers and seaports in spurring rebellions during Mexico's mid nineteenth century cannot be ignored. The title of this chapter encapsulates this central idea: the Revolution of Ayutla is also the story of a "scramble for port cities," most of them declining commercially; a situation that led to fiscal conflicts and popular insurrections unfolding in the chaotic context of gold rush markets. It is also a story of Acapulco struggling to remain relevant in a world where the Pacific was changing at a shocking speed. Once the walls came tumbling down after the revolution, the end result for Acapulco, however, was the complete implosion of the seaport's economy, implosion from which it never again recovered as a port-city. Acapulco languished for the rest of the nineteenth century. Remaining a rural transit-city and a backwater, it gradually lost all of its meaningful maritime connections that linked its economy with commerce, mobility, and traffic in the Pacific. The following chapters explore the causes and consequences of this process of decay: a history of the long road down to economic, urban, and demographic decline in Acapulco.

## CHAPTER 3

### “A Poor Village of Fishermen”

*Commercial, Urban, and Demographic Stagnation in Nineteenth-Century Acapulco*

“Nowadays that steamers have replaced galleons, the seaport starts to revive,” noted Chilean historian Benjamín Vicuña Mackenna, in 1853, upon visiting Acapulco.<sup>195</sup> After the Revolution of Ayutla, the seaport collapsed as a place of political importance, a great moment of economic promise and opportunity for Acapulco. Thereafter, it never recovered from that fall. But trade and the “web of seaport life”<sup>196</sup> was reconstituted around a port of call that serviced new means of transport and traffic in the Pacific; turmoil and the Revolution of Ayutla mediated this transition from the era of the Manila Galleon to that of the Pacific Mail Steamship Company.

The nineteenth century, but especially the second half, in Acapulco, simply put by other historians, is a story of decline. If we follow a conventional narrative, the reasons for its decline seem fairly straightforward. It all began with the Independence Wars. The ensuing commercial disaster set Acapulco on a course of slow but steady, and certainly definitive, decline for an entire century. The disappearance of the Manila Galleon captured this moment, when Acapulco’s story became one of stasis and urban decline in the nineteenth century.

Upon closer examination, however, a different and more nuanced picture emerges: Acapulco, I argue in this chapter, was slowly turning into a service economy while its commercial base kept declining. It also became an intermittent city, its inhabitants disappearing and moving elsewhere in the face of danger, only to reappear when times improved. Viewed more broadly, and particularly shifting the focus to the second half of the nineteenth century, the sources of

---

<sup>195</sup> Benjamín Vicuña Mackenna. *Páginas de Mi Diario Durante Tres Años de Viajes: 1853. --1854. --1855.* (Santiago: Imprenta del Ferrocarril, 1856), 12

<sup>196</sup> Gary B. Nash, *The Urban Crucible: Social Change, Political Consciousness, and the Origins of the American Revolution.* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1979.)

Acapulco's stagnation are harder to pinpoint, even though this period became one of severe commercial decline.

The chapter is divided into two sections, organized around a thematic order roughly following a nineteenth-century chronology of wars and shifts in the world of commerce, transport, services, and connections that directly affected the economy and urban development in Acapulco. The chapter focuses on the causes and consequences of Acapulco's deteriorating commercial situation during the second half of the nineteenth century. Along the way, I explore those forks on the road when Acapulco could have taken off or declined further. This was never a predetermined outcome.

## **I** **Acapulco's Commercial Stagnation and the Race to Join both Oceans**

Three interconnected causal factors became serious obstacles to Acapulco's ability to take off as a commercial port after the 1849 California Gold Rush. First, from 1849 to 1876 Acapulco went through endless cycles of wars, foreign invasions, and turmoil that significantly debilitated the seaport's society and economy. Second, inadequate transport and connectivity in Guerrero contributed to the geographical, overland, isolation of Acapulco's urban and regional economic markets. Third, as Mexico's west coast became integrated northward to California and the United States, fierce competition among Mexico's pacific ports displaced Acapulco to the lower rungs in a hierarchical system of port cities. These three factors can be summarized as the overarching structural reasons, a series of interconnected causal factors, that became serious obstacles to Acapulco's ability to take off as a commercial port after the 1849 California Gold Rush. I synthesize these overarching changes as part of wider "race" to join both oceans. A series of missed opportunities associated with several trans-isthmic infrastructural projects in Mexico ultimately

failed to bring Acapulco under the sway of national and international markets. The period of significant commercial decline runs from the inauguration of the transoceanic railway in 1869 through to the Panama-Pacific International Exhibition in San Francisco that celebrated in 1915 the opening of the isthmian passageway. During this period, Acapulco continued to lose most of its significant economic ties to the world of commerce until it became a veritable commercial backwater in the late nineteenth century.

At a macro level, the old seaport lost in the race to link trade and migration between the Atlantic and Pacific oceans. This race became fiercer among ports when the age of trade liberalism, 1870-1920, began gravitating once again around the Atlantic world. This was reflected in the fortunes of port-cities on Mexico's Pacific coast, abruptly rising and falling with the realignment of the Pacific markets in Mexico, the United States, and Central America. The crucial period here is the one running from 1869 to 1915. When the transoceanic railway was finalized in 1869, the United States was able to connect by railroads the Atlantic and Pacific worlds. This overland connection brought significant changes to maritime routes in the northern Pacific slope of the Americas. The railway stimulated faster and sometimes cheaper overland crossings through the interior of North America, redirecting the movement of people through channels that altogether bypassed Mexican and Central American ports. Facing reduced steamship traffic, many smaller Pacific ports like Acapulco were left grasping at straws. But the unwinding of activity in this corner of the Pacific world was not an exception. It was also part of a broader oceanic-wide process. As Adam McKeown argues, coastal and trans-Pacific migration as well as the "promise for trans-Pacific trade" peaked in the 1850s but thereafter "remained stagnant for the next century as the

Pacific became more of a barrier than a channel for human mobility.”<sup>197</sup> It was until 1915 that one of the barriers to human mobility in the Pacific began to be lifted, when the inauguration of the Panama Canal was bombastically promoted in the Panama-Pacific International Exhibition in San Francisco. But also, it was a year marked by the bloodiest phase of the Mexican Revolution that saw the country sliding into a protracted civil war.

### ***The Intermittent City in a Permanent State of Siege, Acapulco 1854-c.1870***

The period between the Revolution of Ayutla (1854-55) and the first presidency of Porfirio Díaz (1876-1880) saw the implosion of the economy and society of Acapulco as foreign invasions, sieges, and insurrections drained the port-city of most of its commerce and inhabitants. The Revolution of Ayutla and the civil wars of the 1850s left the port even more debilitated. Gold rush commerce had served as a respite from war after the Mexican-American War (1846-48), but the seaport was plunged into revolution from the mid-1850s onwards. Particularly damaging, after the 1850s, were the Franco-Mexican wars on Mexico’s Pacific ports during the second intervention in Mexico 1862-67. In general, seaports in Mexico bore the brunt of war and French occupation particularly because the fight for markets and control of territory in the Pacific borderlands splintered among various contenders.

Acapulco, commercially insignificant by then, managed to escape the first waves of French occupation, but in 1863 the port-city proved once again its capacity to articulate war-time markets, arms, provisions, and ammunition. It also began serving as a gateway through which troops were sallied out from the northwest to attack French imperial troops in the interior of Mexico. Because of its strategic position, Acapulco became a coveted seaport and a city in flux when a large army of Algerian and French troops took over and bombarded the seaport, displacing Alvarez’s forces

---

<sup>197</sup> Adam McKeown, “Movement” in David Armitage and Alison Bashford. *Pacific Histories: Ocean, Land, People*. (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

and provoking the flight of Acapulco's merchants and inhabitants who took to the sea or the interior. After the bombardment of Acapulco, the city's inhabitants — the remaining population of 200 residents from the local elite, barring the garrison, who had not yet left the port— were finally evacuated by the French, leaving behind a ghost city that was then recaptured and repopulated, if temporarily, by Diego Álvarez's soldiers who then abandoned the port when famine struck as a result of the naval blockade conducted by the French from their consulate in San Francisco.<sup>198</sup>

But if we zoom out to the general theatre of war in North America in the mid nineteenth century, the situation in Acapulco and many other ports was as much a reflection of the great movement of people pushed and pulled by war and revolution as it was of the multiplicity of transnational actors involved in the civil wars and foreign occupations that engulfed the region in the late 1850s and 1860s.<sup>199</sup> This was the case of Luis Ghiraldi, an Italian revolutionary and republican who had fought in the Revolution of Ayutla and in the revolutionary activities that would lead to the Italian Risorgimento. A consul from France noted that Ignacio Comonfort had established a close connection with Ghilardi and these Italian revolutionaries and the secret societies they belonged to. French diplomats were well aware of Ghilardi who “expresa las opiniones políticas más exaltadas. Se le considera como un espíritu muy inquieto y hábil, tan lleno de audacia como de astucia, en fin, como un hombre muy peligroso.”<sup>200</sup> Ghilardi had joined the revolutionary forces in Italy, before and after the Revolution of Ayutla, and had participated in revolutionary activities against the government of the Age of Guano in Peru, Ramón Castilla.

---

<sup>198</sup> Gilbert Benjamin Franklin. “French Warships on the Mexican West Coast, 1861-1866,” *Pacific Historical Review*, Vol. 24, No. 1 (Feb., 1955), pp. 25-37

<sup>199</sup> Robert Ryal Miller, “The American Legion of Honor in Mexico,” *Pacific Historical Review*, Vol. 30 No. 3, Aug., 1961; (pp. 229-241)

<sup>200</sup> Alphonse Dubois de Saligny to Minister of Foreign Relations Orizaba, October 2, 1862 in Lilia Díaz *Versión francesa de México: 1862-1864. Volume III, France. Ministère des affaires étrangères. Archives.* (Mexico: Colegio de México, 1963), pp. 196-7

Ghilardi arrived in Acapulco with his legion to join the effervescence of revolutionary activities and rebellions against Maximillian's Empire. Ghilardi, together with Sutter and the Pacific Mail Steamship Co. agents, B.S. Van Brunt, became both instigators and negotiators in the conflict, protecting the community of merchants and their interests in Acapulco

The chaos of commerce during the years of French Intervention in Mexico and the Civil War in the United States overlapped with the scramble for war-time provisions coming from California, as France and Mexico fought to control the channels of access to these markets in San Francisco. By 1864 most of the Gulf coast of Mexico was under French control and the Pacific coast was gradually falling under the influence of French forces, as they invaded different seaports.<sup>201</sup> Acapulco, around this time, was recaptured by French forces. Life under a permanent state of sieges can be revealed through accounts of the wars, turmoil, evacuations, and an unexpected surge of people from other places during the summer of 1864.<sup>202</sup> Remarkably, some accounts are telling of how seaport life and maritime traffic persevered under invasion, amid a general blockade of ports in the Pacific and the Gulf of Mexico, some still in the hands of rebellions against Maximilian's Empire.

When the French captured Acapulco, the blockade was exclusively lifted for the seaport, allowing entry to several steamships in the late summer of 1864, and returning to the normal flow of steamship traffic calling at Acapulco.<sup>203</sup> It was around this time that a passenger, traveling from New York to California, jotted down some notes when they called at Acapulco for several hours during the rainy season

---

<sup>201</sup> Robert W. Frazer. "Trade between California and the Belligerent Powers during the French Intervention in Mexico," *Pacific Historical Review*, Vol. 15, No. 4 (Dec., 1946), pp. 390-399

<sup>202</sup> Gilbert, Benjamin Franklin. "French Warships on the Mexican West Coast, 1861-1866." *Pacific Historical Review* 24, no. 1 (1955): 25-37; Leopoldo Carranco Cardoso. *Acciones militares en el estado de Guerrero*, (México, Sociedad Mexicana de Geografía y Estadística, 1963), 73-77.

<sup>203</sup> Minister of Foreign Relations to the Naval Minister, Paris, April 12, 1864 in Lilia Díaz *Versión francesa de México: 1862-1864. Volume III, France. Ministère des affaires étrangères. Archives.* (México: Colegio de México, 1963), pp. 392, 394

The heat has for several days reached from 86 to 93 degrees Fahrenheit, and not a night passes without a continuous vivid lightning. On the night of Sunday 28<sup>th</sup> [August, 1864], a storm, attended with violent thunder and lightning, sprang up about midnight, and the rain fell in such torrents, certainly not less than four inches, as I have never witnessed on land, so much so that the boat stopped for several hours. We stayed for several hours in that dilapidated town, Acapulco. The number of inhabitants is reduced from 6,000 to 2,000, and although many passengers endeavored to lay in a stock of fruit, there was, however, nothing to be had, and the inhabitants informed me that they had to pay 37 cents per pound for meat; 20 cents for rice, and 25 cents apiece for eggs. The Mexican guerrillas are within two miles of the town and will not allow anything to come in from the country. We found there the U. S. steamers *Narragansett* and *Cynne*, and the French blockading squadron the steamer *Diamant*, the frigates *Pallas*, *Otter*, *Victoire* and *D'Assas*. <sup>204</sup>

But the year of 1864 did not mark the end of conflicts. That same year, another cycle of invasions, bombardments, and evacuations followed. For those older generations who had lived the wars of independence, the siege of Acapulco in the 1860s might have been reminiscent of earlier sieges, when Morelos in 1813 ordered to “abandon and dismantle” the seaport, torching it on their way out as realist troops marched in to recapture the city. <sup>205</sup>

Ports like Acapulco fell under a permanent state of siege. This layered past of destruction and resistance in Acapulco shaped the way the local elite responded to imminent threats. Sieges could provoke a large evacuation, but it could also set the stage for hasty negotiations and improvised forms of resistance. The theater of war during the French intervention often involved complex negotiations in Acapulco between merchants, national resistance movements, the Pacific Mail Steamship Company, French naval ships, and transnational actors like Sutter or Ghilardi who, in the case of Acapulco, became the spokesperson of rebellious forces and merchant elites when negotiating with French invading forces. Urban historian Maria Fernanda Bicalho argues in her study of Rio de Janeiro that “men of good means early on learned to negotiate and defend their

---

<sup>204</sup> Louis Feuchtwanger, “Notes of a trip from New York to California” in *Daily Alta California*, Volume 16, Number 5303, 9 September 1864

<sup>205</sup> For an account of the siege of 1813 see Ruben García. “Dos informes de fray Pedro Ramírez sobre el asedio de Acapulco.” *Anales del Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia* 4, no. 8 (December 31, 1933): 346–74; “Highly Important from Mexico – Evacuation of Acapulco by the French – Rumored Battle before Chilapa” *Daily Alta California*, Volume 16, Number 5403, 19 December 1864

interests" in a city that was one of "the most coveted jewels of colonial treasures." The city was forged in the crossfire between external and internal dangers. It "was born and raised under the sign of fear, which its geographical situation only served to intensify," as "sails on the horizon could provoke hasty departures to the 'hinterland' or haphazard attempts at resistance or negotiation."<sup>206</sup> Acapulco's deep colonial history and the way merchant elites dealt with the constant threat of raids, invasions, and occupations resurfaced with full force in the second half of the nineteenth century.

Recurrent wars caused brief but drastic changes in Acapulco's population. Cycles of depopulation, invasion, and repopulation created a cumulative effect that deeply shaped the port's demography and, in the long run, transformed in significant ways the attitudes and behavior of Acapulco's residents. First, wars kept population growth in check and this, coupled with low levels of economic activity and the absence of migration to the port, resulted in a slow but noticeable population decline that continued well into the 1870s. The population would only resume its slow growth until the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. But the broad demographic trends, the variables of this relatively stationary population— the birth and death rates, the age distribution, and total population size— will be explored later in the next section. Second, constant wars shaped the patterns of movement of Acapulco's population which can also be explained as a change in attitudes. Residents became more accommodating and mobile in the face of constant invasion and abrupt shifts in political fortune. Two sectors were particularly affected: the local elite, due to the constant threat of war and occupation, was constantly on the move. Retailers, merchants, diplomatic and commercial agents, and their families, became perhaps as mobile as the

---

<sup>206</sup> Maria Fernanda Bicalho. *A cidade e o império: o Rio de Janeiro no século XVIII*. (Rio de Janeiro: Civilização Brasileira, 2003), 397

the second highly mobile sector in the seaport's society, the segment of young artisans and laborers in the transport sector of Acapulco's economy.

The latter years of the 1860s and the first half of the 1870s saw Acapulco, once again, caught between the turmoil of the Restored Republic (1867-76) and a boon in commerce, particularly silver, in the late 1860s. The years of the Tuxtepec rebellion saw the loyalty of many merchants in Acapulco divided between those supporting the leader of the rebellion, Porfirio Díaz, and those who supported the embattled President Sebastián Lerdo de Tejada. As Díaz's troops advanced in Mexico, Lerdo de Tejada moved to Morelia to continued his resistance against the rebellion but eventually fled to Acapulco to seek refuge under the cloak of friendly merchants who were in turn protected by the forces of Álvarez's son, all of them supporters of Lerdo de Tejada. Eventually, Lerdo de Tejada took a steamer to Panama from Acapulco and spend the rest of his life as an exile in New York. In Acapulco, it was only until the late 1870s that a stable pattern of exchange was formed around commerce and maritime traffic. The main articulator was the Pacific Mail Steamship Company which carried out maritime traffic in a regular, reliable, and predictable fashion, a lifeline to Acapulco which managed to sustain an insignificant but consistent commercial activity in the region.

In sum, wars in the second half of the nineteenth century consolidated the pattern of a population in flux that had begun since the dawn of the century, when the Wars of Independence ravaged Acapulco and its hinterland from 1813 to the 1830s. Over the course of the second half of the nineteenth century, significant numbers of residents left Acapulco as migrants, some as soldiers joining the Army of the South, as deportees and exiles deemed undesirable by local authorities, as evacuees fleeing multiple foreign and national occupations of the city. But this exodus also resulted in an influx of soldiers from invading armies, refugees from other ports and neighboring regions, prisoners, merchant returnees after the occupation, and the constant and now

familiar arrival of migrants docking and leaving the port on their way to San Francisco or Central America, followed by the temporary flooding of muleteers and stevedores from neighboring regions. Regular maritime traffic, however, only took place when the port-city was not under siege, bombardments, or blockades. All in all, the net effect was to leave a stagnant population throughout the nineteenth century that was impermanent. If Acapulco began the 1850s as a bustling and relatively important port city, by the 1880s, after yet another protracted period of wars and invasions that begun with the Revolution of Ayutla, it emerged as a small, rural city, subsidiary to larger metropoles, with a small population constantly on the move, always ready to abandon the city whenever invasions or famine threatened its existence. After the Porfirian lull, all the elements of this city in flux resurfaced with the Mexican Revolution.

### ***Overland Transport, Geographic Isolation, and Maritime Connectivity in Acapulco***

When, in 1866, the American merchant Demas Barnes arrived in Acapulco, he tried to visit the seaport’s “back country,” but there “was not a wheeled vehicle in Acapulco, or any wagon road leading out of it,” and commerce was still carried by mule train. “All of the intercourse and transportation of the country has to be done upon pack mules over mountain trails just as they were marked out by the buccaneers in 1520. I saw a train of some half dozen mules come in this way, each with a three hundred pound of bale cotton upon their poor backs.”<sup>207</sup>

Land communications in large swaths of Guerrero remained virtually nonexistent. Attempts had been made earlier in the 1840s and 1850s to build a road of nearly 250 miles between Mexico City and Acapulco. At the time, their realization and completion seemed plausible, since the stretch between Mexico City and Cuernavaca had already been completed. The Junta Directiva del

---

<sup>207</sup> Demas Barnes, *From the Atlantic to the Pacific, Overland. A Series of Letters* (New York: D. Van Nostrand, 1866), 128-129; Andrew J. Sackett. “The Making of Acapulco: People, Land and the State in the Development of the Mexican Riviera, 1927-1973.” Ph.D., Yale University, 2009, p. 40.

Camino de Acapulco, founded in the early 1840s, crystallized a plan to use a boon in customs revenue to invest in roads from Acapulco and Tepic to the interior of Mexico. During and after the gold rush, plans to connect Mexico City with Veracruz and Acapulco became more elaborate partly because more business interests were involved in the 1850s. But they all fell through in the wars and the fiscal chaos of the mid-century crisis. After the wars of the 1860s, Acapulco remained disconnected from the interior of Mexico.

New projects to build roads in the 1880s were taken with a great dose of skepticism. On once occasion, a newspaper reminded an engineer, who had persistently failed to finish a project involving the construction of roads between Mexico City and Acapulco, that “siempre ha sido lo mismo, colega, unas veces por angas y otras por mangas; el camino carretero de México a Acapulco que algunas veces anuncia el Diario pomposamente relativo a los trabajos que se ejecutan por el ingeniero de la línea y sus trabajadores, no llega sino hasta Cuernavaca desde tiempo inmemorial; así es que no debe sorprendernos que el citado ingeniero no pase de Huitzilac; mucho más cuando la partida del presupuesto para el camino es muy mezquina.”<sup>208</sup> Acapulco was left to its fate by the late nineteenth century. The only way to reach the port from Mexico City was to trek along the old colonial Camino Real Mexico-Acapulco, with its serpentine paths, rickety bridges, and tumultuous rivers.

In the 1890s, when modernization, railroads, and public roads were reaching many remote corners in Mexico, *El Avisador* condemned the sorry state of roads in several regions in Guerrero: “while other states, farther away from the metropolis than ours, already have one or more railroads, we do not even have a regular dirt track (*camino de herradura*).” Indeed, as many travelers noted, even though Mexico City was only about two hundred miles away from Acapulco, the length of time from the port city was eight to ten days and, during rainy seasons, it could take two weeks.

---

<sup>208</sup> AGN-Hemeroteca, Guerrero, box 8, *El Cometa*, Chilpancingo, Nov. 20 1881

[See Image 6 below]“The conveyance is by horseback, or rather, that of mule or donkey, to Cuernavaca, and thence by stage” to Mexico City. But the meandering path that connected Chilpancingo to Acapulco was impenetrable: apart from its derelict state, “one must traverse dangerous defiles where one ought to crawl along dirt paths to avoid steep slopes and precipices;” most dangerous was the vast stretch of land that connected “El Peregrino, Agua de Perro, Los Cajones, Cañada de Acahuizotla y Salto de Valdez, between Chilpancingo and Acapulco.” So daunting was the trip that “many travelers arriving in the port [by sea] with the intention to resume their overland journey to Mexico City often desisted upon hearing horrifying reports on the state of pathways, preferring instead to take a detour and take a more expensive journey via Manzanillo or San Blas.”<sup>209</sup>

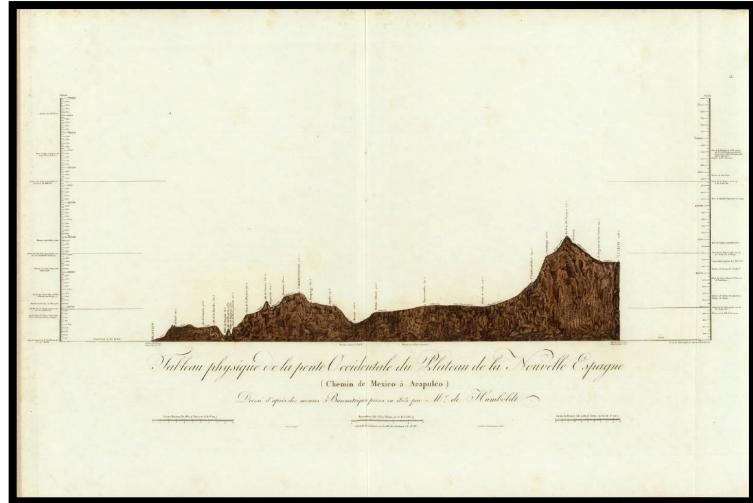
When Porfirio Díaz took power in the mid 1870s, Acapulco became part of a forsaken world of remote regions connected by meandering paths, the old *caminos de herradura*, that timidly crisscrossed vast impenetrable lands, where rural towns, entrepôts, and commercial outposts made up “a patchwork of economic and political experiments.”<sup>210</sup> In this world, improvised administrations desperately tried to galvanize obsolete economies. It became common place to note that the only way to resuscitate these economic regions was to connect them, by railroads, to the interior of economic activity in Mexico.

---

<sup>209</sup> *El Avisador*, Acapulco, November 25, 1891; and Carlos Illades, *Breve historia de Guerrero* (Mexico: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2000) 98-9; Leonidas Le Cenci Hamilton, *Hamilton's Mexican Handbook; A Complete Description of the Republic of Mexico* (London: Sampson Low, Marston, Searle and Rivington, 1884), 231. Sackett, Diss, 46

<sup>210</sup> Jo Guldi, *Roads to Power. Britain Invents the Infrastructure State* (Cambridge, Massachussets: Harvard University Press, 2012), 7. In her book, Guldi reflects on Daniel Defoe’s appreciation of the geography of communications in seventeenth-century England as “a patchwork of economic and political experiments,” an analysis which is indeed illuminating.

Image 6: *Tableau physique de la pente Occidental du Plateau de la Nouvelle Espagne*, 1807



A cross section depicting the elevations from Acapulco to Mexico City. Geologic information is also included. Alexander von Humboldt, *Tableau physique de la pente Occidental du Plateau de la Nouvelle Espagne*, 1807

<http://www.davidrumsey.com/luna/servlet/detail/RUMSEY~8~1~1878~170016:Tableau-physique-de-la-pente-Occide#>

Porfirian officials were well aware of Acapulco's dire economic situation. They constantly echoed the idealization and nostalgia of Acapulco's golden years of colonial commerce, and yet they all seemed to believe that the port's renaissance was always within reach. It was, after all, not the first time that Acapulco had gone through a period of commercial decline. This narrative flooded the pages of travel writing, full of stories idealizing Acapulco's history, which then became a point of departure for envisioning the port's renaissance.

"The ancient splendor of Acapulco has vanished—but it will come back soon," suggested a statistician in the 1890s.<sup>211</sup> In this manner, Luis Alfonso Velasco began his analysis of Acapulco and Guerrero's economic situation; analysis which was then dedicated to Porfirio Díaz, in the hopes that officials would eventually connect the port to Mexico City by railroads. Joining

<sup>211</sup> Alfonso Luis Velasco, *Geografía y estadística de la república mexicana, tomo X-Estado de Guerrero* (México: Oficina Tip. de la Secretaría de Fomento, 1892), 177-9

Veracruz to Acapulco had been in the government's agenda ever since a Veracruz merchant, Francisco de Arrillaga, projected in 1837 the first stretch of railways between Veracruz and Mexico City, which eventually turned into a project to connect the old commercial route, Acapulco- Mexico City- Veracruz, through a transoceanic railroad.<sup>212</sup> But neither project saw the light, and subsequent concessions to build the railroad to Veracruz persistently failed. After its projection in 1837, it took nearly forty years, until 1873, for the stretch between Veracruz and Mexico City to be built. During this period, there were also several attempts to connect Mexico City to Acapulco by railroads. There were several concessions to build the railroad between Acapulco and Veracruz: 1855, 1856, 1861, then one in 1870, when President Benito Juárez divided up the concession into three sections, the last section, from Cuernavaca to Acapulco. The entrepreneurs Rene Masson and Felix Mayalt were in charge of this concession. However, none of these projects came to fruition. Like the multiple projects to connect Veracruz up until 1873, those to Acapulco also failed, consistently and persistently. Time and again a new railroad concession and project was born, followed by the usual heralding of Acapulco's imminent commercial rebirth, but time and again the project turned out to be as stillborn as all of the ones that preceded it.<sup>213</sup>

The first real attempt came in the 1880s, when the governor of Guerrero, Rafael Cuellar, attained a credible contract and a permission to lay the railroad. The long-awaited Interoceanic Railway would finally come to fruition and, once again, Veracruz and Acapulco would stand proudly as Mexico's prime ports. This time it seemed more feasible because the network of

---

<sup>213</sup> For more information on the long history of communications in the State of Guerrero, and the history of railroads, see Eduardo Miranda Arrieta. *Economía y comunicaciones en el estado de Guerrero, 1877-1910.* (Morelia, Michoacán, México: Universidad Michoacana de San Nicolás de Hidalgo, Instituto de Investigaciones Históricas, Departamento de Historia de México, 1994), pp. 137-168; Elizabeth Jiménez García. *Historia general de Guerrero. V. III,* (México, D.F.: Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, 1998), pp. 222-228.

railroads was expanding, and many hopes were being raised in other regions in Mexico as a result. When the Mexican Central Railroad was inaugurated in the spring of 1884, Mexico City was linked to Ciudad Juárez and from there it began branching out into a complex system of railroads in the United States and Mexico. The west coast in Mexico seemed to be the next one, and since there already was a promising contract signed with Guerrero's authorities, it was a matter of time before it received full-backing from the central government. Even heated discussions began to take place in Guerrero's press, discussing the "fears and hopes" that the imminent arrival of railroads in Acapulco entailed.

El Ferrocarril central, temores y esperanzas— Antes del establecimiento de la vía férrea que está por inaugurar, ya teníamos la navegación, y el pasaje por mar es tan barato como puede serlo por ferrocarril, y sin embargo, con el establecimiento de varias líneas de vapor que han puesto en relación a México con Estados Unidos, no hemos perdido ni se ha visto amenazada nuestra nacionalidad.... ¿Será un peligro el ferrocarril para la independencia nacional? ¿Nos traerá males sin cuenta en lugar de los bienes que esperamos? Es difícil leer en el porvenir...De todos modos: nosotros preferiríamos un ferrocarril así, con todos sus peligros, a permanecer olvidados del mundo y de los hombres. Por desgracia, nuestras esperanzas parecen que no son más que agradables ilusiones; parece que nuestro ferrocarril de Acapulco, aunque vivamos más años que Matusalén, no lo veremos terminado. ¡Tal es nuestro destino!"<sup>214</sup>

It was only until the 1890s that the railroad company Ferrocarril Nacional Interoceánico— founded in 1891— decisively took a major step when it laid the first railway network from Mexico City, via Cuernavaca, to the Ixtla bridge in Morelos. Under the direction of the Secretary of Finance, José Yves Limantour, the stretch running from Cuernavaca to Acapulco and another one from Acapulco to Zihuatanejo became a priority, and as a result there was a contract boom. From 1881 to 1911, there were 17 contracts to connect Acapulco and Zihuatanejo.<sup>215</sup> By 1901 the

---

<sup>214</sup> AGN-Hemeroteca, Guerrero, box 8, *La Opinión del Sur*, Chilpancingo 19 marzo, 1884. "The central railroad, fears and hopes." Prior to the establishment of the railway that is by opening, we already had navigation, and the passage by sea is as cheap as it can be by rail, and however, with the establishment of several steam lines which have in relation to Mexico with the United States, we haven't lost our nationality or has been threatened." "Could a danger be for national independence railroad? Bring will us ills without tale rather than the goods that we expect? It is difficult to read in the future... Of all modes: we would prefer a railway as well, with all its dangers, to remain forgotten of the world and of them men. Unfortunately, our hopes seem to be nothing more than pleasant illusions; it seems that our railway in Acapulco, although live more years than Methuselah, will not see you completed. Such is our destiny!"

<sup>215</sup> Jaime Salazar Adame, *Movimientos populares durante el Porfiriato en el Estado de Guerrero*, (Chilpancingo, Universidad Autónoma de Guerrero, 1983), p. 225

network of railroads connecting the north of Guerrero to Morelos and Mexico City had been concluded but connecting it to the last stretch of land to Acapulco became a pipe dream. For several months, coastal Guerrero seemed to be on the verge of permanent abandonment. Railroad works could not continue under the rainy season. It would have become an impossible task to reach beyond the mouth of the River Balsas, swollen by heavy rain, making the passage to the first slopes of the towering mountain range virtually impossible.

Seasons changed, and the dry periods of winter and spring facilitated the laying of railways. But the task itself was daunting to say the least and, when the *sierra* brought everyone to heel, it all seemed hopeless at times. As the project advanced, builders were forced to stop by the sheer orography of the region: steep mountain ranges, arid slopes, sharp falls and rivers that constantly threatened to bring flash floods. The landscape was inhospitable, and coupled with the international depreciation of silver, on which the entire project depended, the enterprise was rushing to insolvency.<sup>216</sup> John Coatsworth, exploring the effects of railways on Mexico's society and economy, argues that railroads "provided virtually no stimulus for Mexican industry through backward linkages. To the contrary, they reinforced the existing disadvantage of Mexico with respect to the advanced economies of the North Atlantic."<sup>217</sup> Although this interpretation has been scrutinized and challenged by other economic historians like Sandra Kuntz, it still holds true that one of the reasons explaining why several railroad projects failed was that the terms of currency exchange and financing did place Mexico at a significant disadvantage. Paying in gold for imported inputs used in the construction of railroads while earning their revenues in depreciating silver currency produced extensive bankruptcies among railroad companies, and those companies in charge of the Pacific Mexico-Acapulco railroad suffered the same fate. That same year the

---

<sup>216</sup> Miranda Arrieta, *Economía y comunicaciones*, 137-168; AGN, F.F. Series FFCC Inteoceánico, 9/357-1

<sup>217</sup> John H. Coatsworth, "Indispensable Railroads in a Backward Economy: The Case of Mexico" *The Journal of Economic History*, Vol. 39, No. 4 (Dec. 1979) 955-6

project from Chilpancingo to Acapulco went bankrupt, abandoned indefinitely, with no plan in the near future to put everything back on track.

Railroads never arrived. Had they arrived, Acapulco would have certainly changed but probably not as much as officials had expected back then. For commerce was no longer as important in Acapulco, as it had been for centuries. To complicate matters, the hinterland was underdeveloped, unexplored, and thinly populated with no commodity market in the making, at least in the foreseeable future in the late nineteenth century. Back then, Chiapas had already developed a buoyant coffee economy without railroads; Guerrero, by contrast, was not even close to this situation in relation to any commodity. Moreover, the center of commerce had decidedly shifted to Mazatlán and Northwestern Mexico, relegating Acapulco to a subsidiary status. The seaport was drifting off, slowly, to a seaport economy that relied less and less on the trading of goods, and more and more on navigation and refueling services. In this sense, railroads in the late nineteenth century were never the panacea for Acapulco's commercial stagnation. Perhaps, had railroads arrived, Acapulco's economy would have matured into a refueling depot that would have then become a solid commercial port, but this remains in the realm of the counterfactual.

For many years to come, the seaport and its environs would remain locked up in semi-isolation: cut off from the Mexican heartland and any commercial activity in Veracruz and the rest of central Mexico, but indissolubly linked to California, Panama, and Mexico's Pacific seaboard. The geographical isolation of Acapulco, and the subsequent abandonment of its urban and regional markets, has often been interpreted by nineteenth-century observers and historians as the main obstacle to the the seaport's development. This story fits with a common explanatory narrative that sees inadequate transport and inefficient economic organization as the main culprits of

underdevelopment in colonial and nineteenth-century Mexico.<sup>218</sup> Lack of overland communications, in the form of either roads or railroads, the explanation goes, significantly contributed to the commercial decline of Acapulco in the nineteenth century. But Guerrero was not the exception: by the turn of the century entire regions like Baja California, the South Pacific Coast, and the interior of the Yucatán Peninsula were left completely disconnected from the center. The familiar narrative is that such monuments to isolation inevitably became poor peripheries when they were left behind, disconnected from railroads and from the interior of Mexico, left to their own fate in landscapes dominated by old mercantile routes, turnpikes, bandits, and rickety thoroughfares.

Yet regions like Baja California and states like Sinaloa, Nayarit, Chiapas, Yucatán, and some regions in Oaxaca, under similar circumstances of isolation, did manage to develop a solid economy based on the production and export of minerals or tropical commodities like coffee and henequen. Perhaps lack of railroads played an important role in slowing the pace of this development, but it was certainly not the decisive factor in preventing agricultural and commercial development. Such regions were only at a comparative disadvantage when the first railroad was built in 1873, and yet many regions were able to come ahead. Perhaps the disconnection to railroads accentuated the lack of urban growth, exacerbating those moments when cities never seemed to flourish and absorb a growing rural population, as Juan Pedro Viqueira eloquently notes in his study of Chiapas.<sup>219</sup> But lack of railroads was not the root cause of commercial decline and lack of urban growth in seaports like Acapulco. San Francisco, as the previous chapters have evidenced, became a boomtown without railroads or without any significant commercial activity

---

<sup>218</sup> John. H. Coatsworth. “Obstacles to Economic Growth in Nineteenth-Century Mexico.” *The American Historical Review* 83, no. 1 (1978): 80–100.

<sup>219</sup> Juan Pedro Viqueira Albán. “Cuando no florecen las ciudades: la urbanización tardía e insuficiente de Chiapas.” Lira Vásquez, Carlos., and Ariel Rodríguez Kuri. *Ciudades Mexicanas del siglo XX: siete estudios históricos*. 1. ed. (México, D.F.: Colegio de México, 2009), pp. 59–178.

prior to the discovery of gold in the 1840s. The town boomed first, railroads arrived later. They were attracted by the creation of a dynamic economic center, not vice versa. In the case of Mexico, most of these narratives that see railroads as the panacea to all ills often ignore that, particularly Yucatán and the South Pacific coast, had been connected by steamship traffic earlier on, long before many other equally remote inland places were connected by railroads. As one writer in Guerrero simply put it, when the arrival of railroads seemed inevitable, “antes del establecimiento de la vía férrea que está por inaugurarse, ya teníamos la navegación, y el pasaje por mar es tan barato como puede serlo por ferrocarril”<sup>220</sup> Many economic historians like John Coatsworth have also emphasized the comparative advantage of maritime transport costs.

Although extremely important, railroads were not the panacea to all ills affecting seaports. Fortunately, a number of Mexicanist scholars have recently turned their attention to Mexico’s Pacific history, uncovering the country’s maritime ties to other Pacific rimlands.<sup>221</sup> These new studies on the Pacific Coast of Mexico reveal an age before the arrival of railroads during the Porfiriato. It was a much more dynamic and globalized landscape than previously thought. As early as the 1850s, businessmen and Mexican authorities had already contracted with most if not all of the dominant American and British steamship companies from the mid-nineteenth century. One of Mexico’s most important contractors in the Pacific was the Pacific Mail Steamship

---

<sup>220</sup> AGN-Hemeroteca, Guerrero, box 8, *La Opinion del Sur*, Chilpancingo 19 March, 1884

<sup>221</sup> Juan Domingo Vidragas del Moral, "Navegacion y comercio en el golfo de California, 1740-1824", BA diss, Mexico, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1982; Jaime Olveda y Juan Carlos Reyes Garza, *Los puertos noroccidentales de Mexico*, (México: El Colegio de Jalisco, 1994); Deni Trejo, "Conformación de un mercado regional en el Golfo de California en el siglo XIX," in Secuencia, 42 (sep.-dic. 1998), pp. 117 145; Inés Herrera Canales, "Comercio y comerciantes de la costa del Pacífico mexicano a mediados del siglo XIX", Historias, 20 (abr.-sep. 1988) Perhaps the most interesting is Karina Bustos Ibarra, "El espacio del Pacífico mexicano: puertos, rutas, navegación y redes comerciales, 1848-1927" PhD diss., El Colegio de Mexico, Centro de Estudios Históricos, 2008; Miguel Ángel Avilés, "A Todo Vapor: Mechanization in Porfirian Mexico. Steam Power and Machine Building, 1862-1906." PhD diss., University of British Columbia, 2010; Ruth Mandujano López, "Transpacific Mexico: Encounters with China and Japan in the Age of Steam (1867-1914)", MA, diss., Mexico: UNAM, 2005. There is another literature that revolves around Araceli Ibarra Bellón, Wlather Berneck, and John Mayo's studies on commerce and contraband in the Pacific See John Mayo, *Commerce and Contraband on Mexico's West Coast in the Era of Barron, Forbes & Co., 1821-1859*. (New York: Peter Lang, 2006.).

Company, which connected the coastal route from Panama to San Francisco calling at various ports along Mexico's Pacific Coastline. Acapulco, in this system of ports, received a preferential treatment and became the obligatory refueling stop and coaling station during the early years of the California Gold Rush, as chapter 1 has already explored.

It was around this time, in the 1850s, when Guerrero and Acapulco experienced perhaps the most aggressive attempt to create overland and maritime connections for Acapulco. This becomes evident if we focus on the life and business trajectory of Edward Lee Plumb as he created the Mexican Pacific Coal and Iron Mining Company.<sup>222</sup> Plumb, originally from New York, moved to California in 1850 but his interests eventually drifted south to Mexico's Pacific where, in the summer of 1857, led a full-scale prospecting expedition to find coal and iron. He arrived in Acapulco in 1854 and negotiated with Comonfort, Álvarez, and Santa Anna to acquire exclusive rights to explore mine coal and iron in Guerrero. He eventually acquired a concession and created the Mexican Pacific Coal and Iron Mining Company that was incorporated in New York, tentatively, with a capital of \$4,000,000 in 40,000 shares. The main aim of the company was to supply coal for steamers calling at different ports along the Pacific coast, but this would also open the door to the development and exportation of many other commodities, including copper, lead, silver, cotton, sugar, coffee, rice, cacao, tobacco, rosewood, and mahogany. Plumb's surveying party projected their trip across the old commercial route from Veracruz to Acapulco with their eyes also set on the construction of the interoceanic railroad. The concession for the railroad had been recently transferred to the Escandón brothers who were planning to complete the transoceanic railroad with British capital. This would create a boom for Plumb's business in Acapulco and

---

<sup>222</sup> The following analysis is based in David Pletcher. "A Prospecting Expedition across Central Mexico, 1856-1857." *Pacific Historical Review* 21, no. 1 (1952): 21–41; It is based on the Edward Lee Plumb papers, 1825-1903 in the Manuscript Division of the Library of Congress, Washington D.C.; also see Edward Lee Plumb, *Reports of the Mexican Pacific Coal and Iron Mining Expedition to the States of Guerrero and Michoacan, Republic of Mexico 1856-7* (New York, 1857)

Guerrero.<sup>223</sup> After a long and arduous trek of several weeks, crossing through the interior of Mexico and witnessing the utter devastation of Puebla by constant wars, the surveying company eventually reached Guerrero where he met Juan and Diego Álvarez at the Hacienda de la Providencia. Plumb eventually received a concession, a *salvoconducto*, and the full backing of Comonfort's presidency in 1857. In Guerrero, he searched for coal deposits and planned to develop the ports of Acapulco and Zihuatanejo as well as to establish means of communication through the Balsas and Papagayo rivers. Plumb, in his travel notes, envisioned this region to become, once again, the gateway to China through which copper, silver, and lead would be exported, and other agricultural products and commodities would be traded within the San Francisco-Panama commercial axis. This also led the company to focus and build adequate transportation outlets in the Pacific. Like Acapulco, the Mexican Pacific Mining Company found one obstacle after another amid civil wars and foreign occupation. It continued to slowly decline in the 1860s until the entire project eventually collapsed under a mixture of bad timing and ill fortune, mismanagement, and insolvency.

The prospecting missions of Edward Lee Plumb reveal the interconnection among roads, mining, and railroads and how there were several missed opportunities to create internal transport demand and growth in Acapulco that would have spurred migration and urban growth. Steamship lines and maritime traffic could have created the first tenuous linkages to other industries like mining. Moreover, steamship interests and commerce could easily spur the construction of railroads. Such was the case of the Mexican Pacific Coal and Iron Mining Company, 1856.

---

<sup>223</sup> Pletcher notes that the connections between Plumb and Gadsden might indicate that both actors were seeking to establish railroads, "having been a railroad engineer and official, Gadsden was particularly interested in encouraging Mexico to build a transcontinental line from Mexico City to Acapulco and probably saw in Plumb's project a step in that direction." Plumb to Theodore Olcott, Veracruz, October 21, 1855, Plumb Papers, I; Ibid., New York, November 25, 1855, Plumb Papers, II. A list of the Mexican owners of stock in the company, dated April 28, 1859, is contained in Volume V. See also Plumb to Ignacio Basadre, Mexico City, November 1, 1855, Plumb Papers, I." p. 23

Investment in steamship lines was on the rise. During the economic year of 1876-77, 64,000 MXN pesos out of a total of 154,700 were destined to Pacific steamship lines— 54, 000 allotted to the PMSC; 10,000 to the company CC Canalizo & Rivera which called on various ports of the Gulf of California and Northwestern Coast of Mexico, Guaymas, Mulegé, La Paz, Mazatlán, and San Blas. In total, the amount of money earmarked for subsidies to steamship lines rose steadily from 154,000 MXN pesos during the economic year of 1876-77 to 240,000 MXN pesos in 1880-81.<sup>224</sup>

Even before Díaz took power, three separate subvention contracts were signed with steamship lines, between 1872 and 1875, to subsidize both courier and transportation services to facilitate movement and coastal trade. The 1872 contract with the Pacific Mail Steamship Company (hereafter P.M.S.S.C.) turned other ports like Manzanillo, Mazatlán, and Cabo San Lucas into obligatory stops in the run between Panama and San Francisco.<sup>225</sup> Henceforward, Acapulco during the 1870s lost its role as the P.M.S.S.C.'s exclusive port of call that had been established when the first contract was signed with the government in the late 1840s. More subvention contracts extending the reach of steamship lines to other ports meant rising competition in the Pacific. Acapulco, in this way, lost its comparative advantage over other ports that were already booming in other areas. Yet in Acapulco and other ports there was a greater impulse on behalf of businessmen and commercial agents to create their own steamship lines. This was the

---

<sup>224</sup>BANC; xF1222.43.L7 no.7 Informe que el Secretario de Gobernación rinde a la Cámara de Diputados del Congreso de La Unión, en cumplimiento del acuerdo aprobado en la sesión del 5 del actual, sobre líneas de vapores subvencionados. (México, Impr. del Gobierno, 1880.).

<sup>225</sup> Bancroft Library, University of California at Berkeley, BANC; xF1222.43.L7 no.7 *Articles of Contract between the Pacific Mail Steamship Co. and the Republic of Mexico.* [Panama, Star & Herald Office, 1874?], 1874. Secretaría de Estado y del Despacho de Gobernación, *Informe que el Secretario de Gobernación rinde a la Cámara de Diputados del Congreso de la Unión* (México: Imprenta del Gobierno en Palacio, Sabás y Munguía, 1880) For details of these contracts see, especially, Document 8, Contract signed between Juan N Navarro and the Mexican Government and Sidney Dillon, President of the PMSSC, New York July 1875, pp 49-55; for disputes between the PMSSC and the Mexican government see a new contract proposed by Mexican government in 1880— rejected by the PMSSC, but reinforced by Mexican government—, documents 9-11 and the exchange of telegrams and contract details between R. Arosemena, PMSSC Special Agent, and Ministro de Gobernación, Mexico, F.B. Berriozábal, September-October, 1880

case of La Mala del Pacífico created by Cecilio Arosemena, born to a powerful family from Panama and Colombia, including the more famous family member Justo Arosemena, who were deeply involved in Pacific commerce and in the politics of Colombia and Panama after the break up of Gran Colombia. Cecilio Arosemena, who had served as viceconsul of Germany and as agent of the P.M.S.S.C. for seventeen years, created the new steamship line to compete against other navigation firms and avoid abuses of Mexicans from foreign travelers. He had a deep influence in local commercial affairs in Acapulco.<sup>226</sup>

Only until the rise of Porfirian elites in the second half of the nineteenth century did Mexican entrepreneurs begin to create national steamship routes in the Pacific. Historian Ruth Mandujano has unearthed various attempts by the Porfirian national project to insert Mexico into Asia and the Pacific. This was the case of the creation of the Compañía Mexicana de Navegación del Pacífico, a project initially designed to break the monopoly of the Pacific Mail Steamship Company in the late 1880s. Guerrero's press reacted upon hearing the signing of the new contract that would connect Asia to Mexico through either Acapulco, Manzanillo or San Blas. "En nuestro Estado [Guerrero], aún se conserva como por tradición el recuerdo de aquella época ya lejana en que procedente del Asia llegaban a Acapulco periódicamente, y conduciendo valores fabulosos en sedas y otros efectos del Oriente, 'El Galeón de Filipinas y 'La nao de China'... Acaso la reanudación de nuestras relaciones comerciales con el Asia hará que vuelva para nosotros aquella época que formó lo que podemos llamar la edad de oro del comercio de México."<sup>227</sup> But the situation had drastically changed for Acapulco. Mandujano argues that with the transition from sail to steam and with the introduction of steamships, new ports and routes flourished while other

---

<sup>226</sup> BANC; xF1222.43.L7 no.7 Articles of Contract between the Pacific Mail Steamship Co. and the Republic of Mexico/ Buttefield's United States and Mexican Steamship Lines with document detailing abuses from foreign travelers, and the alleged creation of the "Mala del Pacifico" as a response in the reports from Carlos Gutiérrez, Secretario de Gobernación, México, Mexico City, 1883.

<sup>227</sup> "Un contrato importante- La navegación del Pacifico- Comercio entre Mexico y el Asia-el Ferrocarril de Acapulco," *La Opinión del Sur* Marzo 28 de 1884. Hemeroteca-Archivo General de la Nación. Guerrero, Caja 8.

faded. But most importantly, she notes, “steam-generated changes emerged hand-in-hand with the rise of British and US imperial projects in the Pacific which supplanted Spanish supremacy.” Porfirian officials, with their national project in Mexico and their visions of progress and modernization projected onto the Pacific and Asia, “influenced this shifting space as the country’s maritime strategy collided with existing interest.”<sup>228</sup> For the latter reason, the entire project eventually failed after several attempts to attract migration from Asia and Europe and establish a regular commercial route between Hong Kong, Yokohama, and Honolulu, on the Asian side, and Mazatlan, on the Mexican side, and from Mazatlan to Manzanillo and San Blas. Acapulco barely figured in this new, if brief, transpacific exchange between Mexico and Asia.

### ***Commercial Competition during Mexico’s Liberal Age of Commerce, c.1870-1910***

Behind all of these attempts to connect Acapulco to other seaports and to cities in the interior of Mexico lies a deep restructuring of the economic organization in the Pacific. Historians Karina Bustos Ibarra, Mariano Bonialian, and Sandra Kuntz Ficker have argued, from the perspective of different periods and moments of trade in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, that “en el Pacífico se produjo un proceso drástico de reorganización espacial, con el resultado de un desarrollo diferenciado entre los distintos puertos y una menor presencia relativa de cada uno en el tráfico total de la costa occidental.”<sup>229</sup> Kuntz Ficker further notes that, for this reason, “el desarrollo de algunos puertos se produjo a expensas de los demás, y que este proceso de reacomodo tuvo lugar con mayor fuerza en el área relativamente ‘desocupada’ del Pacífico que en la región de más antiguo desarrollo en el Golfo de México.” This zero-sum game resulted in a fierce

---

<sup>228</sup> Ruth Mandujano López, “From Sail to Steam: Coastal Mexico and the Reconfiguration of the Pacific in the 19th Century,” *International Journal of Maritime History* 22 (Dec., 2010): 247-276

<sup>229</sup> Sandra Kuntz Ficker. El comercio exterior de México en la era del capitalismo liberal, 1870-1929. (El Colegio de Mexico AC, 2007), pp. 118.

competition reflected in the shifting commercial fortunes of port-cities on Mexico's Pacific coast, abruptly rising and falling with the realignment of the economic and maritime space of Mexico, the United States, Central America to new routes of trade and movement in the Pacific world.

Indeed, up until the 1840s, Acapulco and San Blas continued to dominate commerce in the Pacific, while Mazatlán rose slowly but steadily. By the 1850s—after the short boom in traffic and commerce that temporarily lifted Acapulco—Mazatlán and San Blas began to grow at the expense of Acapulco. But by the 1870s, San Blas had completely collapsed under the great instability of the Lozada years in the 1860s and the unraveling of the Barron & Forbes Co. Railroads never reached San Blas and it turned out to be easier to connect Manzanillo. Maritime and overland connections expanded in this region of northwestern Mexico as response to growing commerce in the Gulf of California, and the proximity to mining booms in Sonora and California. Meanwhile, while railroad works were concluded, public works and infrastructural projects were carried out in seaports, eventually connecting the northwestern coasts of Mexico to the interior. This was the case of Guaymas, which saw a boom when Sonora was connected with the United States and the interior of Mexico through a series of railways in 1882. In this zero-sum game, Manzanillo would soon lose to Guaymas which began to grow at the former's expense. But then this route was superseded by another one connecting Galveston and New Orleans to maritime routes in the Atlantic. As a result, Santa Rosalía boomed, along with other ports on the Gulf of California, increasingly challenging Mazatlán's position of dominance. Kuntz Ficker calculated that in 1886, Manzanillo, Guaymas, and Santa Rosalía managed to transport only 10 per cent of the tonnage moved in the Pacific, but by 1926 this percentage rose to 66. If Mazatlán is added to this equation the percentage would rise to 27 per cent in 1886 and 78 in 1927. Mazatlán would eventually be replaced by Lázaro Cárdenas in the mid twentieth century. But this change does not reflect the intermediate period of volatility. By 1907, it is possible to see a moment when Salina

Cruz began to challenge these northwestern ports when the Isthmus of Tehuantepec was connected by railroad. Before the Panama Canal was concluded in 1914, the Isthmian race temporarily shifted to the Tehuantepec passageway, creating an interoceanic railroad route through the Isthmus of Tehuantepec in 1907. There was, for instance a contract signed in 1910 to ship sugar from Hawaii to New York via the Tehuantepec interoceanic passageway. Tehuantepec enjoyed a temporary monopoly over the shortest passageway between both oceans, and this saw the flourishing of Salina Cruz. In this continuous upheaval of ports and regional markets, what remained constant was Acapulco's further sinking into the lower rungs of a commercial hierarchy among ports. Positioned diametrically to Acapulco was Mazatlán, precariously dominating the world of Mexican Pacific trade at the turn of the century.<sup>230</sup>

In the 1880s there was an effort, primarily, to regulate and adjust tariffs but also to bring order and modernization to seaports and border towns. The Ordenanza General de Aduanas Marítimas y Fronterizas, for instance, was passed in 1887 as a corrective to the slew of tariffs imposed by the 1885 Ordenanza. Simultaneously, Porfirian officials invested heavily in ports. The intention was to buttress their infrastructure and modernize the system of ports in Mexico. Yet Acapulco, during the Porfiriato, never went through a prolonged period of modernization like the cases of Veracruz and Tehuantepec that saw great amounts of money invested into public works, waterfront development, and railroad construction. The most evident example, carefully studied by Priscilla Connolly, Paul Garner, and Bernardo García, was the company Pearson & Son and how the British entrepreneur Wittman Dickinson Pearson invested in the modernization of

---

<sup>230</sup> Sandra Kuntz Ficker, *El comercio extranjero en México*, pp. 110-118 This information was also extracted from the following sources. México. Secretaría de Hacienda y Crédito Público. *Estadística fiscal*. (México: Tipografía de la Oficina Impresora de Estampillas, 1893-94/1895-96); Mexico. Secretaría de Hacienda y Crédito Público. *Exportaciones*. (México: Tip. de la Oficina Impresora de Estampillas, 1889-90/1892-93; Mexico. Secretaría de Hacienda y Crédito Público. *Comercio exterior y navegación: año fiscal de ....* [Mexico City], Mexico: Tipografía de la Oficina Impresora del Timbre, 1901; Balanzas comerciales de la república Mexicana 1871-2/ 72-3; Mexico. Secretaría de Hacienda y Crédito Público. *Boletín de estadística fiscal*. México: Tipografía de la Oficina impresora del timbre [etc.],

Veracruz and Tehuantepec during the Porfiriato.<sup>231</sup> A small dock was built by the Pacific Mail Steamship Company in Acapulco, under the supervision of José Y. Limantour, but these efforts paled next to the public work improvements carried out in Veracruz, the famous *mejoras materiales*. Indeed, this was a constant source of worry for many merchants and authorities in Acapulco. The press captured this in a plea in an entitled “hágase algo por los puertos del Pacífico”<sup>232</sup>

“Los puertos de la costa del Pacífico no disfrutan aún del inmenso beneficio de estar ligados con el resto de la República por líneas de ferrocarril. Se atendió de preferencia a dotar con esta mejora a los puertos de Veracruz y Tampico, y se hicieron sacrificios de cuantía para que el ferrocarril de Tehuantepec fuese un hecho. Lejos de parecernos esto mal, lo aplaudimos... Si creemos que es tiempo ya de que reciban impulso las obras que han de poner a los puertos del Pacífico en las mismas condiciones de unión que las que tienen los del otro mar, y esta petición no puede ser más justísima. [Sic] En el Edo de Guerrero el Puerto de Acapulco es uno de los mejores con que cuenta esta nación. Su progreso depende de que pueda facilitar la importación y exportación y esto se conseguirá en el instante en que llegue allí la locomotora ...pero nuestras ilusiones se desvanecieron.”

Acapulco was no longer a priority and this explains why very few investments took place. If we compare the development of seaports in the Pacific with those in the Gulf of Mexico, the difference in commercial performance is abysmal. Acapulco irremediably lagged behind Veracruz, but so did Mazatlán. The data from the fiscal year of 1888-1889 reveal this: out of the total value of exports in Mexico (nearly \$60,000,000 MXN, at least for those legally recorded at custom houses) the Gulf Coast contributed with an estimate of \$30,000,000 MXN (50% of the total); the Pacific with \$9,000,000 MXN (a dwarfish 14% of the total value). Naturally, Veracruz dominated the economic scene of commerce, not only along the Gulf Coast but also in Mexico, with 32% of the total which increases if we add Tampico; on the Pacific, nonetheless, Mazatlán with 9%—and next to nothing was Acapulco, languishing in a 0.3% of the total value of exports in Mexico, and

---

<sup>231</sup> Paul Garner, "La Compañía Pearson y el Ferrocarril Nacional de Tehuantepec" in Romana Falcón y Raymond Buvé eds., *Don Porfirio presidente... nunca omnipresente. Hallazgos, reflexiones y debates. 1876- 1911*, (Universidad Iberoamericana, Mexico, 1998).

<sup>232</sup>Hemeroteca-AGN. Guerrero, XIX, box 8. “La costa del Pacífico,” *Estado de Guerrero*, July 3, 1898. All throughout the months of March through July of 1898 there was an insistence on the promotion of *mejoras materiales*. See May 29, 1898 29 mayo 1898, *Mejoras Materiales*;

0.6% of the total imports.<sup>233</sup> In 1872, for instance, Acapulco consistently imported more than exported 101, 676 export 178 import 95, 96. A high percentage of the total value of exports was attributed to five types of goods: mainly fruits, hides, silver, gold, and cotton were responsible for the exports.

## II The Demography of Urban and Commercial Stagnation

Nothing has been said about Acapulco's demographics, the social structure and mobility of its mercantile society, nor of its unique path of decline. Moreover, the subtleties of everyday social and economic life, a story that shows how Acapulco's inhabitants faced this reality of decline, cannot be explained by a mere reference to the macro structural and geopolitical factors previously explored in the last section. This second section moves on to issues related to what I refer to as the "demography of urban decline," answering the question of how the "web of seaport life" adapted to this new reality of demographic stagnancy, disconnection, and commercial isolation from the Mexican heartland. The local economy and society of Acapulco were shaped by this liminal situation. From this perspective, I also explore how Acapulco's inhabitants, the local merchant elite, and those officials involved in the seaport's development reacted and adapted to this economically depressed seaside economy, and how, at a micro-level, their decisions and responses greatly influenced this outcome. Their actions and the way they understood, explained, and described this decline, projecting their plans to revitalize commerce, often reveals how difficult it was to conceive this decline as permanent situation, let alone realize that Acapulco would never recover from this commercial deterioration. In the end, micro-level actions from its inhabitants, still laboring under the illusion of a temporary situation, cycles of revolution, and

---

<sup>233</sup> n.a. Estadísticas económicas del Porfiriato. Comercio exterior de México, 1877-1911 (México: El Colegio de México, 1966) 466-509

Acapulco losing in the race to join both oceans would produce the complete collapse and vanishing of the commercial seaport.

Most accounts have emphasized Acapulco's nineteenth-century history as one marked by stasis, decay, and immobility. But this is only part of the story. Even though commercial isolation became Acapulco's major marker in the late nineteenth century, the city revealed a hidden dynamism: an economy that grew from coasting trade and the ebb and flow of population movements between California, Mexico, and Central America. It gave continuity to Acapulco's society and maritime-based economy. After all, like any other city on the water, Acapulco did not cease to exist as a seaport. No matter how depressed its economy was, Acapulco was still able to maintain its connections—if increasingly tenuous—to maritime traffic, seafaring, and navigation throughout this entire period.

The impact of stagnation and decline was most visible in Acapulco population. It is not an overstatement to affirm that the population of Acapulco was virtually stagnant for most of the nineteenth century. It oscillated between 2,000 and 6,000 inhabitants. Unfortunately, there is not enough evidence to present a detailed study tracing Acapulco's demographic patterns during a series of focalized years (1849-55, 1863-76) when the port's economic base suffered important changes due to larger transformations in Mexico and the Pacific world. But there is a constant during the first half of the nineteenth century: up until the 1870s, a slight decline in the population of Acapulco seems to be taking place. This becomes evident if we compare those scant accounts that mention the city's population during the mid-nineteenth century to those carried out in late colonial times. Alexander von Humboldt estimated a permanent population of 4,000 in the city which, interestingly, more than doubled its size to 9,000 when the Manila Galleon arrived once a year around December. Both a traveler's account in 1852 and the geographer García Cubas in 1861

locate Acapulco's population around 3,000 inhabitants.<sup>234</sup> This possible decline of 1,000 inhabitants during this period might have been caused by a number of factors: recurrent cycles of revolution since the Wars of Independence, a trickle of permanent migration to California in the late 1840s and 1850s, and outbreaks of cholera that took their toll on the entire state of Guerrero, particularly during the year of 1850, and most likely faulty population measures. By 1857, however, the region of Acapulco, comprising the Distrito de Tabares—created in 1850—had 23,625 inhabitants and the city of Acapulco had declined even more, reaching a low of 2,907 inhabitants.<sup>235</sup>

It was only after the 1890s that Acapulco registered a modest but sustained growth in population. The census of 1895 and the municipal offices of Acapulco locate the population of the Distrito de Tabares in 32,174 inhabitants in 1895, and 5,000 for the city five years later, with a monthly floating population estimated at 800. The city's population eventually peaked with 5,900 in 1910, and continued to grow until it reached nearly 7,000 inhabitants in the 1920s.<sup>236</sup>

As for the population of the Distrito de Tabares, the general pattern was exponential growth. From what the first 1890s census reveals, it was spurred primarily by internal migration within Guerrero, over a long period of time, relatively low mortality in the region, and by a high birth rate that probably took off in the second half of the nineteenth century. This population growth in Acapulco's region can be largely the result by a burgeoning in the cotton economy on

---

<sup>234</sup> Alexander von Humboldt, Political Essay on the Kingdom of New Spain, Volume II, (New-York : I. Riley, 1811), 115; Antonio García Cubas. Memoria para servir a la carta general de la república mexicana (Mexico: 1861), 37; Letts, John M. California Illustrated including a Description of the Panama and Nicaragua Routes. (New York, 1852.), 144.

<sup>235</sup> Manuel de la Barrera, and M.M. Toro. "Noticia estadística del Distrito de Tabares perteneciente al Estado de Guerrero." *Boletín de la Sociedad Mexicana de Geografía y Estadística*. VII (1859): 407–47; Pavia Miller, *Historia general de Guerrero*, V. III, p. 102

<sup>236</sup> Mexico. Dirección General de Estadística, . . . *Censo general de la República Mexicana verificado el 20 de octubre de 1895*. V. X Guerrero, (México: Oficina Tip.de la Secretaría de Fomento, 1897-98); Enrique Lallier, Perfil longitudinal desde la orilla del mar hasta el hospital civil Acapulco), Mapa Acapulco, Colección General Orozco y Berra, Guerrero, Varilla CGGRO05, No CGGRO-V5-32-CGE-7271-A; Antonio Peñaflor, *División territorial de la República Mexicana, formada con los datos del censo de 1900. Estado de Guerrero*. (Mexico: Imprenta y Fototipia de la Secretaria de Fomento, 1905)

the coastal land which, together with other commodities like palm oil, copra, and coffee, served as magnet for internal migration. But the region did not produce the kind of agricultural economy that regions like Veracruz or Chiapas produced, hence the lack of significant external migration in the region. Regarding external migration, national or international, the stream of migrants from other regions and states in Mexico is very thin, barely surpassing 700 migrants for the first census.<sup>237</sup> Most of them were from Colima, Michoacán, Oaxaca, Puebla and Sinaloa, Veracruz, and Baja California. Even worse is the number of foreign migrants, only 47 out of 32,174 lived in the Distrito de Tabares, and most of them were from Spain, the United States, and the United Kingdom. Lack of urban growth in Guerrero meant that cities were unable to absorb a growing rural population, which in the long run generated social tensions that erupted before and after the Mexican Revolution. All in all, these broader demographic dynamics also reveal the lack of solid economic growth in the port-city of Acapulco and the persistence of a disconnected economic geography in Guerrero that continued to worsen in the late 1890s. All throughout the second half of the nineteenth century, many officials, merchants, and businessmen were fully aware of Guerrero's thinly populated coastal lands. To alleviate the situation, they often sought to attract migrants through colonization, but most of the times to no avail.

### ***Migration and Colonization***

Intimately linked to the story of the northwestern frontier, which underwent profound cycles of colonization and migration after the Mexican-American War, Mexico's Pacific regions

---

<sup>237</sup> Elizabeth Jiménez García, *Historia general de Guerrero*, V. III, p.102. Indeed 31,431 out of 32,174 residents were from other states, leaving it at 743 internal migrants from outside of Guerrero. See, Antonio Peñaflor. *Censo General de La República Mexicana Verificado El 20 de Octubre de 1895*. (México: Oficina Tip. de la Secretaría de Fomento, 1897.); also Antonio Peñaflor. *Censo general de la República Mexicana verificado el 28 de octubre de 1900*. (México: Oficina Tip. de la Secretaría de Fomento, 1901); Mexico. *Censo de la República mexicana practicado en 1900. Extranjeros residentes*. (México: Oficina tip. de la Secretaría de fomento, 1903).

also seemed to be undergoing a similar story of transformation during the second half of the nineteenth century. The promise of mineral wealth triggered a rush to colonize ever more remote regions, and the barren coasts of Guerrero were one of them. Said to be abundant with minerals, Guerrero had been on the eye of prospectors for a while, but the idea of colonizing these lands, grew first out of the necessity to find the easiest way to travel around the mountainous state which revealed the potential of new mines.

A colonization handbook of 1875, for instance, advanced an ambitious project in Guerrero, involving the prospecting and colonizing of many of its regions. Spearheaded by a businessman from Puebla, the plan promoted, aggressively, the colonization of the *sierra* and coasts surrounding Acapulco. But so thinly populated was this vast expanse of territory, and so deep was the businessman's ignorance of the lay of the land in this remote corner, that the sheer size of the land that the handbook offered revealed a certain naïveté about the process of colonization in Mexico. One single estate would be parceled out and sold, the handbook carefully explained, but the estate in question covered more than half of Guerrero's territory; and yet the project seemed plausible for Manuel Carrera Sabat, the businessman in charge. With papers, titles, and deeds in order, he proceeded to execute his project. Invoking colonial title-deeds from 1793, the year when the lands were allegedly granted and sold by the Viceroy Revillagigedo, he sought to buy the lands from some obscure owner. Aside portions of Acapulco's district, the lands comprised the jurisdictions of Tetela del Río, Ajuchitán, Coyuca, Zirándaro, Zacatula, Tecpan, Atoyac, and Chilpancingo—"estimated at about eight to nine hundred square leagues." Sabat assiduously advertised this project, both in Mexico and abroad, in his handbook entitled, *An Offer of Lands for the Purpose of Colonization in the State of Guerrero, Mexico, Situated in the Sierra Madre or Antiguo Anahuac Mountains of the Said State*. Untapped natural resources were the incentives, particularly gold and other minerals like zinc and ore. In addition to the name of "Antiguo Anahuac," the territory's

attributes were romanticized and made more palatable by the businessman who quoted colonial accounts and descriptions of the land: “if at any place the fabulous ‘El Dorado’ is ever to be realized, that place is certainly there in the ‘Antiguo Anahuac,’ from whence gold and emeralds were extracted long before the Conquest.”<sup>238</sup> The allure of commercial enterprises and mineral wealth was evidently being held before colonizers, migrants, and prospectors who would, most likely, read the English version of the handbook in California or on a steamship: “the topographical situation of those lands,” the author of the handbook adds, “is truly advantageous, owing to their proximity to the Pacific Ocean, with excellent ports and harbors through which to export their products. This sea, which one time was entirely deserted on the coast of our Republic, is now crossed by a multitude of vessels trading with Upper California,” and this proximity would also serve as a valuable opportunity to make profitable inroads into the world of Pacific commerce. The long-awaited transoceanic railroad between Acapulco and Veracruz was also mentioned as a future prop to these commercial prospects.

But there was also a national audience for colonization, and Sabat was addressing prevalent concerns over foreign colonization around the time. In the description of his handbook, Guerrero’s lands were embellished beyond recognition; romanticized as the “Antiguo Anahuac,” that vast expanse of territory crisscrossed by mountain ranges and hugged by the Pacific. But his description was also accompanied by a story of the dangers set by the precedent of colonization of Upper California, followed by a moral of this story: “for many years we were in possession of Upper California, and if the multitude ignored its great wealth, many people were aware of it, and still, why did we not profit by it? Our neglect and indifference afforded that fortune to strangers, and

---

<sup>238</sup> Manuel Carrera Sabat. An Offer of Lands for the Purpose of Colonization in the State of Guerrero, Mexico, Situated in the Sierra Madre or Antiguo Anahuac Mountains of the Said State. Oferta de Tierras Para Colonizar En El Estado de Guerrero. English. (México: Printed by Vicente García Torres, 1875), p. 13. Jesús Hernández Jaimes, "Los extranjeros en Guerrero. El proyecto de colonización de la Hacienda de San Marcos, 1880-1884", in Sergio Sarmiento Silva and Tomás Bustamante Alvarez, El Sur en Movimiento. La reinvención de Guerrero del siglo XXI, (México, CIESAS, Universidad Autónoma de Guerrero, 2001) pp. 127-145.

left us but an example and a lesson to serve us for the future.” In response to renewed attempts to launch internal colonizing projects under the presidency of Lerdo de Tejada, 1872-1876, the businessman in charge of Guerrero’s colonization sought to draw most of the migrants and potential colonizers from the mobile labor pool of the Gran Círculo de Obreros, most of them artisans and textile workers, who resided in urban areas in Mexico. While some colonizers would be foreign migrants, the bulk of the colonizing force would be drawn from national labor pools.<sup>239</sup>

But foreign observers were not as sanguine as Sabat, nor were they as uninformed as the businessman from Puebla, whose project to colonize the so-called “Antiguo Anahuac” eventually fell through together with many other colonizing schemes at the time. When implemented, if they ever were, such projects proved to be as fraudulent and ill-conceived as the initial footprints and descriptions in their respective colonization handbooks. But behind these schemes, there was also a fierce dispute in the local and national press over the viability and legitimacy of both the type of colonization projects and the quality and nature of the lands to be colonized. Travel writing and accounts by migrants—their experience and descriptions as settlers and their stories of success or failure in settling—flooded the front pages of newspapers and fuelled an already incensed dispute in the press. The metropolitan press of *El Siglo Diez y Nueve* published an account of a disillusioned German migrant who condemned the false pretensions with which authorities lured migrants to settle in Guerrero, Oaxaca, Chiapas, and the Tehuantepec Isthmus, condemning how colonization handbooks and pamphlets had failed to mention the precarious and insalubrious conditions in those places. Guerrero’s newspaper, *La Paz*, based in Chilpancingo and Acapulco, retorted that the German migrant’s account was fundamentally wrong: in any way were they trying to “seduce [migrants] with a picture of mineral wealth; this is [in fact] a reality... life and property are perfectly secured in the state of Guerrero under the mantle of peace. We do not intend to be

---

<sup>239</sup> Carlos Illades, *Guerrero. Historia breve.* (Mexico: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2010)

taken by our word, instead, we appeal to the testimony of travelers who pass by on their way to California.”<sup>240</sup>

But the testimony of such travelers on their way to California or Panama was equally unflattering; particularly so was the account of another German observer, traveling with an agenda and with an acute sensibility of the situation that governed the geopolitics and life of population movements and commerce along the Pacific seaboard of Mexico, Central America, and the United States. This was the case of the renowned Leipzig University geographer Friedrich Ratzel who traveled in Mexico in 1874 and 1875. Ratzel was the founder of “anthropogeography” and a significant contributor to theories of migration and diffusionism in nineteenth-century Germany; in his scientific observations, he noted that “every country whose history we examine proves the recipient of successive streams of humanity.”<sup>241</sup> In his diffusionist views, Ratzel saw migration and mobility as the unwritten history of deep “historical movements.” Like Copernicus, he perceived a world in motion, “anthropo-geography must see [this] world in motion,” a world where “the whole complex relation of unresting man to the earth is the subject matter of anthropogeography. The science traces his movements on the earth’s surface, measures their velocity, rage, recurrence, determines their nature by the way they utilize the land, notes their transformation at different stages of economic development and under different environments.” Ratzel came from the cultural and scientific ferment of German industrialism in the nineteenth century which, after the Franco-Prussian War, produced innovative anthropological studies on geography,

---

<sup>240</sup> Hemeroteca-AGN. Guerrero, XIX, box 8. *La Paz*, Acapulco, July 23, 1870; August 6, 1870. In the issue of February 16 *La Paz* criticizes an account by a German migrant settler who wrote an unflattering account of southwest Mexico in el *Siglo XIX*, February 3, 1870. The German migrant settler talks about the insalubrious conditions of Chiapas, Guerrero, Oaxaca, and Veracruz, and how entrepreneurs in the business of colonizing tried in Guerrero to “seducir con la pintura de la riqueza mineral del estado; ella es una realidad” “La vida y la propiedad están perfectamente aseguradas en Guerrero a la sombra de la paz...No queremos se nos crea bajo nuestra palabra, sino que apelamos al testimonio de los viajeros que pasan por aquí hacia California.”

<sup>241</sup> Ellen Churchill Semple and Friedrich Ratzel. *Influences of Geographic Environment, on the Basis of Ratzel's System of Anthropo-Geography*. (United States: H. Holt and Co., 1911), p. 75

ethnography, migration and population movements, schools of thought that later became the ideological mainstays of the expansionist drive of the new German state, in hot pursuit of new markets for merchants and migrants in Eastern Europe. It is in this context that Ratzel formulated the concept of *Lebensraum* for the first time, a concept that encapsulated a new understanding of history that incorporated population movements, imperialism, territorial expansion, and colonization.

After a year of traveling around the United States, Ratzel continued his voyage and headed south towards Mexico. The directors of the journal *Kölnische Zeitung* had sent him as a traveling reporter and had commissioned the social scientist to gather information on the land and environment as well as the conditions for German migration to Canada, the United States, Mexico, and Cuba. In 1874 he boarded a steamship in San Francisco and sailed to Acapulco, from where he began his voyage around Mexico. As soon as he docked in the port, he described the scene that by now should be as familiar to the reader as it should have been for any contemporary observer visiting Acapulco at the time, traveling between San Francisco and Panama. As the steamboat approached the dock and anchored, Ratzel described how, from afar, a “great movement” began: a fleet of twenty cargo boats set sail and headed towards the steamboat, leaving behind a group that began congregating at the waterfront. As the cargo boats approached, in no time, the steamboat was flooded with stevedores, all jostling against each other as if in a swirling mass, eagerly waiting to help the foreign travelers to get on land and unload their luggage. The large group congregating at the waterfront, now visibly a large group of fruit vendors, tussled to board the boats and the vessel, screaming and selling their fruit in large baskets while seeking to provide a minimum service to the ruffled travelers like Ratzel, who noted as he described the situation that the chaotic spectacle was reminiscent of a train station in Palermo or Naples. For a few hours, the commotion set off by the steamboat’s arrival “reigned the streets of Acapulco” until dusk, when everyone left.

An abrupt departure announced by a shooting cannon. Then after days of buzzing activity, “any sign of life disappeared,” and Ratzel felt “completely lonely in this strange entourage.” In the city, he stayed at the “Hotel California,” and much to his surprise he noted that the first drink he had in a “tropical place” “was not coconut water, as I had dreamed of, but a chilled lager from San Francisco.” As will become evident later, this small observation, unlike that of many other travelers describing their voyage, was not a casual remark.

Ratzel’s observations are indeed acute, discerning the links between commerce, migration, and urban growth: “en épocas recientes, Acapulco ha perdido cada vez más su importancia comercial y, dado que le falta el respaldo de un núcleo urbano significativo como el que mantiene a flote a San Blas (Tepic) y Manzanillo (Colima), hubiera caído en la irrelevancia de una población rural, si no fuera porque todavía desemboca aquí el antiguo camino de montaña que viene de la Ciudad de México, y si su ubicación intermedia entre San Francisco y Panamá, y su excelente puerto, no hubieran motivado a la Pacific Mail Steamship Company a dejar que todos sus vapores hagan escala aquí y también, en parte, se aprovisionen.”<sup>242</sup> In his later work he saw commerce as intimately linked with migration and colonization, as one of those deep historical movements he identified in his work on anthropogeography. “Commerce, which so largely underlies colonization, is itself a form of historical movement. It both causes and stimulates great movements of peoples, yet it differs from these fundamentally in its relation to the land.”<sup>243</sup>

Ratzel quoted several accounts from German migrants in Mexico, concluding that the country did not provide the necessary conditions for migration. He was also voicing concerns over foreign colonization, migration, and national sovereignty. So prevalent were the fears of Mexico losing national sovereignty at the time that the President of Mexico Sebastián Lerdo de Tejada

---

<sup>242</sup> Friedrich Ratzel, *Desde México. Apuntes de viaje de los años 1874-1875*, (México: Herder, 2009), 70-1

<sup>243</sup> Ratzel. *Influences of Geographic Environment*, 96

captured these concern in the proverbial and most likely apocryphal phrase, “between the powerful and the weak, the desert.”<sup>244</sup> All in all, San Francisco and California’s expansion were a force to be reckoned with and diverse subsequent projects of colonization often grew out of this reckoning. This was the case of one of the first successful colonization programs in Acapulco and its coastal surroundings, in what used to be called the Tabares District. Throughout the 1880s and the 1890s, the Hacienda of San Marcos was subject to repeated attempts at colonization. Situated west of Acapulco, the hacienda formed part of the District of Tabares, the same political jurisdiction to which the port-city belonged. The vast lands of the hacienda were originally founded in the seventeenth century through a process that followed a pattern of community formation and colonization similar to that of another vast hacienda in Guerrero, the Hacienda of Palula in the Iguala Valley, described by historian Jonathan Amith as an overarching process of “place-making and place-breaking,” when the valley after suffering through periods of depopulation was opened up to a constant stream of new migrants from neighboring regions who initiated complex cycles of settlement and resettlement.<sup>245</sup> Throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the Hacienda of San Marcos belonged to a succession of families who derived their power from having a long history of family members serving as Acapulco’s castellans.<sup>246</sup> At some point in the turn of the century, during the Independence Wars, the vast lands of the hacienda fell in the hands of the clergy and remained so up until 1857, when Juan Álvarez invoked the new constitution and denounced these lands as corporate property, deeming them *ociosas* or *baldias*. Amid the disentailment of the church’s landed property in the mid- to late- 1850s, the Hacienda of San

---

<sup>244</sup> For the late reception of Ratzel’s work in Mexico see Patricia Gómez Rey, “La asimilación de las ideas de Ratzel y la nueva visión del territorio mexicano,” *Scripta Nova Revista Electronica de Geografía y Ciencias Sociales*, Vol. X, num.. 218 (25), August 1, 2006: 741-98

<sup>245</sup> Jonathan Amith. “Place Making and Place Breaking: Migration and the Development Cycle of Community in Colonial Mexico.” *American Ethnologist* 32, no. 1 (February 1, 2005): 159–79.

<sup>246</sup> Jesús Hernández Jaimes, “Los extranjeros en Guerrero: El proyecto de colonización en la Hacienda de San Marcos, 1880-1884” in Tomás Bustamante Álvarez y Sergio Sarmiento Silva, *La reinvención de Guerrero*, (Chilpancingo, Gro., CIESAS, Universidad Autónoma de Guerrero, 2001)

Marcos eventually fell under the influence of Juan Álvarez's growing estates in Guerrero. When the old caudillo died in 1867, his son Diego Álvarez inherited the Hacienda of San Marcos who, in 1875, sold it to an American merchant residing in Acapulco, Henry Kastan, who sold it in turn, two years later, to the recently-established Porfirian administration, for 85,000 pesos. The new administration earmarked the hacienda for foreign colonization, and it was in 1881 that the first project for colonization sent promising signs that it could become materialized.

José Parra y Álvarez was the nephew of Juan Álvarez and cousin of Diego Álvarez who now dominated the political landscape of the state in the late nineteenth century. Parra y Álvarez had been a key player in the articulation of interests in gold rush California with those of the Army of the South. In the heat of the Revolution of Ayutla, when Guerrero's revolutionaries pierced through Santa Anna's blockade and smuggled through several ammunition and mercenaries from San Francisco, Parra y Álvarez served as the point of contact between filibusters, mercenaries and the Army of the South in the closing months of 1855. He had been particularly active in the negotiations that led the failed mercenary expedition of Napoleon Zerman that was detained in Baja California.

Now, twenty years later, Parra y Álvarez returned to Acapulco, much older and without any weight or consequence in the new political landscape of a declining port. After having served as commander of jailers in Manzanillo, he could now be seen again planning another trip to California. Instead of dedicating time, efforts, and money in Europe, it was significantly cheaper and easier to lure migrants in the United States with a series of pamphlets distributed in San Francisco's newly-arrived colonies of European migrants. The Mexican administration took a conscious effort to take advantage of California's labor pool. In a well-documented monograph of the colonization of coastal Guerrero, historian Jesús Hernández Jaimes explains how the contract Parra y Álvarez signed with Mexico's administration, through the ministry of Fomento which

commissioned Álvarez nephew to bring 60 families in the span of eight months.<sup>247</sup> Once in San Francisco, Parra y Álvarez commissioned a German migrant, William Schneider, to look for settlers among the pool of newly-arrived German migrants. Scheider promised Parra he would bring 600 German migrants to organize them into groups and embark them on colonizing expeditions that were sent back to Guerrero.<sup>248</sup>

In March 1881 the first colonos arrived. Those families recruited in California, under the auspices of the federal government, were offered land, agricultural opportunities, and cattle at nominal rates payable in installments, all as inducements. They would exempt settlers for a number of years from military service. But all these plans proved abortive. The entire project failed and this would be the last time a colonization project would be carried out in Guerrero in the nineteenth century. “So far, no immigration into this consular district either from European or Asiatic countries has ever taken place, or is contemplated for the near future,” explained John Sutter. The consul further accounted for the failure of the last project and the unsuccessful attempts to settle the Hacienda San Marcos. “Bad selections were made by authorities in California by agents without any experience in the matter,” noted Sutter. Those people who did not succumb to malaria would reach Acapulco completely destitute “as objects of charity and had to be embarked at the expense of foreigners living here.” He moreover, mentioned other successful attempts to send

---

<sup>247</sup> Jesús Hernández Jaimes, “Los extranjeros en Guerrero: El proyecto de colonización en la Hacienda de San Marcos, 1880-1884” in Tomás Bustamante Álvarez y Sergio Sarmiento Silva, *La reinvención de Guerrero*, (Chilpancingo, Gro., CIESAS, Universidad Autónoma de Guerrero, 2001); "Contrato celebrado entre el C. Manuel Fernández, Oficial mayor encargado de la Secretaría de Fomento, en representación del ejecutivo de la Nación y el C. José Parra y Álvarez, para el establecimiento de una colonia, en terrenos de la hacienda de San Marcos", (octubre 9 de 1880) AGN, BN, vol. 48, exp. 116, fols. 51-54v; AGN, BN; caja 220, exp. 48/119; AGN, BN, caja 220, exp. 48/116. Consular dispatches Acapulco 28 March 1888, Roll No. 5 *Despatches From United States Consuls in Acapulco, 1823-1906*. Washington: National Archives, 1949; Bustó Ibarra, “El espacio del Pacífico mexicano,” 301.

<sup>248</sup> AGN, BN; box 220, exp. 48/119; Hernández Jaimes, “Los extranjeros en Guerrero”

German and Californian settlers to Chiapas. He established contact with the San Benito Consular agents asking for information and reports on these successful colonization projects.<sup>249</sup>

As he sailed from San Francisco to Acapulco, Ratzel saw in the United States and in the great westward expansion to California and the Pacific borderlands a clear sign of an expansionist strong state. But as the state grew, like an “organism,” he noted, this expansion came in the form of multiple forms of colonization. Indeed, Ratzel’s conception of an expansionist state is unique for his time and illuminates the problem of human mobility between California and Mexico’s Pacific borderlands. “The civilized state develops specialized frontiersmen, armies, explorers, maritime traders, colonists, missionaries, who keep a part of the people constantly moving and directing external expansion, while the mass of the population converts the force once expended in the migrant food-quest into internal activity.” The spatial needs of the population constantly changed, which meant that borders were never static, nor was the population at the fringes of a state in the midst of a process of expansion. But “here we come upon a paradox,” Ratzel continues. “The nation as a whole, with the development of sedentary life, increases its population and therewith its need for external movements; it widens its national area and its circle of contact with other lands, enlarges its geographical horizon, and improves its internal communication over a growing territory; it evolves a greater mobility within and without.” It is precisely “this mobility [what] becomes the outward expression of a whole complex of economic wants, intellectual needs, and political ambitions. It is embodied in the conquests which build up empires, in the colonization which develops new lands, in the world-wide exchange of commodities and ideas which lifts the level of civilization, till this movement of peoples becomes a fundamental fact of history.”<sup>250</sup>

---

<sup>249</sup> John A Sutter to Secretary of State, September 20<sup>th</sup>, 1886, United States. *Despatches from United States Consuls in Acapulco, 1823-1906*. Vol. no. 143. Roll 5, Microcopies of Records in the National Archives; Washington: National Archives, 1949.

<sup>250</sup> Ratzel. *Influences of Geographic Environment*, pp. 75-8

Through this lens, Ratzel, reinterpreted Acapulco's proximity to California and its commercial expansion. Different waves of colonization came from the Pacific borderlands and the wavering contours of an increasingly expansionist state that began to be felt in Acapulco in the form, not of migrants, as Guerrero's authorities had wished, but in the form of pioneers and filibusters; by the 1870s, this movement turned into a stream of evangelical missionaries who constantly arrived in the port. Even as Ratzel was still traveling in Mexico, a massacre of seven protestant evangelicals took place at a church in Acapulco in 1875 creating a commotion that nearly provoked the sailing of a man of war to the coast.<sup>251</sup> In response to the violence, several members of the Acapulco congregation fled to San Francisco, some of them never returned. This had happened earlier in Sinaloa when Americans had been threatened, an example Ratzel had used to note that these kinds of events could serve, in the future, as a *casus belli* the United States could use against Mexico "in the disorder and weakness of the neighboring republic." In fact, "those familiar with the boldness, inflexibility, and unique expansionist drive of North Americans would not doubt that, in time, they will advance on the Mexican frontier states and on those on the rimlands of the Pacific Ocean [*Uferstaaten am Stillen Meer*]. For the latter, at present, San Francisco is a city already lying closer than Mexico [City] itself, and represents an emporium for this entire region all the way to Central America ... those projects of colonization, over which quite a few Mexican "Statesmen" have obsessed in vain, will become realized on their own, but in a very different way to the one desired in Mexico."<sup>252</sup>

---

<sup>251</sup> "A War of Creeds," *The Milwaukee Sentinel*, February 23, 1875. "The Acapulco Massacre," *Daily Evening Bulletin*, February 15, 1875. "Mexican Refugees in California," *Friend's Review* (May 1, 1875). "The Massacre at Acapulco," *New York Observer and Chronicle* (March 4, 1875); John A. Sutter, Jr., Acapulco, September 30, 1875, Report Upon the *Commercial Relations of the United States with Foreign Countries for the Year 1875* (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1876): 1138. Michael A. Ridge Jr., "A Country in Need of American Instruction: The U.S. Mission to Shape and Transform Mexico, 1848-1911." PhD diss, University of Iowa, 2012.

<sup>252</sup> Early ideas of lebensraum Friedrich Ratzel. "Quien conoce la audacia, la inflexibilidad y el característico afán expansionist de los norteamericanos, no dudarían que, con el tiempo, avancen sobre los estados mexicanos fronterizos y los de la costa del Pacífico. Para estos últimos, San Francisco ya actualmente constituye una ciudad más cercana que el propio México y representa un emporio para toda esta region, inclusive hasta centroamérica. Cuando esto suceda, los proyectos de colonización con los que se ha afanado inútilmente más de un 'estadista' mexicano, se van a

## Conclusion

In sum, why Acapulco never took off as a commercial port and failed to stimulate regional growth in the nineteenth century has been the main question animating our analysis in this chapter. Acapulco defies conventional explanations for urban growth and development. For a privileged geographic position could have meant easier access to trade and a large inflow of migrants, hence the development of cities spurred primarily by export-based growth, migration, and internal demand. If we follow this conventional explanation, Acapulco would have necessarily grown because of its privileged access to Pacific trade and maritime traffic, and despite its lack of overland connections to the interior, like so many other cities did in Mexico and the United States, when successive gold rushes created vibrant markets in the Pacific and turned commercial outposts into dynamic urban centers like San Francisco, San Diego, Mazatlán, Panama, and Valparaíso. Yet none of this happened in Acapulco. In fact, the city experienced urban, economic, and demographic decline in the nineteenth century—why? What explains this long road down?

Wars, political turmoil, and depopulation partly shaped this outcome, accelerating the process of decline. But then again, the history of any port-city is one of a long struggle against wars, foreign occupation, and the outbreak of epidemics. Maria Fernanda Bicalho's history of Rio de Janeiro eloquently and beautifully retells this universal story, exploring the role of constant fear of internal and external threats, of a permanent state of siege shaping the urban, social, and political landscapes of port-cities. At times, major civil wars have produced serious economic and social disruption, becoming a major factor in the decline of a port-city. This was the case of New

---

realizar por sí mismos, pero de una manera muy diferente a la que se desea en México.” P. 399-400 Friedrich Ratzel, *Desde México. Apuntes de viaje de los años 1874 y 1875*. Trans. To Spanish, Lucia Luna, (Mexico: Herder, 2009), p. 400; p. 70 Con el tiempo, sin duda, el predominio natural de California y de los demás estados del Pacífico estadunidense también habrá de imponerse en el área del comercio, pero entonces surgirá una época completamente nueva para toda la costa. Porque, según el criterio unánime, un verdadero arraigo de la cultura aquí sería prácticamente imposible sin una intervención extranjera.” Descripción de los problemas económicos y comerciales de Acapulco.

Orleans's decline after the American Civil War, when the port-city failed to adapt to the seismic change of vanishing plantations and slave-based economies. Historian have traced New Orleans' history showing how it became "a monument to commercial isolation" after merchants and bankers in the port-city inadequately responded to broad structural changes to post-emancipation southern agriculture.<sup>253</sup> But Acapulco lived none of this during the period in question. The Pacific wars waged by the French were serious, but their negative impact on the seaport pales next to the devastation and seismic change the independence war and the fall of mercantilism momentarily brought to Acapulco and Mexico, before everything became reconstituted around the Pacific Mail Steamship Company, replacing an older state of affairs—the proverbial "the more things change, the more they stay the same." Even though the fall of mercantilism and the sacking and torching of Acapulco in 1813-14 dealt a severe blow to the colonial port, the function of the port-city and its ties to the sea through social and economic activities remained untouched. Acapulco continued to function as a less-glorified commercial seaport and entrepôt for more than a century afterwards.

Lack of overland connections was certainly important, fierce competition among seaports, too—all contributing factors to Acapulco's commercial decline. Overland isolation exacerbated the disconnection from the interior, yet Acapulco continued to serve as an important nexus between Panama and San Francisco, keeping coasting trade and passenger traffic alive and well throughout the nineteenth century. Moreover, railroads were important, but they were not the panacea for all ills as many observers argued back then, or as many economic historians continue to argue. San Francisco and Chicago, both commercial outposts at the edge of frontiers, all boomed before the arrival of railroads. Old port-cities like Buenos Aires and Valparaiso, all boomed before the age of railroads, because their valorization of space emphasized the stocking and accumulation of

---

<sup>253</sup> Scott P. Marler. "'A Monument to Commercial Isolation': Merchants and the Economic Decline of Post-Civil War New Orleans." *Journal of Urban History* 36, no. 4 (July 1, 2010): 507–27.

capital and not merely its channeling to other regions of economic activity. The role of rivers was equally important. But rivers, like railroads, were also artificially adapted, shaped into canals, and redirected to centers of economic activity. The Balsas River could have played, for Acapulco, the same role it would play for Lázaro Cárdenas in Michoacán, a century later, when one of the river's tributaries was adapted to facilitate water transportation between the Pacific coast and the interior. As a result, Lázaro Cárdenas became the most import Mexican port on the Pacific. Whereas economic activity was never really connected to the Balsas River.

Weak commerce and strong competition from other ports were also important factors. Yet port-cities rose, fell, then vanished in unexpected cycles on the Pacific. Salina Cruz, Santa Rosalía, and San Blas went through vertiginous commercial cycles of boom and bust in the nineteenth century; and yet, those that dominated commerce like Mazatlán did not experience significant urban growth, neither in the nineteenth nor in the twentieth centuries. Acapulco, against all odds and despite fierce competition, maintained a relatively modest and stable economy based on a predictable pattern of commerce and maritime traffic without any implosions or wild swings after the Revolution of Ayutla and the 1849 Gold Rush. It was a steady decline after 1849.

What was the overarching logic, connecting this disparate list of factors, that ultimately contributed to Acapulco's commercial decline? If none of these factors, when taken individually, can account for a satisfying explanation of Acapulco's decline, then there must be a larger dynamic of interdependent variables at play. Between 1848 and 1869, the universal question was how to connect both oceans, as well as which means of transportation served this end more efficiently. As the steamboat emerged, trade routes between California, Central America, and the isthmian passages flourished. At a macro level, I have argued that the puzzle of Acapulco's commercial decline can be solved by analyzing the way Acapulco lost in what I have referred to as a "trans-isthmian race" among seaports to link trade and migration between the Atlantic and Pacific oceans,

a race that became extremely fierce as the age of trade liberalism, 1870-1920, began gravitating around the Atlantic.

Hence the primal dynamic underlying the fierce competition among Pacific ports, and one of the most important reasons why Acapulco suffered a prolonged period of commercial decline, can be found in the nineteenth-century scramble to articulate the Atlantic and Pacific worlds of commerce. This scramble produced many volatile regional markets in the Pacific, explaining the surge and disappearance of ports and maritime frontiers in Mexico and North America. Moreover, as the next chapter will illuminate, lack of railroad development reflected not only the merchants' continued overreliance on maritime-generated commerce, particularly coasting trade or *cabotaje*, but also reflected meager economic activity and lack of exportable commodities in its hinterland, which could have attracted railroads (though not necessarily as the counterintuitive cases of Chiapas and Oaxaca show). The overriding question of joining the two oceans sparked a significant commercial race that also highlighted the failure of merchants and officials to solve this problem in favor of Acapulco.

The decline of the commercial port in the nineteenth century is fundamental for understanding Acapulco's shift from a transpacific port to a mundane entrepôt devoted to refueling services and coasting trade. But to capture the whole picture of the port's transformation in the nineteenth century, other questions remain to be answered, particularly those detailing Acapulco's other functions: what was the nature of Acapulco as a transport hub and why did it maintain this important position in the northeastern corner of the Pacific? How did this position shape urban and socioeconomic change in the port? What kind of service-based industry emerged in Acapulco in the nineteenth century? These questions will be answered in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER 4

### The Port of Call in the New Pacific *Services, Coasting Trade, and Seaport Life in Acapulco, 1869-1914*

Hubert H. Bancroft began reflecting on the profound changes the industrial revolution had wrought—up until 1900—on the Pacific Ocean. “A dozen lines of steamships,” he wrote, “now cross the Pacific between America and Asia, where for two and a half centuries a single galleon made its slow and clumsy way forth and back from Acapulco to Manila.”<sup>254</sup> Bancroft understood the influence of this vast ocean as he sought to retell “the great industrial evolution on the Pacific,” showing how the world’s great “amphitheater of water” had changed beyond recognition. It had all started the last half century: “Sixty years ago vessels trading into the Pacific rounded Cape Horn or Good Hope, and creeping along the coasts of America or Asia called at the various points for traffic and made their exchanges, returning after an absence of one or two years.” Then from 1849 onwards, gold was discovered in the Pacific and the world rushed in, in rapid succession, traveling quickly across California, Australia, and Alaska; gold rushes stimulated trade and attracted thousands of gold-seekers; telegraphs, steam, and coal attended the pathways of migrants and commerce. “Now,” noted Bancroft in 1900, “all the important ports have their fast-running steamships, sailing on stated days, direct to or connecting with the chief cities of the world.” The Pacific Ocean had turned into a hiving network in the industrial era: “besides the swarms of native junks and river steamboats and fleets of sail,” there were “thousands of foreign sailing vessels which likewise cross and recross from every point to every point, or pass along the shore.” The transpacific world was surging forth with all its might, “carrying the surplus products of one land to another to the benefit of all, and nearly all first appearing within the last half century.”

---

<sup>254</sup> Hubert Howe Bancroft. *The New Pacific*. (New York, N.Y.: Bancroft Co., 1912 (p. 1. Chapter I, Now and Then)

This vast ocean, deemed by Bancroft the “New Pacific,” was quickly turning into “the world’s theater of commerce and industrial progression.” Eventually, the retelling of this profound transformation was crystallized in his book, *The New Pacific*, written at the turn of the twentieth century, in the form of a synthesis of his monumental work on the *Pacific States of North America*. In it, the historian delved deep into nineteenth-century questions of human progress and industry in the islands, coasts, ports, and countries around the Pacific. In this new history of the ocean, many remote corners of the Pacific like Acapulco are described by Bancroft as “sealed ports” where free commerce would hit a wall. But, in the age of industry, ports now swarmed with vessels and steamships, and this frenetic pace of activity meant that every oceanic corner had opened up to the world of commerce and movement as countless ports, entrepôts, and stations connected the Pacific at different points, from one remote corner to the other.

Bancroft devoted many pages to this transformation. His was a story that slowly became the new narrative of the Pacific Ocean; a narrative that mixed ideas on Manifest Destiny and the mid nineteenth-century speeches and foreign policy initiatives by Henry William Seward and John Hay; but also from Friedrich Jackson Turner’s Frontier Thesis and Herbert Bolton’s history of the Spanish American Borderlands. “We have no longer a virgin country to develop; pioneer work in the United States is done, and now we must take a plunge into the sea.” And fusing the worldview of Manifest Destiny with Turner’s story of the significance of the frontier in American history, Bancroft added: “the Pacific, its shores and islands, must now take the place of the great west, its plains and mountains, as an outlet for pent-up industry.”<sup>255</sup>

The story became another master American narrative of imperial expansion but with a trans-Pacific twist. William H. Seward first crystallized this idea in the course of a speech in the senate in 1852: “Henceforth European commerce, European politics, European thought and

---

<sup>255</sup> Bancroft, *The New Pacific*, p.13

European activity, although actually gaining force, and European connections, although actually becoming more intimate, will nevertheless relatively sink in importance; while the Pacific Ocean, its shores, its lands and the vast region beyond will become the chief theater of events in the world's great hereafter.” When Seward gave his speech, according to Bancroft, the Pacific coast was a barren, unknown land with no telegraph or railway yet to be seen on any Pacific seaboard, nor any commerce or steamship line crossing the ocean. But as the Pacific entered the industrial era, the United States also expanded economically and territorially. This process picked up the pace between 1869 and 1914: from the building of the 1869 Transcontinental Railway that joined both the Pacific and Atlantic oceans, through overland connections in the United States, to the 1914 opening of the Panama Canal.

All across the Pacific rim, networks of railways, telegraphs, and steamship lines expanded, and with this expansion also came the spread of Anglo-American naval power. But “next to a navy, and the money to maintain it,” wrote Bancroft, “coaling-stations are an essential to international power.”<sup>256</sup> Coaling stations served as launch-pads for commerce, movement, and imperial expansion at a time when steamers powered by coal became the main means of propulsion across oceans. In the era of coal and steam, ports that turned into coaling stations signaled the deep changes in oceanic transportation taking place in the New Pacific during the second half of the nineteenth century.

Acapulco, between 1869 and 1915, changed with the era of steam and coal in the “New Pacific.” In this way, from its relatively new function as a coaling station, Acapulco derived much of its international presence in the Pacific Ocean. When it turned into a hub of *cabotaje*, much of the regional power it possessed was also derived from this new fueling function. The following chapter thus tells the mundane story of a port-of-call in a heavily industrialized ocean, showing

---

<sup>256</sup> Bancroft, *The New Pacific*, p.61.

how Acapulco became anchored to coal and *cabotaje* while still remaining a small world at the edge of the Pacific.

Historians have for the most part overlooked Acapulco's continuous transformations in this industrialized world. They tend to echo nineteenth-century observers who saw how Acapulco's nineteenth-century transformations paled next to its glorified colonial past. Time and again Acapulco was described in the nineteenth century as a relic of a bygone world, and time and again with important exceptions, contemporary historians repeat what their nineteenth century counterparts said about Acapulco: that it was a place lifted in a limbo of endless decline.

During the commercial boom of the late nineteenth century, Acapulco continued to serve as a refueling port, a coaling station, and an important hub for regional coasting trade between Panama and San Francisco. During the 1880s and up until the late 1920s, coasting trade in Acapulco was briefly galvanized by the continuing urbanization of California and by the opening of the Panama Canal in 1914. Thus, Acapulco saw once again a steady demand in perishable goods like fruit and vegetables, but also a boon in mining, and a commodity boom along Mexico's Pacific Coast. Yet, simultaneously, the era of coaling stations was quickly coming to an end. From this context, of rising commerce in the Pacific and the declining role of coaling stations, a tightly-knit group of merchants of many nationalities consolidated their power in coasting trade and the transport and coal business. This local merchant elite kept a relatively closed mercantile order that began to create deep social tensions.

In this story of urban change, Acapulco became tied to the fortunes of a coaling station. When the coaling station disappeared, so did the seaport. A corollary to the argument is that on the eve of the Mexican Revolution, Acapulco was already going through a more impactful revolution of its own, a silent revolution that did not come full circle until after the armed phase of the Mexican Revolution in the 1920s. It was a revolution—social, urban, and economic—that

had its origins in the world of coal and steam created by the New Pacific during the second half of the nineteenth century. Beginning with the 1849 Gold Rush, the era of coal and steamers served as the tipping point for deep changes wrought in Acapulco, setting off a long urban transformation, subtle and silent but profound, that ultimately tore the port apart in a violent social clash during the 1920s, when Acapulco and many other coaling stations began to disappear, as oil replaced coal as the main engine of propulsion in steamers, during the first half of the twentieth century. Yet the reasons for the disappearance of the coaling station are more complex; they lie in a mixture of global trends, technological changes, a profound revolution in transport and communications, and local trends, post revolutionary social changes and public works in Acapulco, which will be discussed later.

Suffice to say for now, and I take it from here as the heart of my argument in this chapter and the next, that the social and economic tensions created by the coaling station in the late nineteenth century, and then by its gradual fading in the 1920s, ultimately set off spiraling conflicts within Acapulco's merchant and retailing society that tore apart the port altogether. Deep changes began with the Gold Rush in the 1850s, when the Pacific Mail Steamship Company established a coal depot and turned Acapulco into a coaling station. Strategically positioned between Panama and San Francisco, Acapulco kept responding to the benefits of "first nature" geographic advantages brought to port: the centrality and suitability of its bay. Social and urban change then deepened in the late nineteenth century when coal completely replaced sail as the central means of propulsion for ocean transport, which meant that frequent replenishment at sea consolidated Acapulco as a hub of *cabotaje* (regional coasting trade), from which a regional trading monopoly emerged in the port. Entrepôt or *puerto de cabotaje*, transport hub or port-of-call, coaling or refueling station— they all denote Acapulco's middling position as a port at the pinch point of navigational and coasting trade routes. In this world of middling positions in the New Pacific. Coal

and *cabotaje*, steamships and warehouses, stevedore leagues and merchant houses were the order of the day in Acapulco. The industrial era of steam and coal in the Pacific ultimately created in Acapulco a social, urban and economic order that revolved around *cabotaje* and the infrastructure of credit, warehousing, and distribution of coal. This world lasted from 1849 during Gold Rush, when Acapulco was established as a coaling station, and lasted until the late 1920s when a burgeoning oil industry in California and Mexico made cheaper the shift from coal to oil as the central means for navigation, and concomitantly, when the traffic of steamship passengers began to dwindle and be replaced by automobile transportation, especially after the first road between Acapulco and the Mexican heartland was inaugurated.

Acapulco, by the early twentieth century, had become wholly dependent on steamers and *cabotaje*, which had seen the emergence of a consortium of retailing and merchant houses, resembling a weak monopoly, that controlled the infrastructure of credit, warehousing, and distribution of coal, coasting trade, and other refueling supplies in the port and the region. Hence a profound but silent transformation was already underway in Acapulco by the time the Flores Magon led a failed expedition in Baja California in 1911. When the Mexican Revolution struck the Pacific coast, Acapulco was already seething with tensions in the social world created by the coaling station and the New Pacific. When it all disappeared, the port came crashing down precipitously, descending into an all-out confrontation among different sectors of Acapulco's society, scrambling for the remains of a disappearing coaling business. In sum, the real social, economic, and urban revolution of Acapulco had already taken place in the nineteenth century. The armed phase of the Revolution would only catalyze and accelerate Acapulco's transformation, suspending the coaling station on a prolonged period of chaos, only to let it drop and swing down, ultimately unraveling in the late 1920s.

### Seaport Life in Acapulco

### *Mobility, Continuity, and Decline*

In the spring of 1874, there seemed to be much enthusiasm in the port. A “great society” of artisans was created, joining many of the patriotic and civic societies so prevalent at the time. They showed their willingness to “unirse todos los artesanos ya en una sola sociedad, ya en varias según sus artes y oficios, fruto de una revolución santa... La Revolución de Ayutla.”<sup>257</sup> The impulse to create this new society had its post-colonial origins in the *sociedades gremiales* created in the 1840s and 1850s under the political guidance of Juan Álvarez and Nicolás Bravo. One of them, La Virgen de la Soledad, was created to defend small producers from the deluge of foreign products coming in through Acapulco; others sought to create *escuelas e instituciones de beneficencia*.<sup>258</sup> The port after all was still recovering from a prolonged period of war and turmoil when the new society of artisans was founded. They made sure to emphasize how times had changed: “antes por cualquier incidente se escuchaba a cada paso el estruendo del combate y el fragor del cañoneo.... Antes una asonada, un motín, turbaba la paz ...y los negocios públicos.” But times had changed under the more peaceful latter years of the Restored Republic. “Efectivamente en 1874,” noted Acapulco’s society of “artisans” in their inaugural address, “México ha sustituido los motines con asociaciones artísticas; el silbido de la bala con el de la locomotora; las armas con instrumentos de labranza, y ese grito de guerra...ha sido reemplazado con el de ‘Paz’ y ‘Progreso.’”

### *The Continuity of Acapulco’s Social Structure and the Urban Framework*

It is hard to believe there was a large sector of artisans in the port; the idea of a “great society” of artisans in Acapulco was more aspirational than real. Artisans, in the traditional

---

<sup>257</sup> *La Esperanza del Sur*, Acapulco, May 9, 1874.

<sup>258</sup> Moisés González Navarro, *Anatomía del poder en México, 1848-1853*. (México: El Colegio de México, 1983, 1977), p.208

*Braudelian* sense, formed a sliver of Acapulco's society; perhaps a few did exist. Those select few merchants in Acapulco could easily get these services in Mexico City or Guadalajara during their business trips. There was no buoying merchant class to sustain the consumer products that tailors, locksmiths, weavers, or goldsmiths produced; none of those craft skills existed in large numbers at the time in Acapulco.

These so-called artisans were of a different kind. Barring artisans and merchants, the bulk of Acapulco's population worked the small transport and agricultural economy — the proverbial *arrieros* and *jornaleros* of any late Porfirian town in Mexico. The merchant class in Acapulco depended completely on steamships docking at the port and on a large sector of workers in the maritime transport economy and all the accompanying services. These workers became a significant presence in the ports— a rising class that joint forces with an old sector of middling merchants in Acapulco—a social alliance that ultimately fell apart in the aftermath of the Mexican Revolution, with dire consequences.

In the late nineteenth century, the creation of this new society of artisans in the 1870s was a natural response to a new, growing sector of coveted workers in Acapulco's society: longshoremen, welders, riggers, carpenters, woodworkers, and other builders of the shipyard, docks, and shipbuilding industry. This was the reflection of a growing class in a port that had just become another transit point, an entrepôt.

The occupational structure of Acapulco reflected the city's economic base. Yet it is hard to see how this social structure changed in tandem with the port's evolving economic function, partly because it is hard to pinpoint Acapulco's base economy throughout the nineteenth century. This was never a booming commercial port. Friedrich Ratzel's urban description of Acapulco, when he visited the port in the 1870s, is vividly detailed and revealing of this social and occupational structure. As he began walking around the port, he realized that the Hotel California

he was staying in was not that much different to the rest of the one-tiered, sometimes two-tiered, tile-roofed houses making up most of the small town of Acapulco. Merchant houses dominated the waterfront, but the port still remained a “village of fishermen,” and the houses and warehouses that occupied the urban core were still modest enough to pass unnoticed in the eyes of an outsider. “A village of fishermen”— although many descendants of those merchants would contest this epithet, in their 1950s memoirs, Acapulco in the nineteenth century was an isolated, flattened town at the edge of the water. As Ratzel trekked uphill, moving away from the harbor, the cluster of houses became progressively smaller and more rudimentary, until he reached the more impoverished outskirts, where a series of thatched huts began to be separated by vast fruit orchards and veritable forests of coconut palm trees. From there, he saw the tallest building, Acapulco’s church, resting in ruins on a promontory, towering over the rest of the city. Apart from a small plaza and a gazebo, the familiar Spanish urban grid could be barely seen from there.<sup>259</sup>

Acapulco looked more like a Portuguese *feitoria*. It was farther from San Juan or Havana and closer to the trading posts, transhipment posts, and entrepôts that dotted Portugal’s early empire on the Atlantic littoral, in Africa and South America. As Richard Morse notes, in a comparison between the urban layout of Brazilian and Spanish American towns, “whereas the Spaniards implanted their proud, geometric cities boldly inland, on carefully chosen and strategic plateau sites, the modest Brazilian towns grew up haphazardly, straggling along the coast like crabs, in subordination to the great rural estates and to the magnetic attraction of the backlands.”<sup>260</sup> In the case of Acapulco, the town did not boast elaborate public buildings and, by the nineteenth century, we see the tenuous outlines of a geometric, grid-shaped plan that never developed fully, resembling instead those Brazilian straggling towns that spread like crabs along the coast.

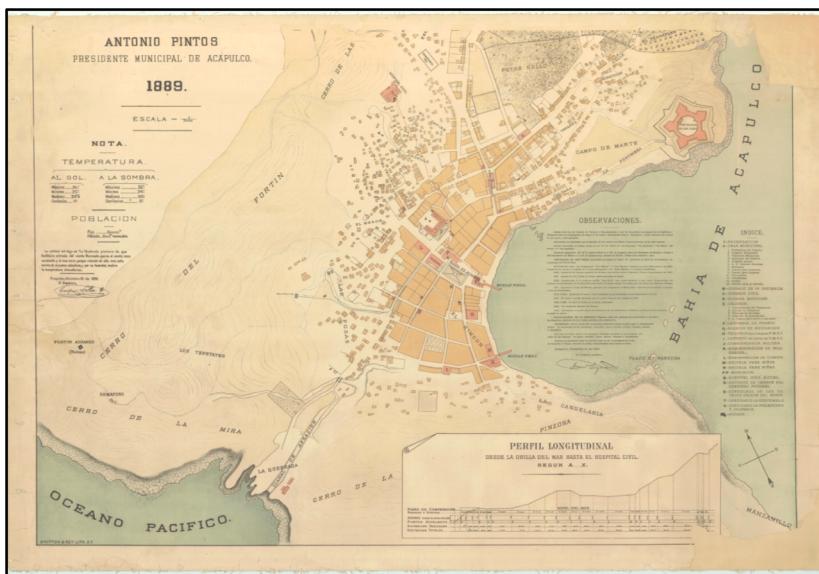
---

<sup>259</sup> Ratzel, *Desde México*. 70-1

<sup>260</sup> Richard M. Morse. “Some Characteristics of Latin American Urban History.” *The American Historical Review* 67, no. 2 (1962): 317–38.

One might argue that the great coastal estates drained the port-city of its vitality, consolidating its function as a rural entrepôt connected to a coaling station. The town of Acapulco, at times, seemed to succumb to the magnetic attraction of its hinterland and the great estates like the nearby haciendas of San Marcos and La Providencia, the latter owned by Juan Álvarez. These great estates served as a magnet siphoning resources and population off the region which would have otherwise been attracted by the port-city of Acapulco, had there been a vibrant trade business.

**Image: 7 Perfil longitudinal desde la orilla del mar hasta el hospital civil Acapulco**



Enrique Lallier, *Perfil longitudinal desde la orilla del mar hasta el hospital civil Acapulco*, Mapa Acapulco, Colección General Orozco y Berra, Guerrero, Varilla CGGRO05, No CGGRO-V5-32-CGE-7271-A.

If we approach the center of the town, located east of the bay of Acapulco, on the waterfront, it is possible to see both the municipal structure and the fort ordering the spatial distribution of the seaport. But when one takes a closer look, a city clustered around travelers' facilities, and consular, warehousing, and transport services begins to emerge before our eyes. [See Image 7 above] That explains why the spaces owned by the Pacific Mail Steamship Company occupied a disproportionately important location in Acapulco. Indeed, the urban cluster of Acapulco, and its spatial distribution, reflects the city's commercial and warehousing functions,

which supported a growing and relatively more skilled labor force in the transport and trade services that lived in Acapulco's nearby towns and rural regions in its hinterland. Those who lived on the periphery, in the smaller, more dispersed constellation of huts and small properties were mostly fruit vendors as well as those who sold other perishable goods to steamship travelers. Beyond this peripheral space of the town lie the vast fruit orchards and palm tree fields, north and west of the town, near the fort of San Diego, where most of the wealthiest merchants, retailers, and consular and commercial agents owned their lands, with their house still on the waterfront.

There was a point of growing tension in Acapulco's "web of seaport life" in Acapulco during the nineteenth century. There was group of merchants who a firm grip on the port's economy and politics, and even though merchant alliances and their composition changed, their fundamental relationship to Acapulco's economy and their status within its society remained unchanged, increasingly hermetic and monopolistic. Yet they were completely dependent on Acapulco's "artisan" society: service and transport workers rising with the refueling station. Meanwhile, the rural population in its hinterland kept growing, threatening to overwhelm the port at any economic opportunity, all under this relatively closed economic and political order, an order disconnected from the Mexican heartland but intimately tied to Californian and Pacific markets. The main articulator of this maritime world for Acapulco was coal.

### **The Consolidation of a Transport Hub** *Steamships, Coasting Trade, and the Coal Business*

Acapulco had adjusted somewhat successfully to the new realities of the Pacific World during the industrial age, when a huge demand for coal meant that the need for depots and stations increased as steamship replaced sail on global ocean routes. Acapulco ultimately responded to this need and became a port-of-call like so many other ports on a global stage in the nineteenth century. In this world, redrawn by steam and coal and the industrial revolution, the status of a coaling

station was the most important any port-of-call could reach, for the benefits were many and the activities associated with a coaling station promised to bring a reinvigorated economic life, international projection, and mobility to the port. But coaling stations meant different things to different merchants and governments and they often varied depending on their purpose and the kind of contract giving life to different coaling station arrangements. Some ports were simply modeled on British stations like Bermuda in the Caribbean, or Hong Kong in Southeast Asia, or Gibraltar and Malta in Europe, Aden in the Red Sea, and so on and so forth. The number of coaling stations multiplied as steamship and imperialism spread across the oceans. Many of these coaling stations were fortified and strategically located at the pinch point of navigational and trade routes; they grew quickly, initially serving as entrepôts and coaling stations but then flourishing into full-blown commercial ports in the late nineteenth century. Other models of coaling stations existed at the time. British and American interests also saw coaling stations as preludes to more aggressive and expansive territorial annexation campaigns as what happened in Hawaii and Singapore. For this reason, Mexican officials always saw coaling stations with suspicion since time and again they served as launching pads for more imperial expansion. But coaling stations, as Peter Schulman argues, also meant more commercial arrangements. American governments often leased coal storage in ports in other countries or negotiated, on behalf of shipping lines, different kinds of contracts that gave access to coal deposits: Yokohama in Japan, Pago Pago in Samoa, and Pichilingue and Acapulco in Mexico were important examples of this kind of depots.<sup>261</sup>

Since there were no coal deposits in Guerrero or anywhere near Acapulco, most coal was shipped from places as far away as England. Hence it was no small feat for Acapulco to turn into a coaling station, no matter how insignificant or mundane coaling stations may seem. Back then, any port that turned into a depot increased its potential to thrive commercially. Karina Bustos Ibarra

---

<sup>261</sup> Peter Schulman, *Coal and Empire*, p. 36

argues along these lines, “el uso de Acapulco como almacén de combustible refleja la importancia estratégica del puerto. Se trataba de un punto de escala imprescindible para las embarcaciones en el circuito de comunicación San Francisco-Panamá, lo cual contribuyó, sin duda, a la internacionalización de Acapulco en un período de expansión comercial en el Pacífico.”<sup>262</sup> Not only that, because of its serving as a coaling station, Acapulco also became an important entrepôt for coasting trade, strategically positioned in the middle of local regional commercial routes: with Tehuantepec, Tonalá, Salina Cruz, and San Benito situated south of the port; and Zihuatanejo, Manzanillo, San Blas, Mazatlán, and Guaymas, north of the port.

The recently-created artisan society lamented their current situation in Acapulco. If only materials were brought in by steamers and sold at a lower price, then Acapulco’s “great society” of artisans would grow and flourish. Laying out their plan, the society would commission their own members to acquire materials in other countries at lower prices, avoiding middlemen and retailers who dominated Acapulco’s isolated commerce.

Artisans reveal how the society created by coal and coasting trade increasingly generated tensions, and this has been subject of several historical studies and debates. Most accounts have emphasized Acapulco’s history in the nineteenth century as one marked by stasis, decay, and immobility; a port dominated by a handful of Spanish merchant houses. But this is only part of the story. Acapulco’s business, mistakenly depicted as a Spanish commercial stronghold, became wholly dependent on the Pacific Mail Steamship Company. The company’s rise to domination coincided with the waning power of European merchants.

There is a well-established story and narrative that revolves around a complicated myth about the world of the Spanish merchant houses in nineteenth-century Acapulco. “Con paciencia

---

<sup>262</sup> Karina Bustos Ibarra. “Acapulco en la segunda mitad del siglo XIX. ¿Estancamiento o desarrollo portuario?” p. 267-288. *El mar: percepciones, lectura y contextos. Una mirada cultural a los entornos marítimos*. Guadalupe Pinzón Ríos y Flor Trejo Rivera. (coeds.). (Méjico. Universidad Nacional Autónoma de Méjico, 2015), p. 274

y astucia, aprovechando la inercia de tres siglos, la incomunicación, las pugnas intestinas y la indolencia y miseria de los nativos,” noted a historian in the 1950s, “los españoles se fueron apoderando poco a poco de todas las riquezas de la región y controlando todas las actividades productivas.” Over the years, “tres casas españolas,” so the story goes, “habían llegado a dominar de manera absoluta la economía de ambas costas”— the Costa Chica and Costa Grande.<sup>263</sup> For many years now, historians, novelists, and writers like Mario Gill, Paco Ignacio Taibo II, and Renato Ravelo have emphasized, on separate monographs and novels written, the absolute dominance of Spanish merchant houses over Acapulco’s nineteenth-century economic, social, and material life. Paco Ignacio Taibo II, for instance, echoes the writings of Mario Gill in the 1950s, arguing that “three big consortiums controlled and governed the economic life of Acapulco.” Taibo’s analysis is based on Gill’s reading of the report of Acapulco’s commercial abandonment by an informant of Álvaro Obregón in the 1920s. Both historians, moreover, reproduce the informant’s report, taking at face value everything that was reported, without really questioning the premises and the social context during which the report was written. “It was soon after the consummation of Mexico’s Independence,” explained Isaías Acosta, the informant of Obregón and son of a merchant and accountant in Acapulco who was locked in a fierce commercial battle with the Spanish merchants in the 1920s, “that the merchant house ‘Alzuyeta y Cia.,’ was established in the port [founded in 1821]; a few years later that of ‘B. Fernandez,’ was founded [between 1824-26], later the merchant house of Jacinto Quirós, then called ‘P. Uruñuela’ which would merge with ‘Hermanos Fernández’ [1900].”<sup>264</sup> Acosta mentions these Spanish merchants were agents of banks, steamers, and insurance companies, and that “mientras exista la colonia

---

<sup>263</sup> Mario Gill. “Los Escudero, de Acapulco.” *Historia Mexicana* 3, no. 2 (1953): 291–308; *La Esperanza del Sur*, Acapulco, May 9, 1874

<sup>264</sup> Isaías L. Acosta to President Alvaro Obregón. March, 1925. AGN, Fondo Obregón-Calles, box 33 exp. 104-G-19, fols. 1 – 8.; the dates of the foundation of these merchant houses can be found in Paco Ignacio Taibo II and Rogelio Vizcaíno A., *El socialismo en un solo puerto (Acapulco 1919-1923) El movimiento escuderista* (Mexico: UAG-Editorial Cultural Universitaria, n.d.p.) 13.

española y sus sistema en este puerto, no tendrán otro porvenir los hijos de Acapulco que ser empleados del gobierno...jornaleros o marineros, porque los que pudieran labrarse un porvenir en el campo del comercio, o de la industria, tienen en la colonia española y sus sistema, una muralla inexpugnable.”<sup>265</sup>

Taibo goes further than the informant’s report, describing the consortium of Spanish merchant houses as a “complex monopolistic system” that had an ironclad hold on Acapulco’s “industry, commerce, retail commerce, overland transport, maritime transport, seaport freight movement, the selling and buying of agricultural products, and most of the services like banking, insurance, telegraphs.” The novelist concludes that “the Spaniards’ control of the port (*el control gachupín*) was accompanied by a type of aberrant domination that resorted to violence, racism, economic asphyxiation, fraud, intrigue, and crime.”<sup>266</sup> The mainstay of this monopoly, notes Taibo, was Acapulco’s “tremendo aislamiento,” echoing the conclusions of Mario Gill who wrote in the 1950s that “el secreto de ese dominio era la incomunicación.”

Isolation, however, only tells one side of the story. It was isolation and disconnection from the Mexican heartland, not from the Pacific World. Acapulco was fully exposed and integrated into the markets of the New Pacific; the trading houses that emerged from this world were never as powerful nor as monopolistic as many writers would have it, for the simple reason that many steam coal merchants and commission agents strongly competed among each other when seeking

---

<sup>265</sup> Ibidem, Acosta to President Álvaro Obregón, March, 1925, p. 6.

<sup>266</sup> Quote from Taibo “Al iniciarse la segunda década del siglo XX, el sometimiento de los costeños al dominio y la explotación de los comerciantes españoles es casi completo...Tres grandes consorcios controlan y rigen la vida económica de Acapulco y de las costas del Pacífico cercanas al puerto.” They would control “la venta de productos llevados a Acapulco desde otras tierras, y monopolizaban la exportación de productos agrícolas, llegaron a constituirse en un complejo sistema monopólico que sin poseer directamente la totalidad de los bienes de los costeños, controlaba férreamente la industria, el comercio, el comercio en medudeo, el transporte por tierra, el transporte marítimo, los movimientos portuarios, la compra y venta de productos agrícolas, la pesca y la mayor parte de los servicios, como bancos, seguros, telégrafos, etc.” “El control gachupín del Puerto se vio acompañado por un tipo de dominio aberrante que apelaba a la violencia, el racismo, la asfixia económica, el fraude, la intriga y el crimen.” Rogelio Vizcaíno and Paco Ignacio Taibo II, “Las dos muertes de Juan R. Escudero. La historia de una revuelta social en un paraíso corrompido,” *Siempre!* Nov 26, 1987, Num. 1338: pp. 35-40.

to gain access to Pacific markets. A temporal and qualitative distinction must be made. The situation both Taibo and Gill describe is more reflective of commercial conditions of Acapulco after the Mexican Revolution. A century-long monopoly of Spanish merchant houses is never mentioned in any of the travel accounts, commercial directories or reports that describe Acapulco in the nineteenth century; and ample evidence points to a more nuanced commercial arrangement, where a mixture of American, Mexican, and European capital kept shifting along with different merchant alliances throughout the century. Aside the propagation of a local Black Legend, what these twentieth century historians often ignore is a more intricate network of foreign and national merchants who had weaved a tightly-knit community around the Gold Rush as well as the commerce and maritime traffic created by the Pacific Mail Steamship Company in the second half of the nineteenth century and the first decades of the twentieth. This merchant community had been able to cultivate throughout the nineteenth century, and particularly after the Gold Rush, a solid local elite composed of multiple nationalities and trading houses.

The real monopoly in Acapulco was the Pacific Mail Steamship Company. The Spanish houses simply served as a group of important brokers who never enjoyed, however, the benefits of lack of competition that would have given birth to a monopoly within the commercial world in Acapulco. Quite the contrary, competition was at times fierce. The social and economic context, largely retold by many twentieth century writers as a monolithic nineteenth-century story of Spanish dominance, is full of contradictions.

Against the grain of earlier monographs, I argue that the world created by this group of merchants in Acapulco could not have been weaker, more mundane or insignificant. It was a consortium founded on *cabotaje* and the coaling business; its sole lifeline was the world created by coal and its infrastructures of warehousing, systems of credit, and distribution. Barbara Freese eloquently describes the life cycle and essence of coal: “coal is a commodity utterly lacking in

glamour. It is dirty, old-fashioned, domestic, and cheap,” and it conjures up especially bleak images of the industrial era when compared to its more “dazzling and worldly cousin, oil;” “long past the time when it was actually part of our daily lives, coal is still considered mundane.”<sup>267</sup>

Acapulco’s social and material life reflected this mundane world.

Through coal, steam, and coasting trade, Acapulco was closely connected to markets in the Pacific, this meant rising completion among trading firms and retailers trying to access these markets. The story of an isolated monopoly in Acapulco is hard to prove as evidence suggests the contrary. There was strong competition: Hamburg, San Francisco, Maryland, and Cardiff dominated and competed for the different circuits of capital, credit, coal storage and distribution. In Acapulco, not all merchants and houses enjoyed the same degree of oppennes and access to these routes and comercial centers. When Friedrich Ratzel visited the port, he mentioned that German merchant houses dominated the port in the 1870s, but that European commerce would eventually give way to American commerce in San Francisco. Although he overstated the power of German commercial houses, German merchants like Heinrich Virmond did hold an important position within Acapulco’s commerce, Oetling, Gericke & Co., Henry Kastan, and August Dempwolff were the most important merchants in the seaport. They managed to create connections between California and Germany and profit from trade in Mexico’s West Coast. Those houses that traded general merchandise, half were Spanish and half German, some a mixture like Yndart J.M. & Co. Moreover, Alzuyeta Hermanos and Uruñuela P. Co.

Many commission merchants really became relatively important trading houses when they began profiting from the distribution of coal, mainly coming in from Britain and Germany. Sometimes it came from places as far as Australia and Japan. But most of the coal shipments arrived from Boston, New York, Philadelphia, and Maryland; through their agreements with the

---

<sup>267</sup> Barbara Freese, *Coal: A Human History* (Basic Books, 2016), pp. 2- 4.

Pacific Mail Steamship Company, many retailers in Acapulco had close connections with far flung networks of steam coal merchants who in turn were developing large markets beyond the narrow regions of eastern seaboard of the United States. Only from the 1850s, and especially from the 1870s onwards, did a reliable network of coaling arrangements with merchants and commission agents emerged in various refuelling stations and ports of call in the Atlantic and Pacific oceans.<sup>268</sup>

The coal business allowed merchants in Acapulco to become important retailers. According to a report from the American Consul, Alzuyeta y Cía., one of the dominant merchant houses, was engaged in the wholesale, retail, and commission business; it dealt in dry-goods, wines and liquors, groceries, provisions, notions, lumber, cement, caustic soda, enamel and glass ware, paper, coffee and seeds. The house's industrial partners were from Spain; the managers—Domingo Alzuyeta from France and Maria Alzuyeta from Spain—lived between Acapulco and Mexico City, and held the controlling stock; the other stockholders controlled only thirty percent. Although this merchant house paled next to those in Mazatalan or San Blas, it certainly had power and an international presence, at least significant enough, to be followed by the American Consul who considered it as “pro-German”: members of Alzuyeta y Cía., the report added, had expressed Germanophile sentiments “very forcibly”. Rumors notwithstanding, Alzuyeta y Cía. had managed to branch out to California and other commercial hubs in Mexico since they had started storing and distributing coal during the Gold Rush. The principal consignors, from whom the firm obtained goods from the United States were Channel Commercial Co. and Cooper, Coates & Casey in Los Angeles—dry-goods, notions, and groceries— also obtaining miscellaneous goods from W Loaiza and Co. in San Francisco who, in turn, had strong bonds with another merchant house, the Escudero family,

---

<sup>268</sup> Schulman, *Coal and Empire*, 35-8.

which will be explored later. The merchant house of Alzuyeta also had business transactions with companies in Manzanillo and Mazatlán.<sup>269</sup>

There is evidence that the dominance of Spanish and German trading interests and merchant houses in Acapulco emerged in the 1840s and continued well into the 1880s as some business directories for the West Coast and various diplomatic reports reveal over the years.<sup>270</sup> The other Spanish merchant house which became important from the eve of the Mexican Revolution through the 1920s, the B. Fernández Co., however, is not even mentioned in the business directory. There were also some Mexican, Guatemalan, Chilean, and Peruvian trading houses like those of the Pintos, Muñúzuri, and Luz families. But most importantly, under the monopolistic presence of the Pacific Mail Steamship Company, and without the ability to forge close alliances with the American consul, John A. Sutter Jr., and the rotating PMSSC agents, and all of their connections with British and American merchants in Mazatalán and San Francisco, without this intricate network of commercial interests, none of these Spanish merchant houses would have been able to thrive and compete successfully. On several occasions, Spanish merchant houses tried to create their own steamship lines but repeatedly failed. This was hardly a monopolistic situation

---

<sup>269</sup> United States Chief Cable Sensor, Daily Reports, Navy Department, Washington D.C., Vol 1, No.206, December 17, 1918. Study of Alzuyeta y Cia. Based on the reports of the American Consul, Acapulco, September 23, 1918 in FAPECFT-CDEEUM, 1918, Exp. 030102. Agregado Militar de los Estados Unidos: Relaciones, 4/4, fojas 213, 226, Inv. 4.

<sup>270</sup> *Business Directory and Gazetteer of the West Coast of America, 1882/ 83*, (S.l.: s.n., 1882), p. 652-674. For extensive information and evidence on this period of control of commerce in Acapulco falling in the hands of German trading houses see the commercial reports of Consul John A. Sutter throughout the year of 1870, rolls 3 and 4, United States. Consulate (Acapulco, Mexico), and National Archives Establishment (U.S.), RG 58, M153. *Despatches From United States Consuls in Acapulco, 1823-1906*. Washington: National Archives, 1949. Bustó Ibarra, "El espacio del Pacífico mexicano," 299; and in Díaz, *Versión Francesa de México. Informes económicos, 1851-1867*, Vol II, pp. 162-3, 173. In pages 99-100 French Consul Antoine Forest, in Mazatlán, DCNC, ff 377-379 and 389-408 sends an 1865 commercial report annexed: "Hamburgo, o más bien Alemania, ocupa el tercer lugar entre las naciones que mantienen relaciones comerciales con Mazatlán. Este hecho no tiene nada de sorprendente si se considera que las casas alemanas representan aquí intereses superiores a los de cada una de las otras nacionalidades y que en todos los departamentos de la costa, y sobre todo en los situados entre Mazatlán y Acapulco, domina el elemento germánico" Forest mentions how Bremen and Hamburg dominate commerce, particularly trade in silk, linen, and cotton which created a fierce and "strong competition" with England. This report also coincides with Ratzel's observations on the merchant houses from Hamburg in Acapulco in the mid-1870s.

dominated by the three Spanish merchant houses as some historians have suggested. They, nevertheless, enjoyed a remarkable longevity throughout the nineteenth century, which rather than revealing a perennial monopoly growing from isolation, it reveals the continuity of local social and economic structures in Acapulco, and the ability of merchants to adapt to the growing Anglo-American monopoly of commerce and capital in the Pacific world.

In fact, in Acapulco, isolation from the center of Mexico and full exposure to commerce in the Pacific made competition over scant resources and trading opportunities extremely fierce among local elites, particularly when cooperation or collaboration failed among merchants and local strongmen. When major rebellions took place, fierce competition resulted among Mexican, European, and American tradesmen as they sided with different caudillos and rallied behind competing political projects, plans, and *pronunciamientos*. This was the case of the Tuxtepec Rebellion which divided the merchant community between those who supported the President Sebastian Lerdo de Tejada, and those who favored Porfirio Díaz's rebellion. At a local level, in Guerrero, Diego Alvarez supported Lerdo de Tejada, whereas General Vicente Jimenez supported Díaz's rebellion. Eventually, in Acapulco, a diplomatic and commercial fight erupted in the port when. General Vicente Jimenez, a supporter of Porfirio Diaz, attacked Henry Kastan and tried to confiscate his property. Diego Alvarez had apparently sold the two enormous rural estates, the San Marcos and La Providencia, to the American-Polish merchant, so that he would be able to protect Alvarez's property through the consulate, as Jimenez's and Díaz's advanced into Guerrero. On a report General Jimenez criticized Kastan and referred to him as a "ruinous merchant of Acapulco, who has sought the means of growing rich by colluding with the politics of D. Diego Alvarez, and making himself his principal agent in the State." Kastan was also the agent who provided Alvarez with arms and ammunition. In this way, General Jimenez claimed that Kastan "esta persona que

así se entremezcla en nuestros disturbios para especular con ellos.”<sup>271</sup> The entire affair resulted in the arrest of several merchants, including the American Consul, John Sutter Jr in 1877. General Jimenez was not delusional. A year before, Sutter had explained to the John Foster that “in case of a rising, the office of the Pacific Mail Steamship Company, where everybody knows there is a good supply of money, and the bazar, the mercantile establishment of Mr A. Dempwolff, who, among his stock of about \$40,000, has rifles, guns, pistols, knives, powder, lead, etc., would be attacked very quick, together with the United States consulate, and the large German importing house of Oetling, Gericke & Co., and our lives just then would be in danger.”<sup>272</sup> This alliance of American and German merchants, shop owners, commercial agents, and consuls would eventually support Diego Alvarez and Sebastian Lerdo de Tejada who eventually fled to Acapulco and, after failing to roll back the ascent of Porfirio Díaz, fled to New York as an exile, onboard a steamship to Panama.

By the late nineteenth century, most of the merchant houses, especially the prominent ones that acted as retailers, became involved in many economic activities.<sup>273</sup> Alzuyeta Bros. & Co, B Fernandez & Co., Hudson & Billings, and P. Uruñuela & Co. are listed in an 1891 commercial directory, for instance, as importers and exporters, as arms and ammunition merchants, as commission merchants and bankers, as ironware dealers, manufacturers, and as tobacco dealers; but they are also described by the directory as those in charge of books and stationery materials, hardware, dry goods; and as manufacturers of cotton, linen, and wooden goods. These houses also acted as commercial firms. That same fiscal year, Acapulco’s commercial insignificance dissolved

---

<sup>271</sup> *Sucesos en Acapulco*, 1877. Mexico, Ministerio de Hacienda y Crédito Público. Exposición de hacienda de los Estados Unidos Mexicanos sobre la condición actual de México y el aumento del comercio con los Estados Unidos. October 9, 1879, (México: Imprenta del Gobierno, Sarás A. Y Munguía, 1879), pp. 301-311. There is an English versión which was also quoted for translation purposes.

<sup>272</sup> “Acapulco Consul, John A. Sutter, Jr., to the Secretary of State, John W Foster.” Acapulco, February 3, 1875. In *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States*, Volume II, (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1875), p. 870 Sutter Jr., “Acapulco,” *Annual Report on the Commercial Relations Between the United States and Foreign Nations*; Sutter Jr., “Acapulco,” *ARCR* (1875) 1136; John A. Sutter Jr., “Acapulco,” *ARCR* (1876); 752-753.

<sup>273</sup> Arthur Walsh Fergusson, *Mexico*. (U.S.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1891), 222-23.

into a hodge-podge of disparate goods exported to San Francisco: mainly livestock, shells, spices and seeds, cotton, *petate*, sweets, tobacco, oranges and limes, minerals, and hides, of which minerals were the richest source of exports (\$83, 041 of the total value of exports: \$186, 285).<sup>274</sup> But due to a lack of communications the mining industry was virtually non-existent; fruits and hides and a dizzying assortment of goods compensated for this underperformance.

In the 1890s, during the heyday of the Porfiriato in Mexico, there was a high degree of collaboration among the local merchant elites. When John Sutter was forced to resign as consul, a large number of politicians, strongmen, and merchants sent a letter. Those who undersigned it reveal an extensive and complex alliance of merchants from all different places and walks of life.<sup>275</sup> Old divisions had been overcome and there seemed to be more synergy among local elites. More joint industrial and mercantile ventures were created between houses. This is most evident in the opening of the textile industry of “El Ticuí” in nearby Atoyac under the corporate name of “Alzuyeta, Fernández, Quirós and Co.” Convergence was also a result of merchant houses working as family businesses, tied by marriages among different family members, and by joint enterprises like those of the brothers Fernández and Nebreda who bought an American-owned soap and ice industry “La Especial” in Aguas Blancas, nearby Coyuca (all of these places in the Costa Grande).<sup>276</sup> Another example is that of the Sutter and Link families who ran apothecaries, retail shops, and small hotels. They had intimate ties to the Pacific Mails Steamship Company and to the American consulate. Consuls often acted as merchants and commercial agents who

---

<sup>274</sup> Velasco, *Geografía y estadística*, 177-9; “much fruit being shipped from here to San Francisco,” John Sutter Jr; RW Loughery, Acapulco, Mexico. July 7, 1875; and the March 28, 1888 report details how a coast steamer arrives at Acapulco on the 18<sup>th</sup> of each month, remains there until the 25<sup>th</sup> for the discharge and transmission of cargo” then sets sail to Panama, Roll 4 United States. Consulate (Acapulco, Mexico), and National Archives Establishment (U.S.), RG 58, M153. *Despatches From United States Consuls in Acapulco, 1823-1906*. Washington: National Archives, 1949.

<sup>275</sup> Letter sent in support of Sutter *Documents from the Records of the Department of State in the National Archives*, Clifornia State Library (CSL), Mf, c.14, March 28, 1881. Karina Bustos Ibarra, 301-02.

<sup>276</sup> Isaías L. Acosta to President Alvaro Obregón. AGN, Fondo Obregón-Calles, box 33 exp. 104-G-19, fols. 1 – 8.; the dates of the foundation of these merchant houses can be found in Paco Ignacio Taibo II and Rogelio Vizcaíno A., *El socialismo en un solo puerto (Acapulco 1919-1923) El movimiento escuderista* (Mexico: UAG-Editorial Cultural Universitaria, n.d.p.) 13.

established their own independent firms. Sutter created, together with German merchants, the Bazaar del Pacific. Cecilio Arosemena, who had been consul and commercial agent for various countries, created a new steamship line, the Mala del Pacifico that had a close relationship with the Pacific Mail Steamship Company. One of the Fernandez brothers, from the powerful B Fernandez & Co., eventually served as British consul during the Mexican Revolution. The Muñúzuri brothers arrived from Guatemala when they were young but began to branch out and consolidate a relatively powerful family in Acapulco.

There was social cohesion among all of these merchant families during the Porfiriato at the turn of the century. Even social clubs were modeled after the Circulo de Amigos del General Porfirio Diaz. “Sociedad Mutualista la Honradez” whose treasurer was Acapulco’s doctor Antonio Butrón whose reputation in the town grew. Founded in 1894, the society eventually managed 9, 529 pesos three years later with a social capital of 4, 367.<sup>277</sup> Dinners were celebrated in their inauguration day, and consuls and merchants from the local elite either celebrated in a boat or in one of the large houses owned by the wealthier merchants. These clubs would bring together members of Acapulco’s local elite—merchants, politicians, diplomats and commercial agents—who, by then, had put away their differences with Porfirio Diaz for having supported the Alvarez family and Sebastian Lerdo de Tejada. Moreover, some merchants like the Sutters, Fernandez, Alzuyeta, Uruñuela, Stephens, Muñuzuri, Vucanovich, although originally coming from different ethnicities, backgrounds, and nationalities, had reached the third or fourth generations by the late nineteenth century. Their families were growing into an increasingly mixed and cohesive local elite. setting the base for a local merchant elite that kept a closed mercantile order that revived during the Porfiriato and survived through the Mexican Revolution. tightly-knit group of merchants from many nationalities derived their power.

---

<sup>277</sup> *El Imparcial*, Chilpancingo, September 27, 1896.

### ***Cohesion, Social Mobility, and Credit Relations***

Acapulco, like many other rural towns in Mexico, was a cash-starved economy. Not enough silver and gold were produced, so very little coinage trickled down from Mexico City to remote places like Acapulco. To compensate for this, and not depend completely on barter, imaginative ways were devised.<sup>278</sup> It was reported by a consul in the mid-nineteenth century that soap tablets with the insignia of the *ayuntamiento* began to be used as means of local exchange. The great bulk of all local exchange in Acapulco was carried out without cash. It was generally based on barter or credit. Only a handful of major trading companies were involved in cases of national and international transactions when cash was used as a direct form of payment. In a report on the system of credit in Acapulco, Sutter reported the intricacies of this system which depended on cash for international transactions.<sup>279</sup> Wealthy merchants like the Spanish Alzuyeta and Fernandez brothers, for instance, were deeply involved in international trade, and they often preferred cash when dealing with foreign merchants and other companies in San Francisco, Mazatlán, or coal merchants from England.

But most of the transactions of wealthy merchants were local and regional. In the end, they formed part of everyday life in the community, on which they also depended in great measure. Wealthy merchants, in this way, also served as grocers, retailers, and middlemen buying goods from producers and small-merchants in Acapulco's hinterland, most importantly in places like Atoyac, Zácatula, and Tecpan. One portion of their merchandise was shipped to larger urban

---

<sup>278</sup> Araceli Ibarra Bellón. *El comercio y el poder en México, 1821-1864: la lucha por las fuentes financieras entre el Estado central y las regiones.* (México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1998), 230.

<sup>279</sup> For a detailed report on Acapulco's system of credit see John A. Sutter Jr. to Secretary of State, June 26, 1883, roll 4 in United States. Consulate (Acapulco, Mexico), and National Archives Establishment (U.S.), RG 58, M153. *Despatches From United States Consuls in Acapulco, 1823-1906.* Washington: National Archives, 1949.

markets like San Francisco, or poured into coasting trade. But the other portion of goods was sold through retailing shops they owned in Acapulco. They also bought household goods from other retailers and merchants. Inventories and commercial directories show that most of these merchants also tried several times to enter the shipping business, but the Pacific Mail Steamship Co. was too powerful for them to be able to compete successfully.

All in all, merchants in Acapulco, those who belonged to the main trading houses in the port, can be considered of middling wealth if we compare them to the wealthier class of bankers, merchants, and financiers found in other seaports, like the House of Barrón & Forbes in San Blas. They had a strong national presence, unlike those in Acapulco. But merchants in Acapulco were still the wealthiest members of the community, and they exerted a considerable degree of influence in the economic life of the port. They drew their influence from two sources: as middlemen and retailers, they were able to control the prices, on the one hand, and on the other, they created and relied on a complex and “informal” structure of credit. This excluded an entire sector of struggling artisans in Acapulco, preventing any social mobility within the socioeconomic hierarchy of Acapulco’s mercantile order. This coupled with the expansion of debt in a growing rural populace in the surrounding regions created serious problems for old commercial Acapulco.

The credit structure, however, was embedded in personal relations in Acapulco, and most often than not served as a source of social cohesion during periods of stagnant peace. Almost all of the exchange, buying and selling, was done on credit, giving rise to an extended network of credit relations based on trust and reputation, tying family and community in intimate ways in Acapulco. An individual’s creditworthiness in their community was of utmost important, thus a glimpse of the web of seaport relations, their intimate social bonds, can be illuminated if we focus on the financial records of the single, most documented family of the time, the Sutter-Link family. Anna Eliza Sutter, the daughter of John Sutter Jr., eventually moved to live with her grandparents

in California and Pennsylvania. But when his grandfather, General Sutter died, he moved to Pennsylvania and married. Eventually her husband died, and she returned to Acapulco to live with her father Sutter Jr, moving with both her sons in the 1880s. In Acapulco, she eventually married her cousin Victor Alphonse Link, and Victor and Eliza started running a small hotel in the port. Her financial records reveal how her household and hotel business were intimately tied with most of the smaller firms and major merchant houses in the port. She owed money, most of them goods probably used for her household and hotel business, to the Spanish merchant house of Fernández and Co. and Alzuyeta and Co., Uruñuela P. & Co, and to the American commercial firms Hudson & Billings, and Vucanovich & Co., the latter a joint Company of Americans and Slovenians. She, moreover, began receiving money from all of these houses, through the municipality, on the houses she had sold.<sup>280</sup> This indeed indicates that the municipality also relied on the credit offered by these houses. The Link family eventually mortgaged their property for 3,000 to pay a merchant family back. But this was not enough and Sutter-Link also began to mortgage her house and land, and eventually declared her hotel business the Hotel Link in bankruptcy.

Finally, the gradual expansion of an urban market, through buying and selling, far from breaking up the merchant community, it created intimate bonds of debt and trust that held together many sectors of Acapulco's society. As the nineteenth century came to a close, schisms deepened between these families and the main merchant houses. Eventually, antagonistic interests resurfaced within a hierarchical trading and debt system: conflicts among middlemen, small town merchants, artisans, prominent trading families, and merchant houses ended up sending the entire mercantile order into a spin.

### III Acapulco and the End of an Epoch

---

<sup>280</sup> Legal Papers and Financial records, 1903-14, of Anna Elisa Sutter Hull Link and the legal records of the mortgage in the Sutter/Link Family papers 88/52 c, box 2, files 2-4 in the U.C. Berkeley Bancroft Library, Manuscript Division.

## *Economic Reorientation, Winds of Revolution, and the Opening of the Panama Canal, 1890-1915*

The period between 1890 and 1915 represents a significant rupture in a predictable pattern of mobility. The reasons for this rupture are threefold. First, a new influx of people resulted from further integration into the United States' Pacific borderlands as new circuits of exchange, mobility, and consumption were fostered in California at the turn of the century. This moment, moreover, overlapped with rising American economic interests in the northwestern portion of Mexico's Pacific seaboard that gradually began trickling all the way down to Acapulco and Mexico's South Pacific Coast. Second, like a backwash of the mid-century conflicts on the Pacific world, came the Mexican Revolution in many Mexican Pacific ports. But this time, it came with the diffusion of new ideas and a new forms of worker mobilization of artisans and longshoremen, what Claudio Lomnitz refers to as "radical mobility."<sup>281</sup> These new actors sought to reset the terms of an order dominated by local merchant elites, a resilient Porfirian order which had stabilized around a regular pattern of steamship traffic and commercial isolation.

The third factor that disrupted a stable pattern of traffic and mobility in Acapulco was the opening of the Panama Canal in 1914 and its inauguration at San Francisco's Panama-Pacific International Exhibition of 1915 and San Diego's Panama-California Exposition 1915-16. This symbolic moment signaled the end of an epoch: the irreversible loss of Acapulco's commercial centrality in trans-Pacific exchanges, as Mexico's Pacific coast pulled away completely from old trade routes that had connected Europe and Asia for three centuries, and began to gravitate, inexorably, around new markets of consumption and circuits of mobility in California, Mexico,

---

<sup>281</sup> Claudio Lomnitz-Adler. *The Return of Comrade Ricardo Flores Magón*. (Brooklyn, NY: Zone Books, 2014), pp. 211-216.

and North America. The gyroscope in the Pacific had altered its direction, and the loss of Acapulco indeed signaled the end of an epoch of trans-Pacific exchange.

Paradoxically, Acapulco's merchant society and its elite did not implode during the Mexican Revolution, as one might have had expected. Tensions resurfaced within Acapulco's mercantile society, but due to their ability to adapt to constant flux, the local elite and the seaport's mercantile order of society, although strained, managed to survive and preserve a system that favored their interests in Acapulco.

Things had to change to remain the same for merchants, although this process of adaptation was not as smooth as it appears. During this period, 1890 and 1915, Acapulco's merchant community faced multiple challenges from new mobile actors. First, wealthy local families suffered a generational split as their scions became more mobile and either migrated, studied and worked in California, or were forced into exile, moving to other parts in Mexico or the United States; and with all of this movements, they went through a processes of political radicalization in exile and revolution. Second, new rural migrants and actors arriving from Acapulco's hinterland, on the eve of the Revolution, increasingly unsettled the order of things that had benefitted the seaport's small merchant elite. Third, as a result of Mexico's Pacific integration northward to California, new businessmen began arriving in the Acapulco region at the turn of the century, further complicating the web of merchants' interests and the alignment of land conflicts in coastal Guerrero. Thus internal migration, mobility, and the spread of new ideas were the main factors that created a fissure in the seaport's mercantile society.

Porfirian centralization coincided with a growing political vacuum in Guerrero left by the weakened *cacicazgo* of the Álvarez family, whose patriarch had died in 1867 when the Republic was restored. The strongmen who emerged in Guerrero from the French Intervention, including the son of Álvarez, eventually plunged the southern state into an insurrection involving warring

factions seeking to control the governorship in the early 1890s.<sup>282</sup> Guerrero's insurrections also became part of a national season of discontent that crystallized in a generational break in 1891, when students, artisans, workers, and young professionals carried out a series of protests in cities. By the late 1890s, all strongmen in Guerrero had died, and a political and generational change also seemed to be taking place in the region.

At a local level, it is also possible to see the origins of a generational split at the heart of Acapulco's merchant community. Juan R. Escudero was born in 1890 to a relatively wealthy Spanish merchant, Francisco Escudero y Espronceda, from Santander, Spain, and a Mexican woman, Irene Reguera, from Ometepec.<sup>283</sup> She came from a family of cattle ranchers in Ometepec, a region that went through a series of popular rebellions throughout the second half of the nineteenth century. Her decision to migrate to Acapulco was probably part of the larger story of ranchers and merchants moving from conflict-ridden rural areas in Guerrero to the seaport. By contrast, the Vidales family had its roots in Tecpan, one of the prosperous coastal districts in the Costa Grande. The family arrived in Acapulco one year before the outbreak of the Revolution and worked as backwater administrators in the port and its environs. But during the Porfiriato, the Escudero and Vidales families had weaved an extended network within the Costa Grande and Acapulco's local merchant elite, establishing far-flung connections with Central America and San Francisco's merchants. Both brothers, Amadeo and Baldomiro Vidales, for instance, created a trading company, the Hermanos Vidales Co. The company engaged in the selling and buying of seeds and vegetables, eventually growing and branching out to ten coastal towns, including other regions deep into the sierra and even into towns in Oaxaca. Their company owned two ships and established credits with other companies in San Francisco and Mexico City. In sum, Ian Jacobs, a

---

<sup>282</sup> For more information on these rural revolts carried out by Canuto A. Neri, Diego Álvarez, and Jiménez see Adame, *Movimientos populares durante el Porfiriato*, p. 73.

<sup>283</sup> "Certifica nacimiento de Juan Ranulfo Escudero Reguera," Acapulco, Guerrero, 1915, XXI.54.6033.2-3, Manuscritos del Primer Jefe del Ejército Constitucionalista 1889-1920, XXI.54.6033.2-3, CEHM.

British historian who studied the Mexican Revolution in Guerrero, concluded that these scions, the Escuderos and Vidales, were of “quite well heeled” trading families in Acapulco and the surrounding regions.<sup>284</sup>

At age twelve, for instance, Juan Escudero was sent to Saint Mary’s College in Oakland, California, and remained there as the protégé of two Mexican and Spanish merchant houses in San Francisco, Urioste & Co. and W. Loaiza & Co., who funded his studies and served as guardians in San Francisco, until he dropped out in 1904, for reasons unknown.<sup>285</sup> The thirteen-year-old either remained in California for the next few years or immediately returned to Acapulco. There is a gap in his biographical records, although convincing evidence points to Escudero returning to Acapulco by 1910. But the details of what happened between 1904 and 1910 are yet to be unearthed. It is not very clear whether he stayed in the United States or immediately returned to Mexico after he quit school in California.

The timing, however, of this fateful drop-out is important. Biographers of Escudero, together with his eulogists, like Paco Ignacio Taibo II, have identified his political awakening as a result of the combustible mix of California’s mobile trade union activism and the Mexican political exile community in California led by the Flores Magón brothers and their transnational community at the time. Some historians argue that Escudero then moved from Oakland to Laredo, Texas, and that during this sojourn in the United States he lived and participated in the ferment of the Wobblies and Magonismo from 1903 to 1907. But the possibility of Escudero—at the latest, age fifteen?—

---

<sup>284</sup> Ian Jacobs. *Ranchero Revolt: The Mexican Revolution in Guerrero*. 1st ed. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1982), p. 125.

<sup>285</sup> His attendance at Saint Mary’s was confirmed by the archivists of the college. Escudero attended during the 1902-03 and 1903-04 academic years. He appears to have enrolled at Saint Mary’s College in June of 1902 and to have continued through December of 1903 at least, possibly 1904. Some of Escudero’s classmates like would become labor organizers later on in California. There is also information on Escudero’s custodians and patrons, Spanish trading houses in San Francisco with close connections to Acapulco’s merchant elite. See Ledger 3, 1899-1908, 192, and College enrollment lists from 1902-04 in St Mary’s College of California Archives, Oakland, California.

establishing a direct connection with the Flores Magón brothers, the Turners, Sarabia, or any other exile in California, are well-nigh impossible. Perhaps he joined the rallies in California and Texas.

Notwithstanding, Escudero's early education is indeed telling of the integration of Acapulco's economy into California. By the late nineteenth century, it was a given that California stood as the closest and most tangible paragon of commercial success for the scion of a small merchant household, with no weight or consequence in Mexico or the United States. By then, San Francisco—since the gold rush—had been slowly but irrevocably changing the social and cultural fabric of Acapulco's local elite, who increasingly looked up to California for an educational and economic model. Mexico City barely figured in their plans; distance and lack of communication overwhelmed any tenuous attachment. After all, the capital was too far detached from any commercial enterprise in the Pacific world and, most importantly, it was far away from Acapulco and Guerrero's problems, far from the reality of violence and insurrections that took hold of the region and the state in the turn of the century, a situation that posed a serious threat to Acapulco's forgotten merchant community. The decision to send Escudero to St Mary's College in Oakland, under these strenuous circumstances, was not outlandish for an old patriarch and Spanish merchant in Acapulco who saw his fortune fading in the rumble of rural revolts of backwoods Guerrero, at a time when San Francisco was booming along with Mexico's Pacific ports, Mazatlán, Salina Cruz, and Manzanillo. Despite the circumstances, it was important to keep up and consolidate Acapulco's merchant community, and young Juan Escudero was a promising enterprise. But for young Escudero the brief experience of living in California as a teenager was not a short-lived impression; as the revolution unfolded in a quick succession, from the headquarters of liberals, maderistas, and magonistas in Mexico and the United States, this combustible mix proved to be a long-lasting impression that deeply influenced his political convictions.

At the same time, there was a boom in commodities and commerce in both the Atlantic and Pacific worlds. Sandra Kuntz Ficker notes that “el dominio norteamericano se agudizó con la Primera Guerra Mundial, de manera que al finalizar la década de 1910 prácticamente todo el tráfico marítimo en las costas del pacífico y una parte sustancial en las del Golfo estaba en manos de líneas estadounidenses”<sup>286</sup> Mining opportunities, investment in new railway lines, particularly along the coasts of Mexico’s southern states, and the potential for profits in the cultivation of copra, sugar, palm oil, rubber, cotton, and coffee attracted a large number of American migrants, businessmen, and settlers to Mexico’s Pacific coastline. Increased steamship traffic, controlled by the United States through the Pacific Mail Steamship Company, facilitated this process of entrepreneurial mobility. New American settlers and mobile businessmen would later overlap with new forms of mobility—refugees, exiles, revolutionaries, and radicalized workers—generated by the pushing and pulling forces of the Mexican Revolution. The opening of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec in 1906 and the Panama Canal in 1914 only served to reinforce this trend of economic integration into a trans-isthmian axis of commerce that saw new forms of mobility circulating through Mexico’s Pacific coastline.

Simultaneously, Spanish, American, German, and Mexican merchant houses sparked a fierce competition for the control of trade in a renewed commodity boom in the Pacific world of commerce. The opening of the Panama Canal had recently galvanized maritime traffic creating tensions, however, that also came with a series of new plans for economic development in Acapulco, projections that varied greatly. Galvanizing the old commercial port was still envisaged as the most viable solution to Acapulco’s decline. Yet in the eyes of many local merchants, reviving commerce also meant increasing consumption and creating local demand, and this needed a change in advertising and consumption attitudes in the seaport, which drew Acapulco’s society

---

<sup>286</sup> Kuntz Ficker. *El comercio exterior de México*, 10.

closer to new service industries and leisure markets in central Mexico and the United States, particularly in California.

“Although Mexico has passed through a very critical period since the revolution started and there have been troublesome times, there is greater field for development today than before,” wrote W. H. Hudson, an American merchant based in Acapulco, reflecting on the opportunities of the Panama Canal. He was a member of one of the old American merchant families in the port who thought trade in the Pacific was the priority in the port.<sup>287</sup> With the opening of the Panama Canal in mind, he wrote an article and laid out a commercial plan for Acapulco. The article and the plan appeared in one of the many journals devoted to Pacific commerce. Entitled “Great Possibilities in Mexico,” the article focused on Acapulco in its entirety. There, from the perspective of the Mexican port, Hudson laid bare his ideology and worldview before the eyes of the readers of the *Frank Waterhouse & Company’s Pacific Ports*. His audience was steeped in the world of boosterism and commerce that flooded many Pacific seaports after the inauguration of the Panama Canal.

Hudson, the American merchant, projected his vision of Acapulco onto the future, a vision not very different to those of merchants and developers on the frontier and ports in Baja California, all underpopulated areas “with a lot of ‘future’ invested” in them or projected onto them, as Lomnitz’s analysis of the Flores Magón brothers shows. During and after the Revolution, Mexico’s Pacific region was growing in strategic importance. Both the recent openings of the Panama Canal and the Isthmus of Tehuantepec had intensified the international competition for control of Pacific ports on the coast of Mexico. Their “proximity to California [and Panama], its accessibility, and the ascendancy of U.S. interest in the region,” notes Lomnitz, “made it an obvious place for a

---

<sup>287</sup> W.H. Hudson, “Great Possibilities in Mexico,” *Frank Waterhouse & Company’s Pacific Ports*, Seattle USA, February 1919, Number 11, Volume 1, pp. 47-8, 182-183.

certain modality of border [and maritime] traffic and commercialization tied to leisure.”<sup>288</sup> Moreover, the rise of San Diego as a port in direct competition with San Francisco, on the one hand, and on the other hand the emergence of Hollywood, as a center of film production, meant that commercial activities in seaports, and plans designed to rebuild ports and create new markets, were increasingly tied to the novelty of film-making, images, consumption, and advertising in the late teens and roaring twenties.

Rising consumer markets deeply influenced the way of thinking about commerce, bringing maritime and transport based services closer to the leisure industry. W. H. Hudson’s plan to revitalize the economy of Acapulco reflects the kind of mindset shared by so many other American and Mexican merchants of his time. He called this new form of making business, “commercial propaganda.” To create new markets in Acapulco, he further noted, one had to study “the great factors in the introduction of new customs, unfamiliar merchandise, modern methods of progress, etc.,” which in his view were “association, samples, and advertising.” He, moreover, used a feat in the advertising world, certainly a novel story at the time he was writing, to back his plan with “facts:” “the great chewing gum manufacturers have made the American public chew gum to such an extent that it appears ridiculous to nearly every other nation on the globe... Advertising has the very same effect on political and social conditions, so why not use it in the development of our Latin American commercial relations.” Professional economic expertise, dollar diplomacy, and a new penchant for consumer markets all were in the minds of Acapulco’s merchants when they scouted out new paths for reconstruction and recovery after years and years on end of revolutions.

His trade firm W.M. Hudson Billings & Co had earlier tried to introduce samples into Acapulco’s society to get people acquainted with unfamiliar goods. The merchant prided himself

---

<sup>288</sup> Claudio Lomnitz-Adler. *The Return of Comrade Ricardo Flores Magón*. (Brooklyn, NY: Zone Books, 2014), p. 336.

for having introduced to Acapulco's trade a number of artisans' tools, cook stoves and many cooking utensils, such as coffee percolators, grist mills, food choppers, cake mixers, etc. Although small, there was an urban market for consumer goods in Acapulco. The firm would send an article to a consumer for him to use a week, then they would rotate and send it to another consumer, at the same time displaying all these articles in their store until a demand was created. Many articles used as free samples, however, were generally not saleable and constituted a loss for the merchant house, and he lamented how there was very little cooperation on the part of the American manufacturers, jobbers, exporters

Like so many other merchants of his time, Hudson followed the old naturalist tradition established by the German geographer Alexander von Humboldt, consisting of a deep description of the lay of the land, its geography, climate conditions, commerce, and potential resources and opportunities. The American merchant went on to describe the great opportunities that Acapulco's natural resources and enviable geographic position had to offer. "The ancient port of Acapulco," he explained quoting Humboldt's oft-mentioned remark, was the best natural harbor, surpassed only in size by Sydney. But he lamented how "at present transportation is quite a serious problem; due to the lack of roads all freight is packed on mules to the ports." The coastal land "is level and automobile roads could be made with small costs and there are a number of inlets and several good sheltered harbors along the coast that are used for loading and discharging cargo." Roads and communications transportation were becoming a pressing need for merchants in the port of Acapulco, and he explained how Guerrero's underdeveloped and thinly populated coastal lands were in large part a result of lack of communications. But the resources were there, underexploited and in some cases untapped.

Many firms and trade houses began receiving an "upsurge of letters" inquiring for sesame, castor bean, copra and coquillo (oil and grease made out of a variety of coconut palm trees). "All

these commodities,” he claimed, “have come greatly in demand and for many reasons we are led to believe that this demand will not decrease after the great war is over nor will the prices.” Indeed, the Pacific world was experiencing yet another commodity boom. In another report on trade in the Pacific, the arrival in San Francisco of the “oil king of Manila” was hailed as a new age of Pacific commodities: “it used to be considered quite worth while to be known as a merchant prince or a coal baron, but today we find a new member of the royalty sharing his hold of the spotlight—the vegetable oil king.”<sup>289</sup> The Philippines, Hawaii, San Francisco, and the Dutch East Indies Co. began articulating a booming coconut oil traffic crossing the Pacific during wartime condition. At the same time, new commercial associations were created, and that same year the Pan Pacific Association met in Hawaii to discuss the future and present benefits of this new commercial bonanza in the Pacific. In Guerrero and Acapulco, the production of sesame seeds was also booming, and if better and more modern methods for agriculture were introduced, the merchant argued, it would represent an invaluable opportunity that could compete with the powerhouses of sesame oil production in Italy, Egypt and India. Sesame seed was quoted in San Francisco at \$9.75 per Cwt., and Hudson’s estimates detailed that, if the production were 2,000 lbs per acre and brought \$200 per ton, there would be a maximum yearly production of over \$26,000,000. This would mean that the region would take off as a sesame oil producer, alongside the flourishing industries of cattle raising and copra production on the coastal wetlands and grasslands surrounding Acapulco. “without a doubt, if all of Guerrero’s resources were thoroughly developed, it would be as rich as the great state of California.”

Part of this renewed attempt to penetrate markets in the Mexican Pacific came accompanied with exciting possibilities of expanding the “moving picture business” in Mexico.<sup>290</sup> But this

---

<sup>289</sup> Robert McAlpin, “San Francisco Trade News,” *Pacific Ports*, February, 1919, p. 88 p. Pan Pacific Association in Hawaii, 136.

<sup>290</sup> L.H. Rovzar, “Showing Moving Pictures in Mexico,” *Pacific Ports*, May, 1920. pp. 124-6.

expansion had come too slowly, and frustratingly so, the “general unsettled state of the nation since the centenary ten years ago,” noted an article on the picture industry in Mexico, accounted in great measure for the slow increase of cinematographic activities in small towns and cities without any reliable communications. In those towns like Acapulco where theater had already arrived, the conditions of most of the pictures sent from Italy and France were “old scratched, faded, and frequently interrupted...[and] into this virgin field of shadows, carelessly shown for only the immediate gain, without thought for the accountable tomorrow, came the first American films, ancient pictures too.” The article criticized the class of movies being sent and screened, particularly for being “absolutely uninteresting, even distasteful to the native audience. Wild west pictures, bombastic, crude, absurd.” But the San Millán Spanish merchant brothers still saw a market and an audience for the screening of wild west pictures in Acapulco, and opened a theater, the Salón Rojo, at the heart of the town. But many other merchants like Hudson would disagree with the content of these films in Acapulco. Instead, they wedded moral reform with commercial progress, advertising this new way of making business through the motion picture industry. Indeed, Rydell noted that these ideas had been implemented in the Panama-Pacific San Francisco International Exposition; the importance of “motion picture studio concessions on both the Isthmus and the Joy Zone signaled the blossoming of film as a powerful medium for shaping cultural values under the aegis of entertainment.”<sup>291</sup>

He recognized that Mexico’s troubles sprung from unequal land distribution. His assessment was that “about 90% of the people have positively nothing, probably less than 5% of them are land owners,” followed by some platitudes that revolutionary activities have always been driven by “those who are propertyless and those who have nothing to lose in disturbed conditions.”

---

<sup>291</sup> Robert W Rydell. All the World’s a Fair: Visions of Empire at the American International Expositions, 1876-1916. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), p. 231.

Reflecting on the local landed class in Acapulco, he recognized that “those who are owners of cattle, small pieces of land or orchards do not favor revolutions.” In spite of ongoing revolutionary movements in Mexico and Acapulco, in his view, “times were improving greatly” throughout the country and it was “far easier to introduce new customs among the peon class of people than before the revolution.” His project was to create a class of small farmers while introducing new customs. “Commercial propaganda” would change old ways in Acapulco. This “thorough propaganda of agricultural training” would involve “large land owners who would gladly assist in teaching their renters to use modern methods.” His description of the plan offers a window into the worldview and aspirations of local merchants in Acapulco. His plan to distribute new instructive literature, modeled on the current magazines distributed in the port, reveals what Acapulco’s merchant class read during this tumultuous period of revolution and booming commercial markets in the Pacific: *Dun’s Review*, *Pacific Ports*, *El Comercio*, *Las Americas*, *la Hacienda*, *El Mercurio*, *El Indicador Mercantil*, *El Espejo de la Moda*, *La Revista Mundial*, etc. “as well as all the pictorial supplements from the large daily and weekly periodicals of the United States … Also catalogues in Spanish are great educators to the lower and middle classes.”

The first signs of some services and selling of products slowly veering towards consumption and leisure could be spotted at the time in Acapulco. Perhaps the most fascinating aspect of the commercial plan laid out by the owner of Hudson, Billings & Co. is the section on how this propaganda and advertisement campaign would be carried out in Acapulco. It has all the trappings of an Orwellian state and society, but with a twist in advertising and consumption:

All the above should be controlled by a Propaganda Committee with headquarters in the United States…This committee should establish a propaganda office in every state [and it] should be used as a distributing point for all instructive matter [it] should have its own job printing press… in order to circulate freely pamphlets and circulars containing simple instructions on modern agriculture, also have an instructor to go right into the fields and show them how to use the implements and call their attention to the different results. Also a portable moving picture plant would give wonderful results; as the majority cannot read,

a picture would make a better impression than printed matter.... Proper instructive literature should be published and widely distributed among all classes...A magazine copied after the "American Magazine"... periodical containing extensive displays of colored cuts showing modern methods of all kinds of farm work, giving practical, everyday sensible advice about the home and farm...a magazine similar to the "Ladies Home Journal" ...and a weekly periodical like the "Youth Companion"... Calendars, bearing advertisements and inscriptions such as "Honesty is the Best Policy," "Learn to labor and to Wait," "Do unto others as you would have others do unto you," etc. These offices should be used as a great medium advertising between the two countries, serving as a wonderful commercial propaganda for one and as a practical instructor for the other." "Moving picture plants would be the greatest medium of instruction. Many manufacturers who use this method of advertisement could help furnish films for commercial, agricultural and industrial advertisement, also good clean films, comedies and caricatures could be shown together with the commercial films in order to break monotony. A minimum entrance fee could be charged that would cover all expenses on this plant: even a good business could be made out of it if desired.<sup>292</sup>

As quixotic as his imagination might sound, this utopian description does offer a window into the aspirations of a sector of Acapulco's merchant class, a sliver of merchants who fantasized with an eventual convergence of Acapulco's retailing services, commerce, and rural economy with emerging markets of entertainment, leisure, advertisement, and consumption in the United States. The path forward for some merchants was to create a market in Acapulco and ultimately, using California's proximity, moving the port closer to new U.S. markers of entertainment and consumption in the early twentieth century. Henceforth, the step to open up Acapulco's tourist markets would then become far much easier for many of the seaport's merchants already exploring different paths and business opportunities in these new areas of investment.

American commercial interests spread quickly through the Pacific coast of Guerrero. John Mason Hart in his study of American interests in Mexico during the Revolution has explored several examples in the Acapulco region, revealing isolated conflicts between American businessmen and landowners in and around Acapulco. Most, according to Hart, began in 1900. He notes that "American landowners gained hegemony along most of Mexico's Pacific coastline, from

---

<sup>292</sup> W.H. Hudson, "Great Possibilities in Mexico," *Frank Waterhouse & Company's Pacific Ports*, Seattle USA, February 1919, Number 11, Volume 1, pp. 47-8, 182-183.

Chiapas to Sonora” during the Díaz regime, a situation that increasingly generated local conflicts and “unrest during the last years of the Porfiriato.” This would lead to the subsequent “nationalization of the properties, or their seizure by other means, in the decade between the revolution and World War II.”<sup>293</sup> Although this hegemony should not be exaggerated, there was nevertheless a stronger presence of American entrepreneurs and investment along the Pacific coastline.

This assertion must be qualified in the case of Acapulco. The presence of Americans had been a constant in Acapulco ever since the gold rush, when the Pacific Mails Steamship Company redirected the seaport’s traffic and commerce to California and Panama. Many American consuls, commercial agents, and businessmen had become part of the seaport’s society since the mid-nineteenth century. Families like Sutter, Link, Kastan, Joseph, Hudson, and Van Brunt bespeak of this older social integration. But from 1900 onwards, it is possible to see more newcomers in the Acapulco region, most of them arriving with ambitious business plans. This is the case of the Stephens brothers and Henry Weiss.

The Stephens brothers arrived in Acapulco around 1900 and established cottonseed and soap factories, eventually forming the Stephens Brothers Company. They forged close alliances with one of Acapulco’s merchants, the Slovenian C.L. Vucanovich who was probably competing against the Spanish. The company began expanding, buying lands and haciendas in El Potrero, near Puerto Marques and in Cacalutla. Other American firms began expanding and eventually bought the Hacienda San Marco which produced all kinds of tropical commodities, raised cattle, processed salt and produced several crops that were then sold to the interior and to the coastal lowlands. According to Hart, this expansion of American firms increasingly created problems in the vicinity.

---

<sup>293</sup> John Mason Hart. *Empire and Revolution: The Americans in Mexico since the Civil War*. (University of California Press, 2002), 189-192.

Acapulco's consul reported that "California capitalists" were seeking an opportunity to build or finance a railroad on the West Coast of Mexico. They had been making inquiries to the consul concerning projected lines in the region of Guerrero. There were some railroad plans from El Marqués to La Dicha mines about 60 miles inland, in the mountainous regions of the state. After the survey and accumulation of much material, including ties and rails, the project appears to have been abandoned and the entire construction material accumulated sold to Henry Weiss and the Mexican Pacific Railway Co., whose road projected from Acapulco northwest to Zihuatanejo was under construction. 12 miles had been graded and the project seemed to be heading towards completion. "The distance between proposed terminals of this road is 150 miles and the line when completed will traverse a splendid fertile country," noted the consul. The plans also contemplated the construction of a dock at the Acapulco terminus. "The bay is one of the finest harbors on the Pacific coast, landlocked, spacious, and of great depth. Situated about halfway between San Francisco and Panama, with a rich and practically undeveloped country easily made tributary, its importance is apparent." The project also included the development of an extensive hacienda about 30 miles from Acapulco which would also be connected by a new road that was under construction.<sup>294</sup> But the entire project faced more and more challenges as the situation in Guerrero was becoming unsettled with Madero's electoral rebellion and popular upheaval.

After the Mexican Revolution, Acapulco saw the revival of popular Hispanophobia. Merchants from the so-called "Spanish Colony" were singled out and bore the brunt of popular wrath and anti-foreign sentiments in the region. Interestingly, American merchants and commercial agents form the Pacific Mail Steamship Company, the real monopoly in the port, were left alone and carried on with their lives, unruffled, as the Spanish community was dragged down to the horrors of xenophobic passions. Popular Hispanophobia was not responding to a suffocating

---

<sup>294</sup> "Western Mexico Good Field for Railroads" *Railway and Marine News*, Volume IX, No. 23, Dec. 15, 1911. p. 12.

monopoly that, in any case, was controlled by American shipping lines. This also happened right at a moment in time, after the opening of the Panama Canal in 1914, when the economy of Mexico's Pacific seaports and regions were becoming fully incorporated into markets in California and the United States. The presence of American businessmen and merchants along the Pacific coasts could have attracted xenophobic and anti-foreign passions, and yet this never happened. Spanish influence and capital barely figured in this great, slow-moving geopolitical process. Yet the wrath was not directed primarily against American businessmen and boosters, although their interests and property did suffer under the generalized anti-foreign popular sentiment that gripped the seaport and the region. Popular wrath was directed, with several bouts of violence, against the Spanish colony, one of the largest foreign communities in the seaport that was undoubtedly in decline, a reflection of Acapulco's commercial presence in the Pacific World.

## **Conclusion**

Acapulco's commercial presence in the world of commerce in the Pacific (and the whole of Mexico's presence in the Pacific, for that matter) had ultimately weakened. The industrial era of steam and coal in the Pacific had in the end created in Acapulco a social, urban and economic order that revolved, minimally, around *cabotaje*, but mainly around a new coaling station that involved the infrastructure of credit, warehousing, and distribution of coaling, transport, and other refueling economic activities in the port and the region. This world lasted from 1849 Gold Rush, when Acapulco was firmly established as a coaling station, and lasted until the late 1920s when a burgeoning oil industry in California and Mexico made cheaper the shift from coal to oil as the central means for navigation, and concomitantly, when the traffic of steamship passengers began to dwindle and be replaced by automobile transportation, especially after the first 1927 road between Acapulco and Mexico City was inaugurated.

After the initial gold rush spur, many mining towns that had earlier boomed in California were becoming more and more self-sufficient, relying less on crops, basic products and foodstuff exported from Mexican Pacific ports. In this scramble for the remains of Mexico's declining commerce in the Pacific World, at least for Porfirian Mexico, Mazatlán eventually emerged from this pyrrhic victory as the prime Pacific port, while Acapulco as an international commercial port sank into irrelevance. Yet turning into a coaling depot and refueling station meant that Acapulco had experienced a somewhat fortunate fate, one shared by countless other old and new ports in the Pacific World. Henceforward, Acapulco quickly consolidated its position as a port of call in the second half of the nineteenth century.

On the eve of the Mexican Revolution, Acapulco was a consolidated port of call revolving around a steady system of refueling, credit, and transport services. But this transition had not wrought changes as deep as one might have expected. Partly because Acapulco's economic entourage, steamship traffic, had remained largely unchanged even if the port's role and function within this world of maritime traffic had significantly changed compared to the early nineteenth century. It became more a service hub and less a port of trade and entrepôt. But it still remained a place continuously shaped by the world of steamers, schooners, and the slow, seemingly-insignificant, and mundane movement of coal, coasting trade, and steamship passengers.

Material life and society in Acapulco surely changed during this period with the rise of retailers, steamship merchants, and stevedores, though not drastically as it certainly would a few decades later. Besides turning into a coaling station, Acapulco turned into a thick Porfirian node of family networks bound by the business of retailing, refueling, and transport services as well as by ties of debt and credit that had been carefully weaved during the Porfiriato. In this way, Acapulco became an outpost of the Porfiriato on an otherwise unreachable coastal frontier and hinterland in Mexico. Socially, this outpost was formed by Acapulco's merchant and retailing elite,

tightly knit by family ties. Almost all of the exchange, buying and selling, was done on credit, giving rise to an extended network of credit relations based on trust and reputation, tying family and community in intimate ways in Acapulco. The credit and debt structure of this Porfirian node was embedded in personal relations in Acapulco, and most often than not served as a source of social cohesion during periods of stagnant peace, so necessary for Porfirian officials who tried to control remote regions like Acapulco's hinterland and coastal frontier.

Merchants, being the wealthiest members of this tight seaport community, exerted a considerable degree of influence in Acapulco's economic life, drawing their influence from their role as middlemen and retailers, which allowed them to control the port's prices, on the one hand, and on the other, to create a complex and "informal" structure of credit, warehousing, transport, and distribution network of steamship refueling services (coal, water, food supplies, unloading facilities, carriers, stevedores, etc.) This excluded an entire sector of workers in Acapulco's economy, barring them from political participation, and preventing any social mobility within the socioeconomic hierarchy of Acapulco's evolving economic order. This coupled with the expansion of debt in a growing rural populace in the surrounding regions created serious problems for old commercial Acapulco.

When the Mexican Revolution struck the Pacific coast, Acapulco was already seething with tensions in the social world created by the coaling station in the New Pacific. When it all disappeared, the port came crashing down precipitously, descending into an all-out confrontation among different sectors of Acapulco's society, scrambling for the remains of a disappearing refueling economy. In sum, the real social, economic, and urban revolution of Acapulco had already taken place in the nineteenth century when Acapulco silently shifted from a commercial seaport to a service town. The armed phase of the Revolution, of which two silent revolutions were crucial, mobility and connectivity, would only catalyze and accelerate Acapulco's transformation

from an old port of call to a new, expansionary, and far more aggressive economy that emerged with tourism.

## CHAPTER 5

### **Roads, Merchants, and Revolutionaries in the Utopian Port** *Mobility, Connectivity, and the Old Order, 1915-1927*

Acapulco was a city in flux. As the Mexican Revolution reached its nadir and the country stumbled its way into a civil war, the rhythm of seaport life, its ebb and flow of people, was swung by an outflow of mobile workers, evacuees, exiles, migrants and an influx of revolutionary forces, soldiers, refugees, and the displaced. Against this context, Acapulco once again became a transitory city, consolidating its role as a refueling station, though with a diminished coaling business, becoming a site of intense exchanges of population movements. At the edge of a coastal frontier, this ebb and flow posed a formidable challenge to Acapulco and its inhabitants. The port turned into a place where the local merchant elite proved its resilience and flexibility by becoming itinerant and moving constantly, while stevedores, artisans, dockworkers, and small-town traders formed a workers and peasant movement in this highly volatile context of geographic mobility, equally proving their resilience and capacity for organization in the face of widening spirals of revolution and counterrevolution. In the end, they were all negotiating their survival in the face of violence, popular upheaval, and revolution.

It is my main contention that the seaport, at the onset of popular upheavals, underwent two silent revolutions in mobility and connectivity, setting the stage for a dramatic transformation of Acapulco, from a coaling station to a small resort, that by the 1940s would have rendered the city unrecognizable for past observers at the turn of the century. Issues of geographic mobility dictated the rhythm and patterns of the armed phase of the Mexican Revolution (1910-1920) as it unfolded, locally, in Acapulco; whereas issues of connectivity, transport and communications, choosing whether to close off the seaport from foreign influences or leave it open-bounded, became central dilemmas for Acapulco during the period of reconstruction in Mexico's "radical 1920s." The way

these dilemmas and issues were solved during and after the Revolution, and particularly during the 1920s, profoundly affected the direction Acapulco would take in the following decades.

As if the Mexican Revolution had passed unnoticed, Acapulco kept operating the way it had for over half a century. It kept moving with the ebb and flow of the more mundane world of the nineteenth-century, serving as a refueling station for steamships, passengers, and as an entrepôt for coasting trade between Guaymas and San Benito. So even if during this period, 1914-1927, the urban and economic function of the port itself did not change significantly, its surrounding regions did, and dramatically so. Acapulco, by contrast, was deeply shaped by these two silent revolutions of mobility and connectivity that are often overlooked by the more spectacular armed conflict of the Mexican Revolution. Thus the story responds, less to the events of the Mexican Revolution, and more to a chronology of connections that directly affected the port and the region: the opening of the Panama Canal 1914-15 and the initiation of road works in 1927 that for the first time connected Acapulco to Mexico City and the interior with modern tarmac roads.

The chapter is divided into three sections: the first traces the literature connecting seaports, urban change, and revolutions; the second is devoted to questions of stagnation and differentiated geographic mobility in Acapulco during the armed phase of the Mexican Revolution; and finally, the third deals with questions of connectivity and isolation during two successive workers and agrarian insurrections in Acapulco and its hinterland.

The first section explores the context that saw the rise of new forms of migration, what Claudio Lomnitz calls “radical labor mobility” among workers and exiles. It was, according to Lomnitz, “a novel context marked by the economic reorientation of Mexico to the United States.”<sup>295</sup> I would add that this new movement of people arose in older, more resilient channels of mobility, namely of workers, migrants, filibusters, and exiles that had been moving back and

---

<sup>295</sup> Claudio Lomnitz-Adler, *The Return of Comrade Ricardo Flores Magón* (Brooklyn, NY: Zone Books, 2014), xviii

forth, since the nineteenth century, between California, the Pacific Coast in Mexico, including the Gulf of California, and Central America. The Revolution of Ayutla and subsequent conflicts in the mid nineteenth century bespeak of this pattern of mobility. Yet this older story of Pacific mobility reinforces the premise of Lomnitz's argument. It reveals an underexplored moment in the history of the Mexican Revolution and its aftermath: namely, that new forms of labor mobility were circulating through old routes at a greater speed, in short-term multidirectional flows, like never before, not even when the 1849 Gold Rush provoked the circulation of mass migration in Mexico's Pacific ports. From a *longue durée* perspective, these new forms of mobility—refugees, radicalized workers, and exiles—suggest the further integration of Mexico's Pacific, northward to California, revealing how it was “progressing at a dizzying speed” during the Mexican Revolution.

The second and third sections, the heart of the argument and the chapter, show how the Mexican Revolution and the upheavals of the 1920s further consolidated the role of Acapulco as a transit point, while mobility and connectivity (transport and communications) became divisive political issues. Indeed, the port's function did not change significantly. It remained a refueling station, though a declining one that saw Acapulco's society experiencing new fractures and dislocations. The irruption of socialists, anarcho-syndicalists, and *agraristas* into Acapulco's political scene, in the aftermath of the Mexican Revolution, was partly a result of the incessant movement of refugees, exiles, mobile radical workers, and the internally displaced who had dominated seaport life for an entire decade, chipping away at the old mercantile order. This gave rise to what some historians have referred to as the “Acapulco Commune” created by Acapulco's Workers Party in the early 1920s, which provoked an all-out confrontation with a group of Mexican and foreign merchant houses. Groups of artisans, workers in the maritime transport services, and the sons of wealthy Spanish merchants splintered into a wide array of revolutionary

popular movements in the port and the region. They called for the breaking of a local commercial monopoly and demanded public works, road building, and labor and agrarian rights.

## I

### Historiography

### **Mobility, Revolution, Connectivity, and Urban Change**

The armed phase of the Mexican Revolution (1910-1920) and the mass mobilization that sprung from it was not led by workers. It was an overwhelmingly rural phenomenon, as many scholars of the Mexican Revolution have argued. Yet this does not mean that the armed conflict failed to produce any working-class movements; in fact, many were deeply shaped and radicalized by the revolution. The “radical 1920s,” the *coletazo de la revolución armada*, further complicates the picture of worker radicalization in Mexico. Inchoate social organizations who fought during the armed phase became full-blown workers’ movements in the 1920s, and most of them sought to radically upturn the order of things for many powerful merchants in a handful of ports particularly in Veracruz, Tamaulipas, and states in Southeast Mexico. Acapulco formed part of these coastal towns and regions that saw the irruption of radical labor and rural movements after the armed phase of the Mexican Revolution (1910-1920).

What exactly caused this politicization and subsequent radicalization of the working class and peasant movements in Acapulco? Why and how did these social movements, in continuing cycles of revolution and counterrevolution, shape the direction of Acapulco’s urban and economic transition? To address the first problem on the radicalization of social movements, some historians of the Mexican Revolution have underplayed the role of foreign influences in working class politicization. Alan Knight notes that “foreign influences were important, but not all-important in this process: working class politicization cannot be explained by some crude diffusionist theory. But certainly it was the capital, the major ports (Veracruz, Tampico, Acapulco), and communities

in the border zone (Chihuahua, Juárez, Cananea), which were most affected.”<sup>296</sup> Indeed, when analyzing the causes of politicization of Mexico’s working class, at a general level, a “crude diffusionist theory” emphasizing the role of foreign ideas and transnational movements falls short of explaining a multiplicity of endogenous and exogenous, particularly regional, factors that contributed to the politicization of the working class before and after the Mexican Revolution.

As for the second question addressing the connection between social movements and urban change in port-cities and entrepôts, the literature on seaports and urban studies provides some interesting answers to this problem. Scholars have emphasized the connections between labor mobility, the diffusion of ideas, and political organization. Like border towns, port cities in urban studies are often seen as freewheeling enclaves articulating relatively autonomous regions where the flow of people, information, and ideas pass through multiple hubs of political activity and organization, a process of diffusion that is rarely found in other types of urban settlements. These lines of interpretation have created interesting monographs showing the connection between seaports, border towns, and social revolutions. Fowler Salamini, for instance, notes that “Veracruz had traditionally served as the port of entry to Mexico for foreigners, whether sailors, merchants, or exile European revolutionaries,” and consequently “was the point from which foreign ideologies filtered into the nation.”<sup>297</sup> Seaports became gateway cities to frontier and maritime markets, where ideas and examples of urban, social, and economic organization were transmitted from faraway places, and circulated within more regional coastal networks. In his book, *Cousins and Strangers*, José Moya presses a similar point on how a networked-based Spanish emigration to Argentina gave birth to a formally organized and politically active community in Buenos Aires that deeply influenced the anarchist revolution at the turn of the century. This process also became evident in

---

<sup>296</sup> Alan Knight, “The Working Class and the Mexican Revolution” *Journal of Latin American Studies*, c. 1900-1920, Vol. 16, No. 1 (May, 1984) pp: 51-79, 54-55, 62.

<sup>297</sup> Heather Fowler-Salamini, *Agriarian Radicalism in Veracruz, 1920-1938* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1978), 26-7.

Mexico after the Maderista revolution, when Spanish anarchists and anarcho-syndicalists actively unionized seaport workers and peasants of the surrounding regions. Émigrés and anarchist reading circles mirrored those of larger seaports, also capital cities, like Havana and Buenos Aires. Far-flung connections also created strong solidarity and close collaboration among seaport movements. Gilbert Joseph, for example, in his regional study of Yucatán, notes how a “Gulf union of dockworkers” was informally created when “Progreso stevedores independently established a close relationship with the equally autonomous and combative longshoremen of Veracruz.”<sup>298</sup> The same can be said of many other ports and their connections with the international movement of renter’s strikes in the early late 1910s and early 1920s.

Seaports, given their exposure to the circulation of ideas and mobile workers, thus saw the rise of highly organized and developed forms of social and political organization among itinerant waterfront workers and the artisanate. By the early 1920s, political relations in port cities like Acapulco, Veracruz, Progreso, and Tampico began to gravitate around an urban working class that was open to “a range of ideas, which could combine in bizarre but appealing constellations: liberal, socialist, anarchist, Catholic...and even Protestant.” But unlike oil workers in Tampico, in Acapulco there was no consolidated workforce of this size, nor was it capable of organizing an aggressive workers’ movement during the Mexican Revolution. Among the urban working class groups, it was the declining artisanate during the Mexican Revolution that “showed by far the clearest commitment to violent popular protest.” But handicraft workers often “found it notoriously hard to achieve any collective organization or mount collective resistance.” As the Revolution progressed, artisans tended to share with peasant movements “a nostalgia for the world they had lost, or were fast losing, but they were less equipped to do anything about it;” their

---

<sup>298</sup> Gilbert Joseph. *Revolution from Without: Yucatán, Mexico, and the United States, 1880-1924*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982). 225. Andrew Grant Wood, *Revolution in the Street. Women, Workers, and Urban Protest in Veracruz, 1870- 1927* (United States: SR Books, 2001).

characteristic response to this lack of organization was the urban riot.<sup>299</sup> This changed when a number of anarcho-syndicalist, inspired in Magonismo, began organizing this group in the early 1920s and tried to break up Acapulco's isolation by promoting the building of roads. According to Alan Knight, concerns such as public works and transport infrastructure as well as education and moral reform were central to the Revolution and formed part of a broader liberal ideology. Most of these concerns did not stop at Madero's revolution in 1910; they became radicalized by the 1920s and "figured in the discourse of the urban working class, notably the serious self-improving artisanate" of seaports, border towns, and industrialized cities.<sup>300</sup>

Workers and artisans in Acapulco were not exempt from this general process of mobilization and radicalization as a result of the circulation of workers and foreign ideas across borders and among seaports. They created a bizarre combination of their own, mixing anarcho-syndicalist streaks from Magonismo and Mexico's Liberal Party with ideas taken from socialism and agrarianism. But also thrown in the mix were other forms of social and political organization found in military agricultural colonies and in the Casa del Obrero Mundial and the IWW.

Yet Acapulco, because of its connections to the outside world, was also a breeding ground for social movements that time and again would seek, like most other ports, to close the door to outsiders. Ports are not merely the reflection of internationalism, cosmopolitanism, or "transnational solidarity" among workers. They are also recluse societies, highly suspicious of their geographic position, always open and vulnerable to distant worlds. Xenophobia and cosmopolitanism came along, mixed up in odd ways, with all of these connections and the

---

<sup>299</sup> Alan Knight, "The Working Class and the Mexican Revolution" *Journal of Latin American Studies*, c. 1900-1920, Vol. 16, No. 1 (May, 1984) pp: 51-79, 54-55, 62.

<sup>300</sup> Alan knight provides several examples of such campaigns like those of the radical Maderista, Antonio Hidalgo of Tlaxcala who combined his "agrarian proposal with familiar provisions: for improved education and roads, orphanages and old people's homes, and anti-drink and anti-gambling legislation" see more examples in Alan Knight, *The Mexican Revolution. Porfirian, Liberals, and Peasants*, Vol. I, (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1986) 443-445.

diffusion of novel and radical ideas espoused by Acapulco's Worker's Party and the agrarian movement. The myth of Acapulco's glorious past was paramount in shaping the discourse with which social demands were articulated by these movements. Radicalization stirred older "social fevers" that had been breaking out in the region, recurrently, throughout the nineteenth century. As a result, xenophobia and nationalism revisited the port and the region. Added to this combustible mix was a strong anti-foreign sentiment, full of nostalgia for Acapulco's lost commercial glory, that turned into an explosion of nationalism and popular Hispanophobia directed against foreigners, "commercial monopolies," "outsiders," and especially against the Spanish merchant communities in the region.

It is worth sounding a cautionary note on political denominations and the names of actors in this story of the Mexican Revolution and the 1920s. We historians tend to dismiss the ideals professed by politicians, particularly if we become entangled with the thicket of local politics and its actors; to understand their names, motives, ideals, and actions pushes us deeper into the thicket until we get lost, like so many authors have in their monographs when they venture into the micro-history of Mexico's Revolutions. Major warring camps within the Revolution, when looked at a microscopic level, turn into a political world described by Braudel as "a history of brief, rapid, nervous fluctuations, by definition ultra sensitive; the least tremor sets all its antennae quivering." Carrancismo, Magonismo, Villismo, Maderismo, Zapatismo, in this way, dissolve into a world of shifting alliances in Guerrero where Vidalistas, Escuderistas, Mariscalistas, Figueroistas produced bizarre ideological configurations drawn from liberalism, socialism, agrarianism, and anarcho-syndicalism that in turn produced actions strongly influenced by morally tinged anti-foreign sentiments of patriotism, nationalism, and Hispanophobia.

To avoid getting lost, we often resort to some sort of Namierite skepticism: "though party names and cant were current" in situations of shifting political alliances and popular upheavals,

“the political life of the period could be fully described without ever using a party denomination.”<sup>301</sup> Or worse still, to avoid getting lost, we listen to Braudel’s forewarning that “we must learn to distrust this history with its still burning passions, as it was felt, described, and lived by contemporaries whose lives were as short and short-sighted as ours.” Examined under this light, “burning passions” in politics and “party names and cant” provide us with a poor guide to analyze the actions of local politicians and revolutionaries. The strategy then is to tell the story of political parties and popular movements as solely being driven by macro political structures or by the self-interested actions of participants and their opportunistic loyalties to individuals of the time.

This approach, however, turns the production of social and political history into an exercise in “skeptical politics.” It leads to a reductionist focus either on institutions or on political self-interest and solipsism, giving up on any attempt to understand ideas and the logic of collective action as well as the formation of politicized groups behind major social upheavals like the Mexican Revolution and the “Radical 1920s.”

I argue that principle and practice overlapped in these historical contexts when “gateway cities,” namely seaports, capitals, and border towns, were turned upside down by revolutions. Granted, workers in Acapulco’s Workers’ Party, for instance, were seldom genuinely motivated by the political principles they professed, even though they constantly invoked socialist, anarchist, and anarcho-syndicalist ideas. Their ideals were divorced from political practice, without doubt; and yet they constantly referred to such principles to justify certain actions that transformed the port city (the building of the road, for instance). They also became nominal Maderistas or were described by their political opponents as Zapatistas, or differently, they became self-identified anarchists.

---

<sup>301</sup> Quentin Skinner. *Visions of Politics*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp.145-6; Lewis Namier, *The Structure of Politics at the Accession of George III*. x.

One might also argue that such names are not useful analytical tools, partly because they were more expressions or tags of “paper radicalism” in which there was a yawning gap between radical rhetoric and moderate concrete actions. Nonetheless, throughout the investigation I will use these categories, for the sole reason that these historical actors presented themselves in this way, socialists, agrarians, anarchists, and so on; they conceived their movements as such, as part of these ideologies, and to avoid any confusion they will be referred to accordingly.

These names and self-identification in politics also spurred cycles of counter-reaction. Naturally, political organizations that defined themselves as “socialists” or “anarcho-syndicalists” generated a deep distrust among conservative local actors. Electoral propaganda in Guerrero reflected this fear of new forms of making politics in which ideology meant very little, but the social tag meant everything: during the 1922 elections, a candidate for the Federal Congress warned “citizens” of Guerrero against widespread demagoguery and the manipulation of these new parties and clubs by his opponents: “they show up with many manifestos, with innumerable programs...supported by those so-called big parties, by an immensity of political organizations; all that’s missing now is for them to say that even those who have passed away into the other world are forming Clubs to their benefit [his opponents’]; and all to what end? To seduce us into voting for them”<sup>302</sup>

It is precisely this process of self-political identification and characterization of opponents what becomes so crucial for understanding the political rivalries of the time, all the more to understand how their actions transformed cities. This strategy reveals how participants used established social norms and traditional rules of conducts, referring to well-established principles to completely transform the political meanings that sustained an entire social order that in turn

---

<sup>302</sup> Toribio Gutiérrez supporting Trinidad Mastache and persuading citizens to vote against his opponent Moisés Herrera, June 1922. Archivo Histórico Municipal de Taxco (ATM), Presidencia, box 237, file 5, 1921-1922.

sustained the entire urban order and economic function of a city. This method is essential for understanding urban change during revolutions. Even if revolutionary participants “were never genuinely motivated by the (political) principles they professed, it remains essential to refer to those principles if we wish to explain how and why” a city changed over time.<sup>303</sup>

In this history of the Revolution, I focus on the historical process of urban transformations derived from political change and violence which, in the words of historian Eric Foner, becomes a way of examining “the way an everyday encounter rapidly descended into violence and acquired political meaning. Most of all, it illustrated how day-to-day encounters [between rival political forces and classes] became infused with the tension inevitable when a social order, with its established power relations and commonly understood rules of conduct, has been swept away and a new one has not yet come into being.”<sup>304</sup>

## I

### The First Silent Revolution: Mobility

*The Mexican Revolution and a City in Flux*

The Revolution irrupted into Mexico’s Pacific seaboard in 1911. That same year, the brothers Flores Magón from Los Angeles launched an ill-fated invasion of Baja California in conjunction with other members of the Partido Liberal Mexicano and several anarchists who, according to Lomnitz, were “in some ways representative of the combustible mix of political exiles that the Porfirian dictatorship had edged out of the country,” to California and Texas. When they captured Mexicali, Wobblies and volunteer adventurers from the Imperial Valley flocked to Baja California and joined the forces of the Liberal party. Tijuana quickly fell under a welter of forces

---

<sup>303</sup> Paraphrased from Quentin Skinner’s discussion in *Vision of Politics* on the evolution of a capitalist system through the professed religious principles of Protestantism. Quentin Skinner. *Visions of Politics*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 145-6.

<sup>304</sup> Eric Foner. *Reconstruction: America’s Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877*. (New York: Harper & Row, 1988) 122-3.

that, by then, had chaotically assembled in Baja California. In his innovative study of Magonismo, Claudio Lomnitz argues from a transnational perspective that “this movement arose in a novel context marked by the economic reorientation of Mexico to the United States and that it was led by a new population: Mexican émigrés and exiles and their American and European friends, allies, and comrades.”<sup>305</sup>

I would argue that an older story of mid-nineteenth century Pacific mobility and circulation resurfaced during the Mexican Revolution, a backwash inadvertently provoked by the invasion of Baja California in 1911.<sup>306</sup> This created a rupture in a more or less stable pattern of mobility, exchange, and maritime traffic that had formed around American steamship lines since the late 1860s, when the republic was restored. From a *longue durée* perspective, new forms of mobility—refugees, radicalized workers, and Porfirian exiles—overlapped with older circuits that had, since the 1849 Gold Rush, established a close connection between revolutionary activities in Mexico’s Pacific seaports, privateering enterprises, and Californian markets in the Pacific. The fact that a fierce debate erupted in the press over the nature of the movement in Baja California, whether it was a revolutionary, patriotic enterprise or a filibustering expedition, speaks lots of this backwash of nineteenth-century conflicts in the Pacific. The conflict in Baja California in 1911 was fought along these lines of movement and circulation.

Moreover, Lomnitz and Marco Antonio Samaniego have traced a series of contingents and their uneasy relationship in the northwestern Pacific coast of Mexico and the United States:

a situation that made Baja California a plum for the Los Angeles junta—its proximity to California and its isolation from the rest of Mexico—made the region a focus of international politics. The diversity of actors, economic interests, and cultural situations was such that making the Baja revolution into a single conflict—unifying actors around a shared set of goals—required resources beyond those of the Los Angeles junta.<sup>307</sup>

---

<sup>305</sup> Lomnitz-Adler. *The Return of Comrade Ricardo Flores Magón*, pp. 126, xviii.

<sup>306</sup> Marco Antonio Samaniego. *Breve historia de Baja California*. (Mexico: UABC, 2006), pp. 133-40.

<sup>307</sup> Lomnitz-Adler. *The Return of Comrade Ricardo Flores Magón*, pp. 335-338.

Even though the armed magonista movement in Baja California was eventually quashed, the entire littoral had been stirred into action. Further south, along Guerrero's Pacific coast, a similar situation of proximity to the Pacific and isolation from the rest of Mexico exposed Acapulco to the unfolding in Baja California. The vice consul in Acapulco reported that "the various revolutionary leaders in Guerrero have become attached to different political parties in Mexico City, and if a counterrevolution should arise, a condition of chaos would probably result from the hatred and jealousy existing among them."<sup>308</sup> Acapulco, once again, reemerged as a city in flux, closely connected to the ebb and flow of migrants, refugees, workers, exiles, privateers, and troops. The Baja California expedition and the collapse of the armed experiment of Magonismo sent rippling effects across the well-established channels of mobility and maritime traffic in Mexico's Pacific. The threat of Magonismo became even more patent, even if Magonismo as an armed revolutionary force was waning. José Inocente Lugo, "magonismo a threat in our state"<sup>309</sup> Escudero's weekly newspaper *Regeneración de Acapulco* (created in 1919) is a telling example of the inspiration he drew from Magonismo.

After his sojourn in California and Texas, in the effervescence of waterfront workers' movements, Wobblies, Magonistas, and exiles, Escudero returned to Acapulco and began organizing stevedores, muleteers, and artisans; he even tried to organize those indentured laborers on their way to Chiapas's booming coffee economy. The response was swift and enthusiastic and, as a result, the Liga de Trabajadores a Bordo de los Barcos y Tierra (the League of Ship and Shore Workers) was founded by the Escudero brothers. Acapulco's tightly-knit merchant community,

---

<sup>308</sup> San Francisco Chronicle, Jacobs, *Ranchero Revolt*, 90; Alan Knight. *The Mexican Revolution: Counter-Revolution and Reconstruction*. (U of Nebraska Press, 1990) 538; Fernández, Acapulco, 30 April FO; Harry Pangburn, Acapulco, 4 Apr. 1911, SD 812.000/1366; Pangburn, 18 Aug 1911, SD 812.00/2346. State Department Archives, Documents Relating to the Internal Affairs of Mexico.

<sup>309</sup> Jacobs. *Ranchero Revolt*, p. 90.

surprised by the uncanny situation—sons of wealthy Spanish merchants from Acapulco organizing stevedores against their own commercial interests—called in their alliance with other strongmen in Guerrero and banished Escudero, amid a generalized suppression of worker movements in the state.

Meanwhile, the situation worsened for Madero as the year of 1912 trudged by. The coup against finally took place; Pino Suárez and Madero arrested, promised safe passage to exile, but then betrayed and summarily executed. The country was quickly sliding into a counterrevolution, and a civil war from thereafter. Any attempt to connect the Pacific Coast of Guerrero collapsed as Henry Weiss, the owner of the Mexican Pacific Company, a Seattle based corporation, was caught during the chaos of the military mutiny in Mexico City and killed during Huerta's coup.<sup>310</sup> Acapulco and the coast of Guerrero quickly fell into the hands of many popular insurrections. Eventually, many merchants and workers were quickly dogged out of the state by an opportunistic cacique, Silvestre G. Mariscal, one of the many who rose to power as Mexico descended into the chaos of popular insurrections.

Mariscal, had been a struggling schoolmaster from nearby Atoyac before he joined the Maderistas in Guerrero. By June of 1911, Mariscal, representative of those new actors who rose in the Costa Grande around the time, had created an extensive and opportunistic popular movement around Madero's electoral insurrection. Acapulco was completely run over by its hinterland, the real player in Acapulco's economy by the end of the nineteenth century. Mariscal eventually invaded the port-city of Acapulco and struck an uneasy deal with the seaport's merchants. On and off, in the chaos of the revolution, he would dominate Acapulco and the Costa Grande from 1911-1918. In 1912 he declared the independence of his movement from the revolutionary cattle

---

<sup>310</sup> "Henry Weiss-Reported Killed," *The San Francisco Call*, 16 February, 1913, p. 73. They suspend the contract with Mexican Pacific Company because they were unable to find the head of the company, Henry Weiss. See *Diario Oficial de la Federación* July 2, 1929.

ranchers, the Figueroa's, who had joined the Maderista revolution in the northern portion of the state of Guerrero. He flailed about until he found his new allegiance to Huerta's dictatorship and the counterrevolution.

The situation grew tense in Acapulco as an influx of people fleeing from other states on the Pacific arrived in the seaport. "Refugees arriving at Acapulco," noted a diplomatic source, have reported "intolerable conditions in Chiapas. Many American planters in Tabasco without protection are preparing to leave. Our military attaché believes conditions not improved in Morelos or Guerrero."<sup>311</sup> Matters worsened when fighting broke out between Mariscal's forces and another coastal leader, more akin to Zapatismo. Mariscal, as a response, led an insurrection against the Figueroas but was swiftly arrested and imprisoned in Acapulco. Ian Jacobs notes in his regional study that "in a way, the Mexican Revolution in Guerrero represented the final struggle for the inheritance of the Álvarez *cacicazgo*."<sup>312</sup> This final struggle was particularly fierce in the coastal regions of Guerrero, the mainstays of the Álvarez family. A similar conflict played out in the region of La Montaña as Herrera Sipriano's work reveals.

### ***An Elite and Working Class on the Move***

As a result, merchants in Acapulco sought desperately to accommodate their interests in favor of the winning side of this struggle. But sometimes it was very difficult to see the fault lines from the surface of a crackling local conflict. For prolonged periods, there was no winning side at all.<sup>313</sup> From Los Angeles, Enrique Flores Magón reported worrisome news, gathered from the American Pacific fleet, of intense combats in Mazatlán and Acapulco, including the evacuation

---

<sup>311</sup> Wilson, March 2, 1912, SD 812.00/3005d.

<sup>312</sup> Jacobs. *Ranchero Revolt*, 95.

<sup>313</sup> Both historians have produced the most revealing monographs on local conflicts and alliances, illuminating how the Mexican Revolution unfolded in Guerrero's regions. See Francisco Herrera Sipriano. *La revolución en la montaña de Guerrero: la lucha zapatista 1910-1918.* (Regiones de México. México, D.F.: Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, 2009); and Ian Jacobs. *Ranchero Revolt: The Mexican Revolution in Guerrero.* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1982).

and occupation of the latter port by federal soldiers from Victoriano Huerta's dictatorship. By the summer of 1914, the fall of Huerta had become inevitable.

After the American occupation of Veracruz, federal troops could no longer guarantee the protection of merchant's interests in seaports. In the press, rumors of Huerta fleeing the country, onboard a steamship, accompanied the stories of several merchants gathering in ports and boarding steamers to leave as refugees. In the meantime, revolutionary troops from other states sallied in and out from Acapulco, crossing the path of steamers from the Pacific Mail Steamship Company also coming back and forth between Mexico's ports and San Francisco, carrying scores of refugees gathered from different regions and ports on the Pacific.

Merchants, miners, diplomats, businessmen, and their entire families began to flee from intermittent skirmishes and lootings that became widespread as the Revolution in Mexico stumbled into a civil war in 1915. These mobile local elites were increasingly described as "refugees" in the press in California and the United States. Onboard one of the Pacific Mail steamers, for instance, "with nearly a score of American, English, and other refugees from Mexico out of a passenger list of 101" was U.S. consul Clement S. Edwards, from Acapulco, who had been attacked by federal soldiers in Manzanillo, barricading himself inside the steamer's room to save his life.<sup>314</sup>

Guerrero's rebellions had become a decentralized chaos. Huerta's dictatorship had collapsed, sparking a civil war in the country, when Edwards finally returned to Acapulco. He described the shifting civil-war alliances of Guerrero in a report on the coastal revolution. The year of 1915 had mainly gravitated around the rivalry of Julián Blanco and Silvestre Mariscal. Blanco was a nominal Zapatista, and Mariscal a nominal Carrancista, but in the summer of 1914, they were both considered nominal Carrancistas. Mariscal was a schoolmaster from Atoyac; a fair-weather follower, who like so many other revolutionaries of his time had, on several occasions,

---

<sup>314</sup> *Regeneración*, 9 May 1914; *Sacramento Union*, Number 21, 21 May 1914.

changed his allegiance depending on the direction in which the winds of political fortune blew. In rapid succession, he had been a Maderista, Figueroista, Huertista, by 1914 a Carrancista, although never a Zapatista. Blanco, by contrast, was an old illiterate peasant from Dos Caminos, near Chilpancingo, but he had come to dominate the revolutionary movement of coastal Guerrero by 1913, placing it under the sway of Zapatismo. As the political power of the Figueroas waned, Blanco's insurrection had grown stronger under Huerta's dictatorship, 1913-14.

Soon, Blanco began looting the countryside and outskirts of Acapulco, coming dangerously close to the sphere of influence of Mariscal's forces stationed at the port and balancing an uneasy coexistence with the merchants there. But the seaport's hinterlands—comprising a mosaic of haciendas, textile and soap factories, small land-holdings, palm tree and fruit orchards, and smaller plots of land—were intimately tied to Acapulco's service and commercial economy, and most of these lands belonged to merchants from the port. As Blanco's forces advanced, the credit relations that tied Acapulco's merchants to their landed interests in the seaport's hinterland were severed, their property was threatened. This threat led to a new actor stepping into the scene, *guardias blancas* or groups of gunmen hired by merchants to defend their landed property, significantly complicating the armed balance that had been carefully maintained by rival forces in the region. But none of these efforts stopped the Revolution. Many merchants saw their property being consumed by skirmishes and lootings in what was turning out to be a protracted conflict involving smaller bands of Zapatistas, Mariscalistas, bandits, and the armed groups hired by Acapulco's merchants to defend their property.

Credit relations within the merchant community, already strained since the late nineteenth century, made matters worse, further upsetting the system of debts and securities that had sustained, for a long time, commercial and social relations in a cash-poor economy. This is the case of the widow of John Sutter Jr., Nicolasa Solís Sutter, who had hired a manager to look after

her business on the eve of the Revolution. The family papers and Sutter's biographer reveal a family in financial distress. Her husband's death had eventually driven her to borrow money from one of the brothers San Millán, Spanish merchants who owned a firm, a cinema, and a canteen in the port. As security for her repayment, she gave Maximino San Millán a portion of the land she owned in Los Órganos, a fruit orchard on the outskirts of Acapulco, and mortgaged half of her house in the city. But the Spanish merchant, facing property losses due to the Revolution, decided to ratchet up the pressure on the widow to pay her debt of 7,000 pesos. In the end, she had mortgaged most of her property to Mexican and Spanish merchants.<sup>315</sup>

The tension between both Blanco and Mariscal finally came to a head in the summer of 1914. Like a scene of Azuela's novels, Nicolasa Solís's lands and house of Los Órganos, at the outskirts of the seaport, was sacked by an armed group drawn out from the whirlwind of armed conflicts surrounding Acapulco. Solís's daughter recalled, in the words of her biographer, how before their eyes "the lime trees were felled, the sugar mill was put to the torch, excited cattle were caught and slaughtered, and the ranch house, in which [Nicolasa and John Sutter Jr.] had spent their declining years, was partially destroyed" along with the consul's books and papers. On the wake of the looting, Sutter's widow took the salvaged parts of her belongings and fled to Acapulco with her daughter and eight grandchildren. At Acapulco they joined with the Link family, whose small hotel business had collapsed. Following the advice of a diplomat, the Sutter and Link families and the entire extended family of nearly 15 members boarded the first steamer and left for San Francisco. Sutter's widow eventually died in California fighting for her inherited property rights in Sacramento. The refugee experience turned sour as they became double exiles: "my

---

<sup>315</sup> She was indebted the most with a certain Guadalupe García. For the detailed accounts see the Legal Papers and Financial records, 1903-14, of Anna Elisa Sutter Hull Link and the legal records of the mortgage in the Sutter/Link Family papers 88/52 c, box 2, files 2-4 in the U.C. Berkeley Bancroft Library, Manuscript Division. A man named Mazzini, and the Vucanovich and Uruñuela companies seemed to be the ones that most profitted from Link's mortgage.

mother and I came to Sacramento as refugees from the Mexican Revolution, to the city that had been founded by my father, and so greatly benefitted by him in his donations of land and public parks. Instead of affording us some recognition, the city literally closed the doors on us.”<sup>316</sup>

Local elites in Acapulco became overnight exiles and refugees, indeed, revealing a long-since learned capacity to be mobile and negotiate with any forces under the “sign of fear” that historian María Fernanda Bicalho identified in colonial Rio de Janeiro. Soon after the Sutters became refugees, Julián Blanco’s revolutionary forces descended upon Acapulco in October 1914, provoking yet another exodus of merchants and artisans, some fleeing to the interior, others boarding the next steamer as Blanco’s forces occupied and looted the port, “singling out the Spanish merchant houses for special attention.”<sup>317</sup> As a response, all the Spanish merchants left and temporarily delegated their business to clerks and close aids. These were the first signs of a revival of popular Hispanophobia that would bedevil the seaport’s society in the 1920s.

One of the merchants who remained in the port vividly described the dire situation in Acapulco during the revolution. By July 1915 the merchant noted that “things were actually getting better in this vicinity” and that the Carranza government “little by little is getting what you might call a start at organization.” Blanco’s forces had turned over to Mariscal who, according to the merchant, “was the only strongman in the country,” even though Blanco was the governor of the state. The latter had no military power, but he commanded the agrarian and Zapatista forces of the Costa Grande.<sup>318</sup> But the real problem was starvation in the seaport, he wrote to his friend in San Francisco:

---

<sup>316</sup> Interview of Anna Young by Allan Ottley in John Augustus Sutter Jr. and Allan R. Ottley. *The Sutter Family and the Origins of Gold-Rush Sacramento*. (United States: Red River Books ed. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2002), 74-5.

<sup>317</sup> Alan Knight. *The Mexican Revolution. Counterrevolution and Reconstruction*, V. II, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 225.

<sup>318</sup> W.H. Hudson to Moreno. Acapulco, July 18, 1915. U.C. Berkeley Bancroft Library, Manuscript Division, 88/52 c Sutter Link Family papers, box 3, miscellaneous Frank Sutter Link.

Corn is now worth \$10 and \$12 per almud (32 lbs) and very scarce at that. I think we have at least from 1000 to 1500 beggars on the streets and they are not the slick fat kind you used to know. The country or poor people are seen daily in the streets with sacks and baskets looking for a bit of corn from house to house. Times are very hard but there is enough money to be had, only the military authorities take corn away from the merchants when they bring it from Colima, therefore the merchant doubles the price and the poor devil pays for it. The government gives a receipt for everything, but hasn't paid any of them yet, so they are counted in a loss and gain. We have the grasshopper plague, and do not expect any crops this year. The central government never sends enough money for the troops and they are continually resorting to forced loans, but with a little more respect than formerly. I don't know what the outcome will be. The Spaniards are still away. Alzuyeta has three clerks here, but their house is closed. They do a little business but through other people. Córdova is doing well and the mercantile business is in the hands of everybody, true democracy.

Interestingly, the large number of “beggars” the merchant is referring to may well have been a large group of people who had been internally displaced from other rural and coastal areas. Together with this influx of displaced groups, there was also the arrival of newcomers who profited from the situation. In the absence of the local merchant Spanish elite, new actors flourished and became powerful. Alan Knight notes that “north of the Isthmus, the Constitutional victory had shifted power on a massive scale from the old elites into the hands of new, local, popular leaders: *campesinos* and *rancheros*, muleteers and miners, clerks, peons and schoolmasters.” Silvestre Mariscal, the schoolmaster from Atoyac, was representative of these “newcomers [who] were young and often of low social origin.”<sup>319</sup> In this reshuffling of elites, most refugees and migrants from the local elite struggled to manage their property in Acapulco from afar. When the Link family left and abandoned their hotel business, the Spanish San Millán brothers managed their property, but after the sacking of the seaport by Blanco’s forces and the wave of popular Hispanophobia, the San Millán brothers left for Spain (they would return later in the 1920s). The property was then handled by another member of the Spanish merchants, Nebreda, who took over the house and stopped paying rent. The family still owed a great amount of money to several

---

<sup>319</sup> Knight. *The Mexican Revolution*, v ii, p. 225.

merchants in the port. An American merchant warned the Link family in San Francisco that “at these times there are people who are making their fortunes taking advantage of the unsettled conditions of affairs down here and they are always ready to jump on a place like this.” Moreover, he revealed the accommodating cynicism of merchants in Acapulco during the Constitutional triumph in the revolution: “of course, you fully understand that the new government parties offer justice, freedom, honesty, and everything under the sun but in reality they are just about 150% worse than the old corrupt crowd that was in charge at first.”<sup>320</sup>

The Vidales brothers, for instance, after serving as backwater administrators in the seaport, began closely collaborating with revolutionary authorities in Guerrero, forming part of the army commanded by Silvestre Mariscal. Their participation in the Revolution would give them even more political and military clout as well as local prestige, allowing them to return victorious, unscathed, to their trading company in Tecpan de Galeana.

This was not the case in the story of Juan Escudero, who had returned to Acapulco to organize stevedores, artisans, and dockworkers into a movement. After being banished by Guerrero’s strongman, amid the brutal suppression of worker movements in the state, Escudero lived yet another period of formative years of radicalization in the turmoil of Veracruz’s revolution and the ideological effervescence of the Casa del Obrero Mundial in Mexico City. He became more and more acquainted with the ideology of anarcho-syndicalism, a series of ideas that had been diffused by Magonismo. His other two brothers, Francisco and Felipe, remained in the port, organizing a strong opposition against other merchant houses. Escudero would only return to Acapulco, along with many other merchants, until 1919 when the revolutionary base of Mariscal collapsed; Mariscal then fled to Michoacán and was executed there. This opened a window of

---

<sup>320</sup> Correspondence between Moreno and Hudson Acapulco, July 18, 1915. U.C. Berkeley Bancroft Library, Manuscript Division, 88/52 c Sutter Link Family papers, box 3, miscellaneous Frank Sutter Link.

opportunity for Acapulco's old and new actors to return and start making plans to rebuild Acapulco, but the different paths for recovery proved to be more conflictive than anyone could have imagined at the time.

## II

### **The Second Silent Revolution: Connectivity**

*Roads, Socialists and Agrarians, 1919-1927*

The aftershocks of the Revolution were still being felt in Acapulco when two prominent merchant families—the Escuderos and Vidales, previously mentioned in the other chapters—suffered a generational split with fateful consequences for Acapulco's already divided merchant community. Regarding the Escudero family, Juan Escudero, the scion of a relatively wealthy Spanish family, had undergone a process of political radicalization at the margins of the Revolution. Escudero had lived in a peripheral context of revolutionary activity marked by what Claudio Lomnitz referred to as “radical mobility” which meant the circulation of itinerant workers, the displaced, and exiles, moving from town to town in Mexico and the United States.

Schisms deepened within Acapulco's society until antagonistic interests resurfaced within the hierarchies of a debilitated mercantile order: middlemen, stevedores, small town merchants, and artisans, on the one side, began challenging the order created by Acapulco's prominent trading families, rural landowners, and a handful of merchant houses, on the other side. Their clash ended up sending the entire mercantile order into a tailspin.

Seaport life, however, seemed to be returning to normalcy. The fact that one of the first bouts of political mobilization took place inside a cinema theater in Acapulco reveals how life carried on, business as usual, despite all the difficulties and disturbances of reconstruction. Merchants had been promoting moving picture plants and cinema theaters in the port as correctives to the kind of sluggish behavior that, in their view, had kept Acapulco in a long commercial

slumber. But such were the unintended consequences of the use of cinema theaters and moving picture. They became a source of politicization for a society whose artisanate and working classes kept growing under the yoke of a weak monopoly controlled by Acapulco's trading houses.

Apart from the socialist leaders— the Escudero brothers— there was also a mass of stevedores, workers in the transport industry, artisans, errant middlemen, teachers, and a host of other actors who had recently been unearthed and mobilized by the Revolution. These sectors of society comprise the bulk of what I will henceforth refer to workers and artisans who were a foundational pillar of Acapulco's merchant houses. The swelling ranks of artisan's joined ranks and turned the league of stevedores into a workers' movement that early in 1919 converged not in the town center but in a cinema theater, owned by Spanish merchants, the San Millán brothers who had recently returned from Spain. Juan Escudero organized his supporters, bought a ticket, entered the theater, and halfway through the screening of a popular Western film, Tom Mix, took the podium. With an ad-libbing speech he began haranguing the audience, reminding everyone of Acapulco's economic situation, blaming it on the dominant Spanish merchant houses, and exhorting artisans, merchants, and workers of the transport and shipbuilding industries to form a political party.<sup>321</sup> This soon led to a riot and, one month later, Acapulco's Workers Party (Partido Obrero de Acapulco, POA) was founded, joining the thousands of political associations sprouting all around Mexico in the 1920s.<sup>322</sup> They began to challenge Acapulco's old order.

The economic situation in Acapulco had not changed significantly, nor had its role as an entrepôt and transport hub. Not even after the Mexican Revolution did Acapulco suffer fundamental changes. Quite the opposite, it was slowly returning to its earlier form which meant

---

<sup>321</sup> "Salón Rojo"; film, Tom Mix (M. Gill) or Eddy Polo (Martínez Carvajal, *Escudero y Vidales*, 50-1. 175); cinema owned by the brothers Maximino and Luciano San Millán, company Sayago and San Millán (Guadalupe Joseph, 125).

<sup>322</sup> Thomas Benjamin, "Laboratories of the New State, 1920-1929. Regional Social Reform and Experiments in Mass Politics" in *Provinces of the Revolution. Essays on Regional Mexican History, 1910-1929*, edited by Thomas Benjamin and Mark Wasserman (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1990), 71-90.

the return of an old merchant elite who carried on their affairs, business as usual, having a stake in all the activities of coasting trade, shipbuilding, and maritime transportation. Yet local society had been jolted and mobilized and it would have been difficult to return to an unchanged state of affairs. As the Mexican Revolution drew to a close and Silvestre Mariscal's grip on the port loosened up and disappeared, tensions within Acapulco's society began to grow even stronger when Spanish, German, American, and other foreign merchants slowly began to return to the seaport under more stable conditions. A manual on Pacific trade, in their commercial directory, described the lists of importers and exporters dominating commerce in Acapulco in the year of 1920; the actors and merchants were the same as before the Mexican Revolution.<sup>323</sup>

Between the late 1910s and early 1920s, commercial and diplomatic reports begin to multiply, and the wealth of information we have on Acapulco's declining mercantile society often comes from these later reports. Vice-consul Pangburn described, and probably exaggerated, the social and economic power of these houses: they "have practically controlled the commerce of this region and through their money and influence have exerted a dominating influence upon the local state government. They have controlled," he added, "the sale and export of agricultural products of the coast district of Guerrero and, through combinations with corrupt local authorities, they have forced the farmers to sell to them only and at their own price." Additionally, writing after the Revolution, "they [were] large landowners and, probably through political influence, they have avoided...the partition of their landholdings as 'ejidos' under the communal land law, even when American owned lands of this region had been so sacrificed."<sup>324</sup> By the late nineteenth century, a tightly-knit group of merchants had eventually weaved an extended network of corruption that entangled political and judicial authorities in Acapulco; they often acted against town merchants,

---

<sup>323</sup> The *Pacific Ports Manual* of 1920, in their commercial directory, describes the lists of importers and exporters dominating commerce in Acapulco.

<sup>324</sup> Pangburn to Alexander W. Weddell, 18 May 1927, NA, RG 84-1927 (800); RDS, 812.00/27789. In Ian Jacobs, *Ranchero Revolt. The Mexican Revolution in Guerrero* (Austin: The University of Texas Press, 1982) 124, 205.

middlemen, and other competitors whose situation was vividly described by many sympathizers who would later join the workers movement in 1919. They sent reports on the port's suffocating conditions. In a letter to President Álvaro Obregón, Isaías Acosta denounced the commercial monopoly that controlled a significant portion of the region's agricultural production, providing several examples of the abuses committed at the hands of the trade firms and the local mercantile classes.<sup>325</sup> "The common people," an American merchant explained naively but enthusiastically, "have opened their eyes...and the strong arm of oppression has been removed, so they are beginning to think for themselves. The moneyed interests that formerly controlled the commercial and industrial movements of our state worked to keep the people from learning the modern ways and did all they could to keep the working classes down under their control. Some of these large concerns still exist in this district, but their power has been temporarily checked and it is very probably that they will not be able to hold things back as before." He further made an allusion to European merchants. "These interests have been established in Acapulco for about 75 years, have always been and still are Anti-American, both commercially and politically; therefore, now it is the time for American capital to come in and take up this great work of instruction and progress...."<sup>326</sup> Interestingly, he mentioned 75 years clearly dating the establishment of a mercantile order during the Gold Rush and not after the Independence as many other historians have argued.

Upon returning to Acapulco, the Escuderos and Vidales forced their way into the maelstrom of political struggle in the port city while beginning to experiment with different forms

---

<sup>325</sup> Report from Isaías L. Acosta to President Alvaro Obregón, March 5, 1925. AGN, Fondo Obregón-Calles, box 33 exp. 104-G-19, fols. 1 – 8.

<sup>326</sup> And again, the reference and comparison to California was mentioned: "shall we help [Mexico] in a way that will not only be a credit to us forever but will at the same time open up a new field for us probably as great as the West was in the old pioneer days..." Hudson, "Great Possibilities in Mexico," *Frank Waterhouse & Company's Pacific Ports*.

of political organizations. Acapulco had been also part of a larger shift in national politics, and the early 1920s saw several different parties, political clubs, and associations being founded in Mexico; radical politics in Veracruz and some socialist parties in Mexico's Southeast reached national importance, others like the socialist worker's party in Acapulco remained in the undergrowth of regional politics.<sup>327</sup> Escudero's socialist/anarcho-syndicalist party (1919-1923) emerged from this national context, but also from the local reshuffling of Acapulco's merchant society, in plain decadence. Eventually, Acapulco's workers captured the municipality and governed from 1920 to 1923, forming an alliance of *fuerzas vivas* with a number of agrarian leagues sprouting all around the Costa Grande.

The story of the port's socialist movement is brief, punctuated by short-lived popular triumphs, as many academics have stressed, but triumphs that soon dissolved into political chaos. In the end, they accomplished very little, and yet they were able to unsettled an old nineteenth-century order, which by 1919, was teetering on the verge of collapse. The counter-reaction was swift and successful: merchants eventually managed to imprison Escudero, completely displacing him from Acapulco's politics. As socialism was swept aside by the Delahuertista rebellion of 1923, the conflict in Acapulco gave way to a full-blown agrarian insurrection, led by the Vidales brothers, that engulfed the port and its environs from 1923 to 1926.

Workers and artisans in Acapulco were mobilized and radicalized by the circulation of labor and foreign ideas across borders and among seaports. Through this circulation, the workers party of Acapulco and the agrarian movement created a hodgepodge of their own, mixing anarcho-syndicalist streaks from Magonismo and Mexico's Liberal Party with ideas taken from socialism and agrarianism, together with other forms of social and political organization found in military

---

<sup>327</sup> But none inherited a solid tradition of party politics; Mexico had no long-lasting party subculture around which society might have been structured. It never experienced party formation along the lines of Chile, Colombia or Venezuela. But like no other Latin American country at the time, Mexico experienced the irruption of the revolutionary masses (an old story told and retold by historians of the Mexican Revolution).

agricultural colonies and in the Casa del Obrero Mundial and the Industrial Workers of the World. Added to this mix was a strong anti-foreign sentiment that turned into an explosion of nationalism and a revival of popular Hispanophobia that swept through the region. Although perceived as foreign, many of these merchant families had been there for more than three generations.

Revolutionaries in Acapulco placed the problems of isolation and economic abandonment at the heart of the political struggle. The solutions to these ills came in the form of public works, infrastructure, and road building, which figured prominently in the social demands of Acapulco' workers' movements and were often framed as indispensable aspects of their labor and agrarian proposals. In this manner, public works and the arrival of roads in Acapulco became a potent symbol of change and regeneration, articulating disparate political demands and agglomerating different social projects. Moreover, Acapulco's fall into disrepair quickened an urgent need for connections to the interior of Mexico from which competing projections of roads emerged; that is, visions over the type of change that connectivity, namely telegraphs and roads, would bring.

What makes the project of Acapulco's workers movements stand out from many others of the time is this insistence on the promotion of what nowadays would be referred to as regional "mobility" and "connectivity." Roads promised to end economic decay and remoteness, fulfilling popular aspirations to renovate the port by opening new markets and dissolving old ones; but roads also seemed to promise peace, social stability, and the revitalization of an old socioeconomic order. These projections eventually clashed under a fierce political struggle in the 1920s.

In seeking to break the monopoly of trading firms, they also sought to find a place in the port's commercial order. Roads became the solution to open up an entrepôt in decline. Many groups in the port, mainly merchants, socialists, and agrarians, were all closely interconnected under the same economic system. They fought not over the design of roads, nor the allocation of federal resources, that was beyond their scope of influence, but over the right to participate in the

new market (or revitalized old market) that the road would supposedly open up. Guldí further notes that “the world of infrastructure was fraught with struggles for control...where the very survival of radical politics or local economies depended on how players negotiated complicated laws and distant administrations”<sup>328</sup>

However, merchants in Acapulco were powerless in these affairs, let alone socialists and *agraristas*. They had no credible leverage in negotiating complicated federal laws that dealt with the funding and laying of roads; central administrations were too distant from the thicket of Acapulco’s local politics. Instead, they sought to secure a place in a reshuffled order and capitalize on the “progress” that roads were meant to bring. Even though these groups, for the most part, were limited participants in constructing the highway from Mexico City to Acapulco, their leaders still presented themselves as key actors in their promotion and building. This allows for an analysis of popular aspirations projected onto public works, and especially onto roads that would eventually transform Acapulco beyond recognition.

The rest of the chapter deals with the vagaries of different projections about the future that roads would bring and how such projections were gradually distorted by a fierce power struggle among socialists, agrarians, and merchants that unintentionally left the door open for a deep transformation of Acapulco, once the road had been completed in 1927.

One projection about the future that roads would bring revolved around a nostalgia for the glorious past Acapulco had lost; roads promised to revive the olden days of commercial splendor. The aspirations, illusions, and expectations of both socialists and agrarians were attributed to road building. In this projection about the future, plans for economic regeneration, the improvement of education and public works as well as agrarian, labor, moral, and social proposals for reform were all concomitant with road building which meant putting an end to isolation, the mother of all ills

---

<sup>328</sup> Guldí, *Roads to Power*, 23.

in the port. As socialists and agrarians failed to achieve other goals, connectivity, and the “progress” it promised to bring, gradually turned into the only solution out of the maze.

The other projection associated with roads emerged from the chaos generated by the Delahuertista military rebellion in Mexico in the winter of 1923. As roads took longer than expected, and the local conflict between merchants and radicalized workers was exacerbated by the military rebellion, nostalgic and patriotic sentiments began to turn sour, smacking of Hispanophobia. The clash of interests worsened after 1923, merchants and generals increasingly resorted to outward violence against the workers’ movement, giving way to a spiraling conflict between them. In no time, the struggle overlapped with an agrarian insurrection that engulfed the entire region. The prospect of a complete collapse of the economic and social order in Acapulco and the region increased demands for pacification and disarmament. From this perspective, isolation was equaled with social anarchy, and road building with pacification and social peace. For merchants and military generals the arrival of roads guaranteed the equilibrium of a socioeconomic order increasingly threatened by “radical” movements.

### ***The Workers Movement, 1919-1923***

“The year of 1919 saw the world adrift,” and worldwide “either revolutionary or reactionary forces profited from xenophobia” and nationalism.<sup>329</sup> Popular riots in Acapulco were not merely a flash in the pan, as the Spanish owners of the cinema theater had earlier wished; riots were quickly translated into party making and electoral campaigns. That same year at the theater, another political rally took place. Unlike the previous rallies, this one was less improvised, and

---

<sup>329</sup> Mauricio Tenorio-Trillo, *I Speak of the City. Mexico City at the turn of the Twentieth Century* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2012), 93.

Juan Escudero, the leader of the rally, was fully in charge of the political situation. He was accompanied by members of his newly founded Workers' Party, the Partido Obrero de Acapulco (POA) and by Guerrero's candidate for governor, Rodolfo Neri—all Obregonistas. Some like the leaders of Acapulco's party were nominal socialists and anarcho-syndicalists who drew their inspiration from Magonismo, to the point of naming their official newspaper after its famous counterpart in California, run by the anarchist brother Flores Magón. The weekly newspaper *Regeneración de Acapulco* (created in 1919) was a telling example of Escudero's constant emulation of Magonismo. It only takes a quick look into the founders of Acapulco's worker's party to evince the presence of several sectors of seaport society at the rally: tradesmen, stevedores, municipal and court functionaries—even a poet—, as well as families of artisans and skilled workers like shoemakers, cabinetmakers, smiths, carpenters, and machinists who took part in the foundation of Acapulco's workers' party. The leading group included the sons of wealthy Spanish merchants, Francisco, Juan, and Felipe Escudero; the Vidales brothers, also merchants; the cabinetmakers and Basque-descendant brothers José and Mucio Tellechea. This variegated social group reflects the web of seaport relations, as family life, politics, and work were indissolubly linked within this movement.<sup>330</sup> Moreover, handcraft workers, faring badly under the old mercantile order, composed the majority of the population in Acapulco, and most of them joined the rank-and-file of the workers' movement present at the 1919 rally. Yet it seemed impossible for artisans in the port to be able to organize without a strong tradition of popular protest. Merchants and stevedores rallying behind Escudero's powerful nationalistic rhetoric completed the equation.

---

<sup>330</sup> Smiths, Santiago Solano and Sergio Romero; shoemakers like Ismael Otero; stevedores like the Diego brothers; and even a court functionary and poet, Lamberto Chávez and his employee, added to the host of middlemen and stevedores like Pablo Riestra, the brothers Dorantes, Camerino Rosales, Crescenciano Ventura, Martiniano Díaz, E. Londe Benítez, Julio Barrera, and Juan Pérez who had formed part of the stevedore league. Taibo and Ravelo, *Socialismo en un solo puerto*, 24; for an extensive depiction of professions and families as well as the locations of their houses of practically everyone in old Acapulco see chapters two and three of the memoirs of ex-governor Alejandro Gómez Maganda, *Acapulco en mi vida y en el tiempo* (Mexico: Libro Mex Editores, 1960), 49-82.

Many of the party leaders, disgruntled and radicalized, were the sons of the mercantile elite, most of them Spanish. Managed to articulate artisan demands and communicated them in a seductive discourse that promised the revival of Acapulco's glorious commercial past; stevedores had earlier provided the missing link between artisans and socialists by lending structure to the movement and organizing it around the league of stevedores, the Liga de Trabajadores a Bordo de los Barcos y Tierra created during the Revolution. For all these reasons, in the 1920s a workers' movement became possible, one structured around artisans but commanded by radicalized leaders, sons of Spanish merchants, and organized by stevedores.

The rally gives us a sense of the alluring rhetoric of Escudero's speeches which fused patriotism, notions of progress, labor rights, and infrastructure into one cause. Leaders pandered to the sentiments of the local Patriotic Assembly's, thus avoiding censure and the closing of an open tribune. In the end, many orators managed to deliver their speeches before three hundred people teeming inside the theater. When it was Escudero's turn, he addressed all popular expectations, while complying with the Patriotic Assembly's exigencies to evoke Mexico's Independence. The speeches were published in weekly newspapers and extensively distributed in Acapulco on September 15. After condemning Acapulco's economic situation, Escudero directed his tirade against Spanish conquerors which quickly became an attack against the Spanish merchant houses. "We have gathered here tonight," he noted, "to commemorate the sublime sacrifice of our ancestors [who] ignited by the fire of liberty... [fought] against the despotic Spanish government that has dominated our Nation for so many years." And he then added a rhetorical question, "who could comprehend the oppression suffered by our ancestors under the government of the Spanish Inquisition?"<sup>331</sup> In this way, Spanish merchants became a reincarnation

of colonial oppression, and such oppression could only be shaken off by the “progress” that a new workers’ movement would bring to the port. The speech must have come as a shock to the Spanish merchant families who saw the Escuderos, and their father, the Spanish patriarch from Santander, as part of their community. The speech, full of allusions to the original one he delivered earlier that same year of 1919, when the riot took place inside the theater, marked the beginning of a rhetoric of Hispanophobia.

In local elections, workers in Acapulco put on center stage the problem of isolation. Demands for infrastructure were infused with strong sentiments of patriotism that devolved into popular Hispanophobia. In the midst of atavistic revivals of anti-Spanish sentiment, both electoral candidates, Escudero and Neri, promised to initiate negotiations with the federal government to build the road from Mexico City to Acapulco, and thus break the power of the merchants’ monopoly over Acapulco’s economy.<sup>332</sup> For decades, they argued, lack of public works and rickety communication networks had been the main source of Acapulco’s commercial decline. The promotion of public works and road building was crucial for the workers’ party to agglomerate different actors under one banner and one movement.

The workers’ movement eventually produced a well-defined charter. The general points of the POA’s charter were simple, far from radical, though for the times they were so: just wages; protection of individual rights; the elimination of noxious elements within the government; participation in elections; an eight-hour working day; distribution of land for peasants; extended educational programs; improved health conditions for workers through national campaigns; and the construction of the highway from Mexico to Acapulco. But in the eyes of the members of the workers’ movement, merchants became an obstacle. Workers spurred demands for labor rights and

---

<sup>332</sup> *Regeneración*, No. 28 September, 1920; and No. 29, October 3, 1920. Alejandro Martínez Carbajal, *Juan Escudero y Amadeo Vidales* (Mexico: Editorial Revolución, 1961), 59; and most likely taken from Carbajal’s book see Carlos Illades, *Breve historia de Guerrero* (México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2000), 88.

the building of roads, which in turn became a form of rallying popular support behind Escudero and the socialist leaders. But their conflict with Acapulco's merchants deepened and the construction of the road mired in insolvency, insurgencies, bureaucracies, and lack of intent. Out of frustration, socialists began blending Hispanophobia and the project of road building into a 'radical' discourse which was popular among artisans, middlemen, and petty merchants. Their strong sentiments of nostalgia for a world they had lost were projected onto the prospect of change that roads were meant to bring.

Elections finally came around in January 1921, and like many others at the time it was a fiercely contested affair, wildly swinging between upheavals and mutinies as candidates sought to overpower each other. While results were still up in the air, the town hall was stormed by Escuderistas, while the opposition candidate, Juan H. Luz, a politician and a merchant with ties to the Fernández & Co. Spanish merchant house, and one of the Sutters blocked the entrance with a platoon of soldiers and supporters, arresting some members of the workers' party. The tug of war continued until the Workers Party of Acapulco was eventually elected to run the municipal government. But as soon as the Partido Obrero de Acapulco took power, merchants pulled the strings of judicial and political networks, and Escudero's administration tripped again and again over judicial courts, orders of arrest, and military harassments, eventually stumbling into a trap in the judiciary system. Escudero was arrested while in office and jailed for several months in 1921.

Meanwhile, in the summer of 1921, Federal Secretary of Communications and Public Works, Amado Aguirre, announced the first works of a stretch of roads that would run from Acapulco northward, to Acahuizotla, halfway between the port and Chilpancingo.<sup>333</sup> The news spread fast, and a flurry of pamphlets invaded Acapulco's streets with rumors of the final

---

<sup>333</sup> J.R. Benítez, Comisión Nacional de Caminos. Guía histórica y descriptiva de la carretera México-Acapulco (México: Editorial Cultura, 1928), 10-11.

construction of roads. “It was about time”, *Regeneración* exclaimed in its pages, “that our State (of Guerrero) could finally reap the benefits of this communication”, and copies of letters from the president, governor, and general attorney were distributed; their words, decisions, and announcements to build the road were heard, read out loud, and ricocheted all around the port by those few town criers who could read. The local press became a tool for political organization, as it rallied support in favor of political causes like the construction of the highway or the amelioration of public services.<sup>334</sup>

The impact of federal projections to build roads began to be felt in Acapulco. The question of national funding and the allocation of resources to Guerrero’s infrastructure fell squarely on the hands of the Secretary of Communications, later on the Comisión Nacional de Caminos. So for socialists it was not a matter of competition over access to resources, that matter was too high up in politics for members of the *ayuntamiento* to decide. It was rather a matter of using the banner of public works and road building to advance their political agenda. Many workers joined the construction of the road from Acapulco to Acahuizotla. The road proved to be an unexpected source of jobs that gave a boost to the workers’ party. But roads meant something more, less tangible than resources and jobs. It also meant accolades, popular support, mobilizations, and a certain local prestige for Acapulco’s socialists who had placed infrastructure building at the core of the electoral campaign. It fitted perfectly into an evolving vision of progress projected onto road building. Along with such pamphlets transcribing the decisions made up in the realm of “high politics”, flyers and invitations to a political mobilization appeared all around; soon, a popular

---

<sup>334</sup> *Regeneración*, No. 59, May 15, But the effervescence of the local press had its unintended consequences and, for most of the part, an undistinguishable jumble of news and rumors were fed and disseminated by crowds and a very young population in the port. One of Guerrero’s governors in the 1950s recalls in his memoirs to have joined an entire flock of adolescents who descended onto the port to distribute the worker’s party newspaper; the only thing one could hear was the “vibrant street cry, Reeegeneración a cinco centavos”, among other small personalized newspapers of the movement like *El Mañana Rojo*, and the full-throated response of the opposition in those like *El Fragor*, *El Rapé*, *El Liberal*, and *El Combate*, most of them ran by local merchants and generals. See Carbajal, *Escudero y Vidales*, 74.

celebration was hosted by the municipality, under the leadership of the POA, with the intention to speed up the construction of the road and demand the liberation of Escudero, still languishing in jail. For socialists, roads meant renewal. And renewal meant adjusting to the changing circumstances, to present the workers' party as the bearers of progress, progress which road building would bring when works from Acapulco reached Chilpancingo. By 1921, socialists thought the arrival was inevitable; only the timing was uncertain. They had fully and publicly endorsed roads, seeking to speed up the pace of their construction by mobilizing the workers' party, distributing flyers and letters announcing federal decisions to building the road, actively participating in the laying of tarmac roads and the construction of bridges.

For socialists, the arrival of roads had become inevitable, or so they thought, and in this way they could forcefully respond to the opposition who claimed that the POA's leaders were responsible for the port's dereliction. Escudero was eventually released. This time the socialist movement was poised for significant changes that would revert Acapulco's fall into disrepair. Apart from reducing market prices and fixing tax limits, and introducing some minor administrative changes, undermining the power of the merchant houses, he shifted the focus from road building to public works. Members of the *ayuntamiento* began to be paid fixed wages (five pesos to the *regidores* and eight to the municipal president); the municipal police was incorporated into the local administration and instead of being financed by merchants it became a municipal body paid, nonetheless, by the worker's party. Escudero's brother founded and ran the treasury and the initial funding came, ironically, from their father. He reduced market prices and fixed taxes; moreover, he created municipal councils all around the district to facilitate bureaucratic and legal processes for residents living far away from the port. Socialists, however, were up against the effects of years of turmoil and isolation. Escudero launched campaigns to sanitize the port,

exhorting residents to drain cesspools, to clean and paint their houses and sweep Acapulco's streets, even to begin planting and irrigating gardens.<sup>335</sup>

That same year, when socialists were improving sanitary conditions, the British Admiralty vividly described Acapulco's deterioration, while indirectly recognizing the local administration's efforts to renew the port, or at least keep it clean: the "town is mean and crowded, with narrow streets"; and buildings were made of adobe and were one-storied; "chief buildings"—a church, custom-house, market, town hall, and gaol—had been wrecked by a hurricane in 1912. Trade—exports of sesame, coffee, hides and fruit—was "dwindling owing to [a] lack of railway communication with the interior", and by 1915 soap and oil factories and cotton mills had already "closed or on point of closing." There were no sewerage works and water had to be brought into town in jars from wells in neighborhood. The town, the Admiralty concluded, was unhealthy, "but efforts have been made to improve sanitary conditions."<sup>336</sup>

Public work improvement went hand in hand with a rhetorical emphasis on the reform of public morals, indeed, a carryover of nineteenth-century liberal thought, enlightened porfirismo, and Maderista reforms of public morals, which meant the elimination of alcoholism, gambling, squalor, vagrancy, but also a strong support for education programs and public works like the construction of roads, hospitals, rails and irrigating systems. Socialists in Acapulco quickly closed "vice centers", publishing tirades against alcohol consumption and gambling, allegedly induced by the "corrupt" habits of Spanish merchants. Indeed, in Acapulco's *Regeneración* several articles were published in which agrarian proposals were combined with reforms of public works and public morals. Moralizing stories of drunken peasants and workers made it constantly into the weekly's pages, always fused with proposals to create agricultural colonies as a way of eliminating

---

<sup>335</sup> Martínez, *Escudero y Vidales*, 59.

<sup>336</sup> Great Britain Admiralty, Geographical Section of the Naval Intelligence Division, Naval Staff. *A Handbook of Mexico* (London: His Majesty's Stationary Office, 1921), 222.

alcohol consumption and promoting good and responsible behavior.<sup>337</sup> Another more ominous article, *Los pueblos se suicidan*, was dedicated to the problem of “those vices that have so insensibly dominated our people”, exhorting the people in its last section to stop serving “the powerful and the rich” by falling into the trap of vices, and proposing to “look to the future ” and create two agricultural colonies of four hundred men that would cost around 50,000 MXN pesos.<sup>338</sup>

*Instruir y Construir* was one of the biweekly’s taglines that recurrently appeared in Acapulco’s *Regeneración*, but in Acapulco *instruir* had an infrastructural twist to a motto from Magonismo, *Instruir al Pueblo*. Given Acapulco’s isolation, all these disparate social reforms formed part of a broader vision of progress projected onto road building and the improvement of public works; sweeping social reforms of public morals, education, and the establishment of agrarian colonies were dependent on infrastructure development.<sup>339</sup>

Merchants had placed the issue of Acapulco’s abandonment and lack of public works at the heart of Mexico City’s press; socialists had responded with a rhetorical emphasis on such issues. *Instruir y Construir*, however, had to be along the lines of a Socialist platform that increasingly radicalized its rhetoric vis-à-vis a merchant community dedicating all its efforts to violently fend off the advance of the Escuderistas. Increasingly, the merchants’ reticence and lack of collaboration was perceived as a direct attack against Acapulco’s general improvement, and there were rumors of serious efforts on the part of merchants to prevent at all costs the arrival of roads.

---

<sup>337</sup> *Regeneración*, No. 59, May 25, 1921. “Se le condujo a la guardia establecida en la Mayoría de órdenes, donde todo aquel que pasaba se divertía con su asqueroso aspecto, pues estaba vazqueando y revolcando” Mr. Efrén Villalvazo, a cantina owner, was severely condemned for allowing drunkards like “Don Paco” to wander around, “vomiting and crawling” in his “disgusting aspect” as other town dwellers laughed at him.

<sup>338</sup> *Regeneración* , No 29. October 3, 1920 ‘Nuestros hijos crecerán sin poder establecer familia; nuestras hijas se desarrollarán para ir a servir a los PODEROSOS a los RICOS...para venirse a hundir en el tormento o la tempestad levantada sobre nuestros porvenires por los vicios...BUSQUEMOS EL FUTURO, pensando en el establecimiento de la colonia de agricultura...comenzará nuestro desarrollo y unidos todos podremos no solo implantar una sino dos.”

<sup>339</sup> Taibo, Socialismo en un solo puerto 34-5; Martínez, Escudero y Vidales, 59.

The conflict worsened and the construction of roads took longer than expected, for military agrarian colonies had budgetary problems and implementing public works went beyond the resources of the local administration. Meanwhile, Escuderistas began to create their own scapegoat, to attack whoever seemed to be against “Acapulco’s progress”; and progress meant public works, moral reform, education, and agricultural colonies, which were then all tied to the prospect of road building. Merchants and commercial agents from the Gold Rush like the Sutters were attacked by the Escudero. Reginaldo Sutter, customhouse administrator at the time, and Juan H. Luz were depicted as “verdaderos ejemplares de las épocas del porfirismo” and were in no time associated with a counterrevolution. Customhouse corruption was denounced and seaport society was divided and polarized between “foreigners” and “locals.”<sup>340</sup> The spirals of revolution and counterrevolution eventually ended up in an attempt to arrest and murder Escudero in 1922. He escaped but was left paralytic, and eventually resigned. The reaction to Escudero’s murder attempt reverberated across the entire region.

By contrast, merchants silently made provisions, waiting for roads to arrive, whenever they would come. Merchants were more concerned, however, with the upsurge of nationalism and popular Hispanophobia in the region. Parallel to the slow advance of roads ran the fast channels of the local press through which rumors of arbitrary actions on the part of the “Spanish colony” became common knowledge. Escudero’s brutal arrest and murder attempt by the chief of military operations had shocked many POA supporters all around the Costa Grande. A stream of complaints for the arrest of Escudero accompanied an ever-growing flow of caustic letters that flooded the office of Obregón’s personal secretary, warning high authorities of the impending destruction of the “Spanish Colony”. One letter from the leader of a *defensa social* in Ixtla, upon hearing of

---

<sup>340</sup> In *Regeneración*, number 108, 24 September, 1922 they attack Reginaldo Sutter, customhouse administrator and Juan H. Luz in the municipal government as “verdaderos ejemplares de las épocas del porfirismo.” They denounced the corruption of custom houses and at the same time promoted local businesses attacked by the ‘Spanish Colony,’ but supported by the POA. See *Regeneración*, 119, 10 December 1922.

Escudero's arrest, warned authorities that if the oppressive situation continued they would be forced to descend upon the port and wreck havoc among the mercantile elite: "not a single merchant would be left alive, and every commerce would be sacked and torched, all Spanish women would be raped." He further demanded the replacement of Acapulco's federal soldiers, "the enemies of the workers party."<sup>341</sup>

Spanish merchants reacted. A new competing projection of what the road would change was slowly emerging as a counterforce to the socialists' program: roads would quell revolutionary movements through pacification and social order. For a few weeks, members of the three houses, through *El Universal*, indirectly placed the problem of Acapulco's abandonment and isolation at the heart of Mexico City's press; roads and public works became an urgent solution to the problem of Hispanophobia, which was assuming ominous proportions. More and more news and rumors were travelling fast and deep into the *sierra*. Spanish merchants did little to assuage the situation, and conservative generals who sympathized with the merchant houses became the scourge of agrarian and workers leaders in Acapulco and the Costa Grande. That same summer when the construction of the road from Acapulco to Acahuizotla was announced in 1921, several prominent members of the three merchant houses who had been locked in a battle with an agrarian colony were murdered; their haciendas were sacked and torched. The victims, the Nebreda brothers and Lorenzo Quesada, had closely collaborated in joint enterprises with the Hnos Fernández and Co., whose members sent a letter to *El Universal* condemning Guerrero's authorities for allowing the emergence of a "Hispanophobic campaign" in Acapulco.<sup>342</sup> Mexico City's daily responded swiftly; and since their reporters had not been received in Acapulco by local authorities, *El*

---

<sup>341</sup> And he remarks that "El costeño de su tierra tiene mucho de bárbaro, es buen amigo e implacable enemigo... Todo podrá evitarse con que la Guarnición Federal que es enemiga del Partido Obrero, se sustituya por otra en que los jefes sean más ilustrados. Por patriotismo da estas noticias." Letter from Francisco A. Campos to Fernando Torreblanca and Alvaro Obregón, Tixtla Guerrero. AGN, Ob/Calles, box 293, 811-E-7.

<sup>342</sup> Señor Marqués de los Arcos, via the Spanish Legation in Mexico, to Minister of Foreign Relations, Aarón Sáenz, September 5, 1921. AGN, Ob/Calles, box 293, 811-E-7.

*Universal* condemned the murders and for several days attacked Guerrero's authorities in its headlines: "the [Spanish] colony," ran one of its articles "established more than sixty years ago, has always been welcomed by its neighbors until now that the Apostle of Anti-Hispanicism (*Apóstol del Anti-Hispanicismo*), [Escudero], has come to stir up the masses."<sup>343</sup> No sense of proportion considered, the metropolitan newspaper considered in its editorial, *El repugnante crimen de Acapulco*, that such events were the harbinger of an imminent Mexican "Boxer Rebellion;" Mexico was at risk of being invaded by "civilizing armies" marching from foreign countries to save missionaries and foreign merchants, as had happened in China, when the Qing dynasty collapsed under a mixture of imperial brutality and anti-foreign sentiments. Simultaneously, *El Universal* published an article on the road from Mexico to Acapulco. The daily suggested to inhibit the "*boxerización*" of the port, improving public works and ending its isolation and abandonment, as well as eliminating the "*savagery*" of movements dominated by "a mongrel, cross-eyed jingoism" (*patrioterismo bizco y patizambo*) that weighed heavily on the "Spanish colony"; moreover, the chief of military operation told the daily's correspondents that Acapulco "resembles more a cemetery than a port, and without street lighting or police what are we to do?"

For merchants, roads meant pacification, putting an end to a socialist movement that was hardening with Hispanophobia and becoming a serious threat to their interests. However, nowhere in the documents is it possible to find any outspoken or organized opposition, on behalf of the merchant community, against the arrival of roads; that is a narrative formed afterwards by Paco Ignacio Taibo and Renato Ravelo, and Mario Gill, among other historians who formed an explanation solely based on the rumors and letters of the POA supporters who blamed an increasingly hostile merchant community for thwarting a large-scale project that was beyond

---

<sup>343</sup> *El Universal*, July 27, 1921, "la colonia tiene de establecida más de setenta años, siempre con beneplácito de los vecinos hasta ahora que el Apóstol del Hispanismo, Escudero, ha venido a agitar a las masas usando de su impunidad como comandante de la policía, puesto que actualmente ocupa." No one noticed the irony of Escudero being the son of a Spanish merchant from Santander.

everyone's hands: the total cost of the road from Mexico City to Acapulco was almost ten million pesos, Escudero could barely provide funding for the agricultural colonies created by the workers' party.<sup>344</sup> Additionally, there was still no national program for road building, no national revenue from gasoline taxes funneled to such large-scale projects that involved multiple actors above the *ayuntamiento*. Everyone in Acapulco was in desperate need of receiving the benefits of connectivity (whichever they might be—the benefits were uncertain); what they all knew, however, was that isolation and abandonment was becoming a problem for everyone in Acapulco, including merchants.

Political interests clashed and the conflict finally came to a head when merchants and generals, deciding not to wait any longer for the arrival of roads to dissolve the socialist movement, took advantage of an internal squabble among Escuderistas, and invaded the municipal offices; the army chief of operations shot at Escudero who managed to flee through the window; though not killed, he was severely injured—from then onwards remaining paralytic. The short-lived Socialist *ayuntamiento* was dissolved in the spring of 1922, and an improvised civil body was created.

In the midst of this turmoil, roads never arrived: Acapulco remained with a tarmac track leading nowhere. “To continue the Mexico City-Cuernavaca-Balsas route to the Pacific Coast,” explained a report on Mexico’s roads, the “line was [built] about ten or twelve years ago” and tarmac had been rolled for about five miles out from Acapulco-northward towards lower Balsas River. But “work was then interrupted and has never since been resumed. Little remains of the work done at that time.” The situation was disheartening: “most of the stretch between Chilpancingo and Acapulco (the long and difficult part of the Mexico-Acapulco route) is still merely a mountain trail, difficult even for horses in the [rainy] season.”<sup>345</sup>

---

<sup>344</sup> Vito Alessio Robles, *Acapulco en la historia y en la leyenda* (Mexico: Ediciones Botas, 1948) 187.

<sup>345</sup> “Individual lines in the states of Guerrero, Colima, Jalisco” August 21, 1923. FAPECFT-CDEEUM, 080102: Agregado Militar de Estados Unidos, Informes, 5/7, 314, 315.

### ***“Robusteciéndose por el mar:” The Port, the Agrarian Movement, and the Revolutionary Hinterland, 1923-1926***

Isolation continued to deepen Acapulco’s commercial abandonment as Mexico stumbled upon yet another crisis. Rafael Ortega, a well-known labor leader, described 1923 as a “tragic year, one of tremendous agitation, ideological ferment, real anarchy, and perverse demagoguery”<sup>346</sup> Adolfo de la Huerta, one of the national figures and strong pillars of the Sonoran Triangle, arrived in Veracruz on December 5 1923, bombastically received by General Guadalupe Sánchez with a large celebration. The largest military insurrection in the 1920s was unfolding before the eyes of a paralyzed federal government. Within days, the insurrectionary wave engulfed strategic states: Tabasco, Jalisco, Oaxaca, Chihuahua, Campeche, Chiapas, Yucatán, and Guerrero. They all bore the brunt of insurrectionary chiefs of military operations.<sup>347</sup>

Rómulo Figueroa sided with the insurrection in the north of Guerrero, rose up in arms, and toppled Governor Rodolfo Neri, sending the shockwaves of the Delahuertista rebellion all around Guerrero, eventually reaching Acapulco. That same winter of 1923, the three Escudero brothers, who had been the protégés of the toppled Obregonista governor, openly declared themselves against the military rebellion. But they were swiftly arrested, left several days to languish in Acapulco’s prison at the fort of San Diego. Their mother, recently widowed, had seen how her entire family had been split apart by a generational clash between the Spanish merchant patriarch and the three revolutionary sons. Yet in a last ditch effort to save her family, she began negotiations with the army to release them from jail. Late in December, the Escuderos were released from prison and promised safe passage into a second exile. They were driven to the Aguacatillo, but quickly betrayed by their captors, and summarily executed at early dawn.

---

<sup>346</sup> Fowler-Salamini *Agrarian Radicalism*, 35 (Agetro, *las luchas*, p. 184; Clark, *Organized labor*, p. 34)

<sup>347</sup> Pedro Castro, *Adolfo de la Huerta. La integridad como arma de la revolución* (Mexico and Spain: Siglo XXI, 1998), 209-213.

The port plunged into chaos. Delahuertismo had dealt the final blow to Acapulco's workers' movement, yet this did not spell its end. Heather Fowler-Salamini, in her study on Veracruz, notes that Mexico's conservative political forces, rallying behind the federal army and the Delahuertista rebellion, indirectly contributed to the consolidation and radicalization of peasant movements.<sup>348</sup> The rearrangement of the political landscape during the years of 1923-1924 resulted in several peasant leagues being armed by the government and organized into guerrillas to fight off Delahuertista bastions and *guardias blancas*. The Costa Grande had seen the emergence of several peasant leagues and agrarian military colonies, most of them organized by leaders of Acapulco's socialist party. Salamini further argues that several factors had to "broaden the vision of the peasantry" before they could become allies with worker forces: these factors were human displacement, the creation of modern means of communication and transportation, but most importantly for the case of Guerrero, given its isolation and lack of communications, was the interregional mobilization of radicalized middlemen, small-town merchants, teachers, party and agrarian leaders between Acapulco and many of its surrounding rural entrepôts. In many places in Mexico, leaders from "the anarcho-syndicalist movement and the Communist Party acted as urban allies to supply experienced urban leadership, financing, and radical ideology to the... peasant movement."<sup>349</sup> In Acapulco, they forged a solid alliance between peasant leagues and socialist and anarcho-syndicalist parties. Moreover, the government had mobilized and armed these agrarian and worker forces to quash the military insurrection. At the height of the de la Huerta's rebellion, this alliance turned into a fully grown agrarian/worker force armed by the government, led and

---

<sup>348</sup> Heather Fowler-Salamini, *Agrarian Radicalism in Veracruz, 1920-1938* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1978), 37.

<sup>349</sup> In the case of Veracruz "one finds a strong radical, trade-union movement and its powerful offshoots, the tenant movement and the local communist party...these were crucial in the mobilization, organization, and radicalization of the Veracruz peasantry" in Fowler-Salamini, *Agrarian Radicalism*, xvii, 25.

organized by local agrarian leaders and workers, but consolidated and radicalized by conservative military forces who threatened their existence.

Acapulco's hinterland exploded into a dizzying array of warring factions until they engulfed the entire port when they began fighting for "la plaza de Acapulco." By 1924, with the Delahuertista rebellion receding, the federal government sought to disarm all parties, including self-appointed pacifiers in the region. But this saw the emergence of new actors in an already complicated scene of pacification forces who eventually forged a stronger alliance with workers and agrarian leagues.

A clear example of this alliance between agrarian leagues, worker unions, and pacifying forces was the armed peasant league, the Liberating Movement of United People behind the Supreme Government commanded by self-appointed General Valente de la Cruz. A primary-school teacher from the Costa Grande, De la Cruz had constantly moved around the region, founding Tecpan de Galeana's worker's party and closely collaborating with agraristas in Tecpan and Escuderistas in Acapulco. In this way, the situation in Tecpan was spinning out of control: roving bands of self-defense associations, *defensas sociales*, and Delahuertistas commanded by a merchant and son of a "potentate," most likely with ties to Acapulco's economy, according to Valente de la Cruz, were becoming the scourge of Tecpan and neighboring San Jerónimo. They raided agrarian colonies, killed agraristas and small-holding peasants, and threatened members of Tecpan's worker's party; meanwhile agraristas in the region confiscated lands and set off an exodus of *pequeños propietarios* who sought refuge in Acapulco. Interestingly, Valente de la Cruz, being a teacher and a local leader who defined himself as "pacifier of the region", saw his office flooded with different letters and complaints from these spiraling conflicts, leading him to adopt the role of moderator between what he saw as two clearly-defined blocks: small-holding landowners, Delahuertistas, self-defense associations, and merchants, on the one hand; and on the

other, Escuderistas, worker party members and agraristas. With these letters in hand, he told Álvaro Obregón and the president of the National Agrarian Party, “I’ll prove to you that both contending parties have resorted to me in order to solve their conflicts in peace.” But the situation was too complicated for a quick pacification. From 1923 to 1924, as the Escuderistas were quashed in Acapulco by the remnants of Delahuertismo, socialists and agrarians began converging on myriad nodes of political organization in the Costa Grande. These nodes were worker parties and agrarian military colonies organized against a common enemy based at Acapulco, merchants who had sided with the military rebellion but who had indissoluble connections, interests, and armed *guardias blancas* in Acapulco’s hinterland. These merchants, in the words of one of the pacifiers, were becoming stronger through the sea—“robusteciéndose por el mar.”<sup>350</sup>

Indeed, an alliance of merchants opposed these mobile revolutionary forces by controlling the seaports of Acapulco and Ixtapa-Zihuatanejo, which meant a bountiful source of revenue and arms, and mobility of forces with all of their connections to the sea. The situation prolonged the conflict between both warring camps. To tip the balance in their favor, the Vidales brothers gathered their revolutionary forces of workers and peasants and began planning a full-scale invasion of Acapulco, which would cut off merchants’ sea-based support in the conflict. They would also close off Acapulco to foreign “newcomers,” as it all gradually became evident with their proposed plans. But before moving forward, they declared a truce, held back their armed forces, and began negotiations with Álvaro Obregón’s and Plutarco Elías Calles’ successive governments. A tense truce was declared in Acapulco. Meanwhile, the military rebellion in Mexico was quashed and Adolfo de la Huerta, ultimately defeated, left for California to live his exile in Los Angeles.

---

<sup>350</sup> Valente de la Cruz to A. Obregón, December 10-25, 1923. AGN, Ob/Calles, Box 5, 101-R2-A1; Alejandro Carbajal, *Escudero y Vidales*, 136-151.

This time, for the government, the construction of the road was of utmost importance; during Calles's presidency, road building and a general improvement in communication networks in Mexico was seen as a necessary precondition to disarm and pacify the country. In November 1924 the government resumed road works, this time not from the port northwards, but from Acahuizotla southwards to Xolapa and Xaltianguis, towards Acapulco. Already by 1925, peasant leagues and agraristas had been deeply involved in a more improvised forms of building roads, in the Acapulco-Acahuizotla route that had been suspended since 1923. The Vidales brothers, using their connections as prominent merchants from the Costa Grande, had locally administered the payment of salaries to road workers. Agrarian forces and small merchant administrators saw in the building of roads a possibility to realize their plans for an economic renewal of Acapulco and coastal Guerrero. Their plans were based on extremely nationalistic and militaristic visions.

Expecting the arrival of roads, military agrarian colonies began to form all along the coast of Guerrero under the umbrella-cooperative Unión de Ambas Costas. Such colonies, the agrarian program proposed, should provide services necessary for "a modern life" to guarantee "conditions of hygiene, beauty, and harmony." Local societies in charge of such colonies were meant to initiate the constructions of residences for *colonos*, and build schools, nursing homes, public libraries, plazas, gardens, and recreation centers. One of the "*poblaciones agrícolas*" was named Juan R. Escudero. Backed by Calles and the CROM, all of these agricultural colonies took over many haciendas.<sup>351</sup>

Disarmament, however, was a nagging concern for the federal government, and pacification was taking longer than expected, partly because Calles' government was dithering: to disarm agrarian movements and leagues meant cutting off a large base of support, but not doing so meant handing over entire territories to autonomous agrarian leaders, fully armed, like the

---

<sup>351</sup> Carbajal, *Escudero y Vidales*, 136-151.

brothers Vidales. “The agrarians retain their arms and absolute control of the coastal region”, told the chief of military operations to the American Consul in Acapulco.<sup>352</sup> Agraristas also argued that if disarmed they would be left at the mercy of *guardias blancas* and, still worse, at the mercy of large roving bands of ex-Delahuertistas. Later that year, the construction of the road ended in the hands of the Comisión Nacional de Caminos, displacing local administrators belonging to the Vidalista movement, and speeding the pace of road works. But the ambivalence of pacification coupled with the violence of merchant forces in the Costa Grande, eventually sparked off an insurrection of eight hundred armed men led by erstwhile merchant brothers, Amadeo and Baldomiro Vidales, against the central government. Valente de la Cruz, Tecpan’s schoolteacher and sympathizer of the agrarian cause, was the first to rise up in arms upon hearing that he had been declared a rebel after participating in the fight against Delahuertistas, and along with Tecpan’s worker’s party and other peasant leagues, they joined forces with Amadeo and Baldomiro Vidales in 1926. Feliciano Radilla, a peasant, member of the Atoyac’s Liga de Campesinos de Atoyac also joined them. The entire Costa Grande was in flames, and Acapulco experienced a veritable invasion from the Costa Grande, which resulted in the creation of several local governments supported by the Colonia Agricola Militar Unión de Ambas Costas from 1925-1926.

The genesis of the agrarian movement is worth noting. Before the mid 1920s, the agrarian movement had begun with the mass coastal mobilization of peasants, school teachers, clerks, and town merchants during the Revolution, particularly under Julián Blanco’s movement that spread to the entire coast before the outbreak of the civil war. The movement was kept alive and organized into a more structured organization under the influence of Acapulco’s workers party in the early

---

<sup>352</sup> FAPECFT-CDEEUM, 1925, Exp. 100203: Agregado Militar de Estados Unidos, Informes, legajo 4/7, fojas 213-14, Inv. 40. “Political Issues and Problems, Public Order and Safety, July 15, 1925. In 1925,

1920s. It was then further organized by the Vidales brothers and town merchants of the Costa Grande, but became radicalized by Escudero's anarcho-syndicalist rhetoric, turned impatient by the ambivalence of the federal government, and finally turned rebellious against the government by merchant violence.

The mixture proved explosive: popular Hispanophobia came back with a vengeance, allied this time with an agrarian insurrection—dealing a severe blow to a crumbling mercantile order, and particularly to families and members of the Spanish merchant firms. “As long as the Spanish Colony exists,” explained the father of four jornaleros who sympathized with the insurrection, “there will be no progress for the people.”

These gentlemen [Spanish merchants] do not understand and will never understand the people ... pejoratively calling them mobs [*chusmas*] and those mobs are the ones who built the Teotihuacan pyramids, the palaces of Uxmal and Mitla; they are the ones who have raised great cathedrals and palaces admired all around the Republic; they have built railways and laid the lines for the telegraph—those mobs have spilled their blood generously to live free.<sup>353</sup>

In their eyes, the creation of value and its accumulation was layered in a deep history of popular aspirations that had been time and again frustrated by the ambitions and rapacity of the “Spanish colony” in Acapulco. The odd medley of pyramids, railways, telegraphs, and cathedrals mentioned in his letter entailed an accumulation of forms of progress carried out by *el pueblo*, currently unrewarded; Acapulco fell behind due to the presence of Spanish merchants in the port and the region. The port was never able to belong to this unusual circuit of progress, infrastructure,

---

<sup>353</sup> “Esos señores no comprenden ni comprenderán jamás a los pueblos, a los que llaman despectivamente ‘chusmas’ y esas chusmas . . . son las que hicieron las pirámides de Teotihuacan, los palacios de Uxmal y de Mitla, son las que han hecho las grandes catedrales y palacios que se admirán en la república, son las que hicieron los ferrocarriles [y tendieron] los hilos del telégrafo... las que con su sudor riegan los campos y penetran en las profundidades de la tierra a sacar sus tesoros, . . . son las que brindan su sangre generosamente para vivir libres.” In Report from Isaías L. Acosta to President Alvaro Obregón, March 5, 1925. AGN, Fondo Obregón-Calles, box 33 exp. 104-G-19, fols. 1 – 8.

and “ancient splendors.” This indeed provides a glimpse into the worldview of popular Hispanophobia around the time.

Agraristas drafted a plan for the region’s economic renewal, partly in response to commercial decline in Acapulco and the region’s abandonment, but partly in response to the proliferation of popular Hispanophobia and anti-foreign sentiments, spreading fast as the insurrection unfolded across the region. The joint movement that had started with Escudero culminated in the Plan del Veladero. According to historian Ian Jacobs, the plan blended commercial interests with popular aspirations and, one might also argue, with nostalgic and patriotic visions of progress seen in the previous letter. “The Vidales movement,” Jacobs further notes, “is most strikingly cast in a nineteenth-century mold” denouncing three hundred years of “odious Spanish tyranny,” establishing a direct historical connection between Acapulco’s Spanish merchant houses and the Plan of Iguala, which had guaranteed the protection of Spanish interests after Mexican independence. In their view of history, the nineteenth century had enabled Spanish commercial monopolies to endure, remaining untouched through the Reforma and the Porfiriato. It went farther than the Escuderos, proposing the expulsion *en masse* of Spanish and Iberian foreigners living in Mexico, a revival of the 1829 Spanish expulsion that Juan Álvarez had vehemently opposed at the time. They called the movement behind the proclamation, the Libertarian Movement of Mexican Economic Regeneration. It was a bit of everything: socialist, anti-imperialist, antifeudal, and agrarian, an ambitious project seeking a large-scale plan of economic reintegration for the country; certainly, Acapulco and the Costa Grande, formed an integral part of Mexico’s envisaged transformation—if only there were better communications. Instead, the Vidales proposed to confiscate Spanish properties and turn them over to the free municipalities and the military agricultural colonies immersed in ambitious public works funded

by the merchant brothers who had chipped in with \$26, 835.00 MXN pesos.<sup>354</sup> In sum, throughout the years of gestation that had started with Escudero's socialists, there had been a great deal invested in the movement and the Costa Grande: commercial interests, money, and popular aspirations. They would not allow merchants and poor communication networks to dismantle the entire plan.

With the rebellion at its peak, merchants from the three houses increasingly saw many of their members executed, their interests for the first time seriously endangered, their haciendas sacked, and their lands overridden by agrarian forces: the region's isolation, with its rickety roads, now became a serious threat for merchants. They naturally sided with the government against the Vidalista rebellion, while simultaneously striking alliances with white guards and the local remnants of Delahuertismo to fight agrarians, and inhibit the sprouting of more workers and peasant's movements all around the region. Jesús Fernández told a high official in the Banco de México that "it would be very convenient for the Federal Government to put an end, once and for all, to this group of disorderly people who so far have wrecked havoc in the entire region."<sup>355</sup> That meant pacifying the region and to do so better communications were paramount. The Spanish merchant added— upon his departure from Acapulco, fleeing back to Spain— that there was widespread fear; the "military garrison is small" and the threat of a full-scale agrarian invasion descending upon the port was becoming a reality.

On his way to Spain, hopeless and completely bankrupt, the merchant patriarch further mentioned that their soap and ice company "La Especial" had been sacked by Vidales' troops during the summer. The Fernández brothers filed a claim for 72, 906.00 MXN pesos mentioning that they had no intention to involve the Spanish embassy, since they had lived in Mexico for a

---

<sup>354</sup> Jacobs, *Ranchero Revolt*, 125-27.

<sup>355</sup> Alberto Mascareñas to Fernando Torreblanca, AGN, Ob/Calles, 101-R2-A-1, 1, annex 2, 24.

long time and they wished to be considered as a Mexican firm (many, in fact, had become naturalized Mexicans). Their claim was sent to the Comisión Especial de Reclamaciones, part of the Secretaría de Hacienda. That same year, in December, one of their houses was taken over allegedly by the federal army to establish a garrison; according to the complaint, the occupation of the house had been carried out under the orders of the Vidalistas who had alliances with the army; the Alzuyetas also saw the sacking and looting of the textile industry Progreso del Sur, demanding a compensation of 86.412.00 MXN pesos. It took two years for *Reclamaciones* to answer back. Meanwhile one of the Fernández brothers waited; his economic power dwindling in dank hotels in Donceles, nearby federal offices in Mexico City. *Reclamaciones* rejected all of their demands for compensation.<sup>356</sup>

The Spanish Merchant houses finally caved in to the Revolution, completely overrun by an agrarian insurrection that had proven extremely difficult to quell and an official apathy to their cause that had been equally difficult to kindle. As the year of 1926 progressed, the power of the Vidalistas waned and became dispersed. Harassed by a war of attrition, they eventually took to the mountains of the Atoyac sierra, where several of their leaders were murdered in 1926. The region had been temporarily pacified, and yet it took one more year for roads to arrive to Acapulco.

### **Conclusion Old Acapulco in Crisis**

This was the story of the final collapse of an old coaling station. The collapse was prompted by the two silent revolutions in mobility and connectivity set off by the armed conflict. Acapulco began the Mexican Revolution as a relatively stable port city, a refueling station with a stable seaport economy and a stable marketplace in a small rural provincial town, only to reemerge from

---

<sup>356</sup> Memorandum from Obdulio Ferández to President P.E. Calles, September 20, 1926; and letter from Sigifredo Menéndez Fernández to President P.E. Calles, December 13, 1926 in AGN, Ob/Calles, box 231, 771-F-27

it, a decade later, as a highly unstable seaport, with a collapsed economy, seething with revolutionary activities and political infighting in the “Acapulco Commune.” But it remained a refueling station nonetheless. The Revolution had failed to dissolve the power of the merchant elite. Merchants had struck alliances with revolutionary caciques like Marsical in Guerrero to fend off Zapatistas, and through mobility and pragmatism they managed to adapt to the volatile circumstances of an ever-changing Revolution. The merchant elite, “los grandes toreros de revoluciones,” had grown accustomed to revolutions, dodging and escaping them at the least sign of trouble. For the seaport’s elite, the Mexican Revolution was yet another revolution in a long history of invasions, epidemics, occupations, rebellions, and smaller upheavals. The same can be said of other sectors of the seaport society. In the end, revolutionary Acapulco was nothing new for its inhabitants. It was the usual rough-and-tumble world where all desperately negotiated their survival in the face of widening spirals of revolution and counterrevolution.

This moment in the history of Acapulco significantly overlapped with the hinterland in a longue durée story of the waning and waxing influence of the hinterland on the seaport. During this period, Acapulco and its hinterland began to shade into one another, with violence and upheavals leaving no clear lines of distinction. Instead, in-between Acapulco and its hinterland, there were continuous gradations of revolutionary and counterrevolutionary armed groups, peasant leagues and worker unions—all vying for control of the port, since controlling Acapulco meant having an upper hand and access to resources in the armed conflict. Like the Revolution of Ayutla, it became an all-out scramble to snatch the port from the hands of the opposite warring faction.

Thus for this particular reason, Acapulco and its hinterland cannot be studied separately. Another reason for studying the hinterland in conjunction with the port is the long trace of credit relations that had tied Acapulco’s merchants to their landed interests in the seaport’s hinterland. The seaport’s merchant families, tightly knit by ties of debt, intermarriage, and credit, had served

as an outpost of Porfirian control on an otherwise impenetrable coastal frontier. The seaport's hinterland—comprising a mosaic of haciendas, textile and soap factories, small land-holdings, palm tree and fruit orchards, and smaller plots of land for coaling storage and warehouses—were intimately tied to Acapulco's market and service. Most of these lands belonged to merchants from the port. Credit relations within the merchant community, already strained since the late nineteenth century, made matters worse, further upsetting the system of debts and securities that had sustained, for a long time, commercial and social relations in a cash-poor economy. These debt and credit ties were eventually severed during the armed conflict when their property was threatened and then completely overrun. Acapulco was eventually disconnected from its hinterland as merchants lost their property to *ejidos* and to *fraccionadoras* and as the copra trade and the *mar de plantíos cocoteros* took over in the 1940s. Acapulco's henceforward became a source of labor and only gradually, until the 1960s, began to catch up to explosive urban growth in Acapulco and cater the tourist city and its markets.

Furthermore, transport and communications became hotly contested issues. There was a certain mysticism to road building. It was used as a means to foster local businesses and boost Acapulco's impoverished merchant economy, while consolidating many other services in its economy. Historian Jo Guldi notes that "in the modern era, fighting over the design of roads [became] a way of achieving larger political goals."<sup>357</sup> In this seaport society, at once recluse and cosmopolitan, issues of connectivity, transport and communications, choosing whether to close off the seaport from foreign influences or leave it open-bounded, became central dilemmas for Acapulco during the period of reconstruction in Mexico's "radical 1920s." Such issues profoundly affected the direction Acapulco would take in the following decades. That is why this story has responded, less to the events of the Mexican Revolution, and more to a chronology of connections

---

<sup>357</sup> Jo Guldi, Roads to Power: Britain Invents the Infrastructure State, (Harvard University Press, 2012), 7.

that directly affected the port and the region: the opening of the Panama Canal 1914-15 and the initiation of road works in 1927 that for the first time connected Acapulco to Mexico City and the interior with modern tarmac roads.

The Mexican Revolution had exposed the deficiencies of a seaport economy that began to revolve around its refueling services: isolation, corruption, weak monopolies, and a yawning gap between workers in the transport services and merchants/retailers. But remarkably the port did not collapse and remained deeply rooted in coastal trade, refueling services, and the agricultural economy of the region. However, as the construction of the road became a major concern for inhabitants and especially for alijadores and stevedores in Acapulco, the Escuderista and Vidalista rebellion ripped at the core of the port's community: its social and economic life, so resiliently kept afloat for half a century after the California Gold Rush and the Revolution of Ayutla. The old port of call in Acapulco began a violent dissolution.

Thus merchants, retailers, and revolutionaries (most of them workers in the transport and shipbuilding industry), along with many inhabitants of Acapulco, invested all of their future into public works and regional connectivity. But when roads finally arrived in 1927, a swift reversal of fortunes took everyone by surprise. Acapulco's merchant class and revolutionaries saw how their world was swept aside by a new and unexpected host of actors. Land developers, generals, and entrepreneurs initiated a breakneck transformation of the port's economy of maritime services and coasting trade. This latter turn of events is part of the story that the next chapter is concerned with.

## CHAPTER 6

### **Motorists, Generals, and Merchants in the Fading Port Town** *Post-Revolutionary Mobility and an Urban Economy in Transition, 1927-1946*

It all came to an end, like T. S. Elliot's contemporary poem, "not with a bang but a whimper." The coaling station vanished, passing unnoticed and unlamented for many observers at the time. Henceforth, material and seaport life in Acapulco was slowly pulled to pieces in subtle but painful ways until the port was ultimately dismantled. But if the port ended with a whimper, the opposite was seen from the local perspective: seaport life in Acapulco ended with a bang when roads arrived in 1927; from thereafter, a sudden, painful disintegration of their world. The web of seaport life was painfully frayed and pulled apart by the smooth swings and turns behind the gradual disappearance of the port town. It was accompanied by a deep rearrangement of the seaport's society, a process of urban and social dissolution that began in the 1920s and slowly closed during the postwar years in the mid to late 1940s.

Why this came to be is the story I tell in this chapter. The death-blow to the port came with urban planning and public works in the 1940s, when the port was dismantled, relocated, and unintentionally destroyed by urban planners. But even before the final stroke, and the more visible destruction and reinvention of Acapulco, the port town was slowly being erased in a process urban economists refer to as an "agglomeration economy."<sup>358</sup> This refers to the spatial concentration of economic activity and populations, a cumulative process created, more often than not, by accident in cities and regions but then predictably sustained, in self-reinforcing mechanisms, once it has been set off. The accident, with its unintended consequences, was the road that connected Acapulco with Mexico City in 1927. But the result, the clustering of economic activities, became

---

<sup>358</sup> Fujita, Masahisa, and Tomoya Mori. "The Role of Ports in the Making of Major Cities: Self-Agglomeration and Hub-Effect." *Journal of Development Economics*, Increasing Returns, Monopolistic Competition and Economic Development, 49, no. 1 (April 1, 1996): 93–120.

more predictable, with hindsight, once the urban economy began to shift. This subtler process initiated by the road is revealed by the painful disintegration of Acapulco's seaport society and the mixed urban economy and the new actors who replaced it.

This present chapter is divided into three sections. The first explores the hub-effect of Acapulco as a transport node, showing how different paths for economic recovery were scouted out in Acapulco during the 1920s when it was finally interconnected by land and sea. The loss of balance between the seaport and the ensuing rise of a tourist city was neither inevitable nor predetermined. While some windows of opportunity were irreversibly shut, as commerce dwindled and disappeared for Acapulco, others opened up with new connections to the port, especially with the opening of the Panama Canal in 1914 and the completion of the first Mexico City-Acapulco road in 1927. When they finally arrived, roads set off a process of relocation, clustering, and disintegration. During these years, the resort emerged as one of the many viable options, but soon it became evident that Acapulco had begun to concentrate many economic activities in the tourism industry, many of which, for years, had been loosely tied to agriculture, commerce, fishing, retailing, and transport services. Firms and services in Acapulco, located closely together to cater passengers, steamship traffic, coasting trade, and navigation, in the 1920s, harbored a mixture of different port and lodging services. But after 1927, such economic activities eventually began to revolve around a small resort and its rising tourism economy.

Sections two and three trace the rise of a mixed economy in Acapulco as the town's urban functions slowly changed. Acapulco became at once a port and a resort, with both sharing, in uneasy cohabitation, a small agricultural hinterland and fishing industry in the surrounding region. Inconsequential as this event may have seemed at the time, for many thought this would consolidate Acapulco's role as a commercial port, nevertheless took place amidst broader, slowly-evolving attitudes towards the seashore in the 1920s. These changing attitudes were brought by

changing patterns of consumption, travel, and mobility that completely redefined the function of Acapulco's bay and waterfront. As a result, roads brought large groups of newcomers who set in motion deep changes that would set the seaport on a course of economic transition no one really knew where it was headed.

The section focuses on the rise of a mixed urban economy through the interplay of Acapulco's local merchants and newcomers, boosters, and mobile actors —namely, revolutionary generals, motorists, and businessmen— who created and converged under the hotel industry, still nascent in Acapulco and Mexico, and the first land developing companies, the *compañías fraccionadoras*, founded in the port in the late 1920s. Concomitantly, Acapulco experienced an unexpected boom in trade, reviving as an international port during the abnormal war-time years that stimulated commerce large volumes of commercial exchanges between Latin America and the warring countries. The brief history of land redistribution in the port is analyzed in tandem with the rise of land developing companies as they expanded and overlapped with ejidos, federal lands, and old merchant property. This initial development, in conjunction with the ensuing wave of expropriations of merchant property and the creation of ejidos, drove Acapulco into new forms of mobility that altered urban land uses dedicated to tourism.

## I The 1927 Road

During the 1920s, Acapulco was a port-city in crisis. After several attempts at pacification in the region, the city still faced internal strife among merchants, socialists, and agrarians; a political conflict that lingered on well into the late 1920s and early 1930s. Ravaged by continuous revolutions, the city's infrastructure, its pier, buildings, and central roads were damaged if not completely collapsed after the port was struck by a powerful earthquake on the eve of the Mexican Revolution. The city's finances mired in debt as a new public health crisis gripped its population

with the spread of malaria. Refugees, migrants, and the internally displaced shaded into the picture of desolation the revolution had left behind in Acapulco. Local authorities were naturally overwhelmed and often faced these challenges reluctantly, hesitating to push any far-reaching reforms so as not to further polarize the seaport's society. Agrarian and labor reform eventually stalled because of the violent clash between agrarian leagues, labor parties, and *guardias blancas* in the Costa Grande, a conflict that threatened to spill over and sink the port once again into chaos.

Yet letters from Guerrero's entrepreneurs exuded a mood of optimism. An eagerness to open up new markets transpires the exchanges between local and foreign businessmen and national authorities. The president of the Mexican Mineral Company, head of a joint Mexican-Belgian firm, sent a memorandum, via Guerrero's governor, to expound the virtues of the new road. Its construction was well underway by the time President Calles received a letter in August of 1926. The mining booster described the benefits the highway could bring:<sup>359</sup>

Esta ruta tendrá por resultado inmediato la destrucción del comercio fenicio que ejercen en Acapulco españoles, árabes y mexicanos que tienen muerta la costa de Guerrero. Abaratará además la vida de la capital, porque se podrá traer carne refrigerada y pescado fresco a precio ínfimo. Fomentará por otra parte la minería, pues sólo la Cía. Mexicana de Minerales, S.A. ofrece exportar de Taxco por la vía de Acapulco 3,000 toneladas anuales. De la costa vendrán a la capital para surtir las fábricas de aceite de México no menos de 5,000 toneladas de ajonjolí, que es la producción normal, pero ésta crecerá extraordinariamente con las facilidades de tráfico. Por frente a la costa de Guerrero pasa un verdadero cordón de barcos, desde que se abrió el canal de Panamá, así que será muy fácil organizar excursiones de turistas con automóviles, no sólo para que den vida a la carretera de México a Acapulco, sino a todas las demás ligadas con la Capital de la República.

---

<sup>359</sup> "This route will result in the immediate destruction of the Phoenician commerce in Acapulco that is controlled by Spaniards, Arabs, and Mexicans who have kept dead the entire coast of Guerrero.... ever since the Panama canal opened," the entrepreneur abounds, "an entire line of steamships fleets, right in front of Guerrero's coast (...) [by inaugurating the road] it will be very easy to organize tourist excursions with automobiles; not only would they give life to the Mexico-Acapulco road but to the rest that are linked to the capital of the Republic." Memorandum from Hector F. López to P.E. Calles, includes letter of J.E. Salas President of the Compañía Mexicana de Minerales, October 19, 1926 in FEPAC-FT-APEC, Exp. 72: López, Hector F. (Gral.), 5-12, 3261, 5.

The coast of Guerrero was far from dead, but neither was it teeming with life, like flourishing Phoenician trade invoked by the businessman. In his muddled orientalism, this Phoenician commerce meant the opposite, a corrupt monopoly of incompetent merchants and city states who had been suffocating trade since time immemorial. In Acapulco, there was no doubt a monopoly, born out of geographical isolation from central Mexico, but a monopoly whose lifeline was maritime traffic, which continued to follow the lively rhythm dictated by coastal trade between Central America and California, now revamped by the opening of the Panama Canal. Severely weakened by the Revolution, and further struck by agrarian and labor insurrections, many merchant houses began to falter by the late 1920s. Yet their symbol as omnipresent power-holders in the region remained strong. It continued to linger on in the imagination of boosters and eager entrepreneurs, whose letters sought to convince high-ranking public servants to open up new markets, by invoking the image of the monopolistic nature of the merchant houses, depicted as all-powerful, all the more to break competing commercial interests.

For the booster, mining was the priority. But there was indeed a veritable string of steamships lining up along the coast, coming from diverse companies, the Pacific Mail Steamship Company, the Gracie Mail, and even some steamers of the Great White Fleet, from the United Fruit Line, which had increased its presence in Central America. In addition to mining, tourism was an alternative path for Acapulco to free itself from the allegedly boundless power of the merchant houses and begin moving forward, leaving behind centuries of economic stagnation; or so the story went for many revolutionaries and boosters at the time. “The development of our program is intimately connected to the construction of the road” and after conclusively asserting the importance of this linkage he extended an invitation to the state, under his auspices, and solicited a change of date of the forthcoming inauguration of the road: November 20, commemorating the day the Revolution started. This time around, seventeen years later, it was

also a year marked by violent social upheavals and extensive road building in Mexico. But also it was a moment in time when previously isolated regions were receiving the first pulses of what would later become a full-throbbing force of urban renewal, particularly in port cities and border towns.

The long-awaited road was finally completed by the Comisión Nacional de Caminos, and inaugurated in November 1927. But still, the prospect of embarking on this overland journey entailed more than twenty hours of trying to cross Guerrero's impenetrable mountains. One of the architects and boosters of Acapulco, Mario Pani, vividly described the perilous drive from Mexico City to Acapulco in the late 1920s: eight hours driving to Taxco, northern Guerrero, on a sinuous road ascending and descending through the central plateau; staying in Taxco for the night, leaving the next day; yet another eight hours driving to Chilpancingo through surging mountains full of colossal boulders; then soaring to the heights of the Sierra Madre del Sur, only to quickly plunge to the depths of the Zopilote Canyon, winding along rivers that turned into flash floods during the rainy season, then finally Chilpancingo. Staying the night there, resuming the journey, another eight hours to Acapulco, until towering escarpments on the horizon announced, menacingly, further curves ahead, at that point, "thousands of peaks and terrible curves," noted Pani, descending to the coastal lowlands, through sinuous roads obstructed by choke-points that forced motorists to wait for several hours to float off their automobiles on "pangas," to cross choppy rivers, particularly roiled when it rained. All along, the Minister of Public Works and Communications, warned motorists and developers that having a large network of roads was not enough, "there are no conveniences for travelers...tourists are afraid to start on a long trip on our roads because [they know] they will not find inns in which to rest, gasoline stations, stores in which

to buy food.”<sup>360</sup> Upon crossing the coastal lowlands of La Sabana, covered by a sea of coconut fields, the long-awaited destination would lay there at everyone’s sight, tantalizingly close when seen from behind, like a landlocked mountain, indeed a completely obstructed view of the ocean. Then the last ascent, a steep slope full of curves with no end or beginning, twisting and turning on the hillsides, trees hovering overhead, blocking the sky, leaving shaded roads that carried on meandering upward through the back of the massive granite rock formation, the back of the crescent-shaped bay—until finally the last turn. The landscape would turn upside down as the curve, the hovering trees, the opening sky jolted into the precipice and the immensity of the Pacific Ocean, then the Santa Lucía Bay, the pink granite boulders and the deserted beach strands, all falling through the motorists’ eyes; and farther away, the small town of Acapulco lost in a vast, undulating forest. For many decades to come, this image [see image 8 below], the experience of being struck by the bay and the vastness of the Pacific Ocean, would become firmly fixed on the imagination of countless visitors and motorists.

---

<sup>360</sup> Tomás Oteiza Iriarte, *Acapulco. La ciudad de las naos de oriente y de las sirenas modernas* (Mexico: Casa Ramírez Editores, 1965) 388; Sexta entrevista al arquitecto Mario Pani por Graciela de Garay, August 8, 1990 Archivo de la Plabra del Instituto de Investigaciones Dr. José Ma. Luis Mora, PHO 11/4-6, p.4 Simpson also has a book on tourism. Caja 1 (Ver fotos) (Documentos Varios), Exp. 1130, Simpson, Eyler, Senior Associate in Mexico for the Institute of Current World Affairs, “What Mexico Offers to the Tourist,” *Bulletin of the Pan American Union*, 65 (1931), p. 11-13 (manuscript) 1039-1052 : il

**Image 8: Puerto de Acapulco desde el semáforo, circa 1890-1900**



“Puerto de Acapulco desde el semáforo,”  
unknown date, probably 1890-1900, in C.B. Waite Collection, Fototeca, AGN. Courtesy of the  
Archivo General de la Nación.

The day the road was inaugurated, a gathering crowd of spectators eagerly joined in to welcome and celebrate the arrival of the first twelve automobiles as they rolled in, descending the hillsides of the amphitheater, breezing through the bay after a long and arduous voyage. Revolutionary generals, politicians, motorists, entrepreneurs, local merchants, and a group of spectators—all saw a spectacle that announced a profound, if uncertain, transformation of the Pacific seaport.<sup>361</sup>

Reaching Acapulco was one of the major feats of a six-year infrastructural plan, part of a national road program that started under Calles’s presidency. Funded by revenues from gasoline taxes, the plan came to fruition and laid nearly 5,000 kilometers of roads that interconnected forgotten towns and secluded markets within the states of Veracruz, Guerrero, Oaxaca, Chiapas,

<sup>361</sup> Tomás Oteiza Iriarte, Acapulco. La ciudad de las naos de oriente y de las sirenas modernas (México: Casa Ramírez Editores, 1965) 388.

and Yucatán. But those larger, far-flung roads that connected Mexico City to Nuevo Laredo, Acapulco, Guadalajara, Veracruz, and the boundary line with Guatemala stood as a matter of political contention.<sup>362</sup> Roads were built everywhere, stretching to many remote corners of the country, eventually leading to American observers to warn the Mexican government to avoid the kind of new “road slums” that were sprouting everywhere in the United States, as new cities began to grow at the pinch point of road networks.<sup>363</sup> In profusion of roads, Adalberto Tejeda, governor of Veracruz and one of the emblematic figures of radical *agrarismo* in the 1920s, bombastically promoted road building: “roads dissolve monopolies and capitalist exploitation... without a good accessible communications system,” he added, “it will be impossible to resolve the agricultural problem and that of socializing industrialization.”<sup>364</sup> Indeed, roads and radical local agrarian projects often came hand in hand with the building of roads; and local merchants became the reviled embodiment of old Porfirian values.

But if roads were meant to revamp mining and commerce in Guerrero, a boosting strategy projected by Acapulco’s business elite and Mexico’s federal revolutionary authorities, it was nonetheless a new set of actors who took control of the situation, offered alternatives, and indirectly challenged more conventional strategies for economic regeneration. A depiction of the attendees at the inauguration of the road shows how tourism in Acapulco grew out of the uncoordinated efforts of private actors and networks created by a new and completely unexpected influx of arrivistes and tourists. The attendees were parvenus, adventurous travelers, motorists, businessmen, and revolutionary generals-turned-entrepreneurs. Revelers and this demobilized sector of society, the latter seen as the new up-and-coming bourgeoisie of the Mexican Revolution,

---

<sup>362</sup> CNC, Los Caminos de Mexico, 79-87.

<sup>363</sup> Simpson also has a book on tourism. Caja 1 (Ver fotos) (Documentos Varios), Exp. 1130, Simpson, Eyler, Senior Associate in Mexico for the Institute of Current World Affairs, “What Mexico Offers to the Tourist” Bulletin of the Pan American Union, 65 (1931), p. 1039-1052 : il.

<sup>364</sup> Wendy Waters “Re-Mapping the Nation: Road Building as State Formation in Post-Revolutionary Mexico, 1925-1940.” (Ph.D. diss., University of Arizona, 1999) 82.

began to see new opportunities in Acapulco. They would end up making a clean break with Acapulco's mercantile past and physiocratic inclinations. But this outcome was far from given in the 1920s, and it took several years for Acapulco's economic activities to cluster around a series of land markets, services, and credit arrangements that comprised the tourism industry. Mining and commerce were the obvious sources of economic renewal but the increasing presence of motorists and steamships, all teeming with passengers, was decisively changing the equation, even for those businessmen eager to exploit Guerrero's zinc and lead mines which, in the future, they thought would bring a boom in commerce along Mexico's Pacific Coast.

Yet Acapulco's newfound proximity to Mexico City, and the opportunities this represented, remained untested. As never before had Acapulco been exposed to the possibilities of a new wave of people, at least, not since the 1849 California Gold Rush. But this also meant that, once again, the port-city remained exposed to the uncertainty of a large number of newcomers and arrivistes meddling in local affairs.

## II

### **The Fading Port and the Transformation of Acapulco's Seaport Society**

After staying in various cheap and small hotels in Donceles Street, Mexico City, Irene Reguera in a state of despair sent a letter to ex-President Plutarco Elías Calles. Her situation in 1931 was unenviable: she had become a widow when her husband—the wealthy Escudero and patriarch of one of the Spanish merchant firms from Santander—died in Acapulco in 1922, signaling the demise of many other middling merchant families in the region. His death was particularly revealing for Acapulco's merchant community: as we already know, one year after the patriarch's death, Irene Reguera's three sons, the Escudero brothers, were executed in the maelstrom of the Delahuertista rebellion. Now, hopelessly vying from the edges in a hotel in Donceles, the widowed mother found herself pleading for acquittal, on the verge of losing all of

her properties in Acapulco, most of them vast lands covered with fruit orchards near the Papagayo River. Her letter captures that moment when a profound social transformation began taking place in Acapulco in the early 1930s. Her sons, she reminded Calles, had fallen victim to the bullets of “Delahuertista shards”—all in the name of his presidential candidacy. “The sacrifice of my three children is well taken (*lo doy por bien ganado*), especially since their humanitarian work was enough for them to achieve glory.”<sup>365</sup> But she strongly protested, nonetheless, against the expropriation of her patrimony by a group of land grabbers she identified as General Juan Andreu Almazán who was serving as Communications Minister in Pascual Ortiz Rubio’s cabinet (1930-32); Guerrero’s Governor, Adrián Castrejón; the ex president, Emilio Portes Gil (1928-30); and some “capitalists of the Lagunera region”. Half the price of her property (MXN 21,000.00) had been paid in compensation, but now she claimed full payment of the property’s real price, which was double the amount; furthermore, she denounced “the generals’ disingenuousness who, in the name of ‘public utility’ had erected a badly built hotel to which only rich people could gain access—“la pretendida utilidad pública en este caso es sólo un mito, pues no hay tal, ya que sólo se ha hecho un mal construido hotel a más de un kilómetro de distancia de mi propiedad, al cual sólo la gente rica tiene acceso.”

This badly-built hotel was part of the Papagayo bungalows, one of the first hotels that began to prop up in the 1920s and 1930s. The owner, Juan Andreu Almazán, was a parvenu par excellence. Originally from a family of Catalan migrants, he had been born in Olinalá, Guerrero, and after finishing medical school in Puebla, he joined Madero’s political insurrection. Upon Madero’s deposition and execution during Huerta’s military coup, Andreu Almazán, whose political future had been left hanging, would then become a fair-weather follower of different

---

<sup>365</sup> Letter from Irene Reguera to Division General Plutarco Elías Calles, December 1931. FAPECFT-APEC, exp. 192: Almazán, Juan Andreu (Gral.), legajo 2/2, fojas 145-47, inv. 192, 130-147.

revolutionary and counterrevolutionary leaders until he eventually created an independent force marauding around the states of Puebla, Morelos, Guerrero, and Oaxaca. During the 1920s, having sided with the triumphant side in the Agua Prieta rebellion of 1920 that toppled President Venustiano Carranza, Almazán began ascending the ladder of political power within the Sonoran Triangle. Eventually, he became deeply involved in the finances of road building, creating various firms, including the Compañía Cosnstructora de Acapulco S.A. He became director of another more powerful firm in the port, the Compañía Impulsora de Acapulco, and stockholder in a number of road-building firms in Mexico at a time when far-flung networks of roads began to be built in the country under Calles's presidency. He would then become Minister of Communications and Public Works in Ortiz Rubio's cabinet which allowed him to invest his profits in real estate holdings in Mexico City and Monterrey and growing cities like Acapulco. He would literally take control of entire swaths of land, Real de Mayorazgo in Coyoacán, Mexico City, and large beachfront lands in Hornos, Acapulco.

His rapid ascension to the heights of political and financial power in Mexico would ultimately clash, at a local level, with the descending path of the Escudero family. Simultaneously, once the construction of the road had been completed in 1927, California and Mexico City's markets were further connected through Acapulco. Indeed, many newspapers at the time published how Almazán had closed a number of deals with "Californian capitalists" who invested thirty million dollars in hotels, roads, and other public works. As minister, Almazán had forged close relationships with Californian businessmen, particularly with W.W. Wilkinson, general manager of the California Standard Oil Company based at San Francisco, who invested 5 million dollars into Mexico's National Highway Commission (the Comisión Nacional de Caminos), which in turn had been profiting from the then nascent real estate industry in Acapulco through a number of officials and businessmen whose real estate holdings had been driving the aggressive expansion

of *fraccionadoras* in the port. The Californian oil company would pay five million to the Tesorería General de la Federación, a sum which would then be handed over in monthly installments to the National Highway Commission. In exchange, the Californian oil company would receive extensive tariff benefits and exemptions.<sup>366</sup> Almazán, through his position as minister of communications and public works, would invest this money in hotels and roads connected to his firms in Acapulco by expropriating lands in the name of public utility. Some expropriations were actually dedicated to public works and public goods, others like the expropriation of the widow's lands were clearly carried out to boost his profiteering network in the port. In the end, Irene Reguera lost everything. The Miami-inspired bungalows became the Hotel Papagayo, which formed part of one of the frontlines of waterfront redevelopment, on the center-west side, of Acapulco's bay.

The initial standoff between the widow and the arriviste generals reveals a wide-reaching change in the port: Acapulco's local elite of merchants was slowly being displaced by parvenus with access to both dollars and political power in Mexico City and California. Irene Reguera no longer belonged to the local elite in a town that was vaulting over, headlong and without any firm footing, in a transition very few at the time could possibly foresee where it was headed. Her political clout— even when this meant presenting herself, and justifiably so, as a widow of the Escudero family in the 1920s— no longer held any sway. Nor did the dissolution of her entire

---

<sup>366</sup> CONDUMEX, Recortes de Periódico. Oficialía Mayor de Hacienda CCCXII.46.200 Treinta millones se invertirán en hoteles, caminos y otras obras[artículo de periódico] :capitalistas californianos han apartado el dinero para desarrollar esos planes : se ha publicado el decreto ; en el tramo de carretera a Laredo se invertirán 7 millones y sumas aproximadas se gastarán en otras obras 1 recorte de periódico Inyección de siete millones - La carretera a Laredo - Se expidió el decreto Compañía Constructora de Acapulco, S.A.1 *Excélsior*, Jan 9, 1932) cat1 [FAPECYFT-APEC, exp. 192: Almazán, Juan Andrew (Gral.), legajo 2/2, fojas 145-47, inv. 192. ] [Foja 119-122] México, D.F. 30 de abril de 1931 ‘Puntos tratados por el Sr. General de División, Juan Andreu Almazán, Secretario de Comunicaciones y Obras Públicas con el Sr. W.W. Wilkinson, Gte. General de la California Standard Oil Company de México con relación a un proyectado anticipo de impuestos y derechos de importación de esta compañía y que serán sometidos a la consideración del Sr. Secretario de Hacienda y Crédito Público por una parte y de los controladores de la mencionada compañía que reside en San Francisco, California por otra... La compañía entregará a la Tesorería General de la Federación, en el acto, la cantidad de cinco millones de dólares y se obliga a entregar a la Comisión Nacional de Caminos, a partir del mes de mayo... la cantidad de seiscientos veinte y cinco mil dólares mensuales, hasta completar la cantidad de cinco millones de dólares en el año en curso.’”

family elicit any compassionate responses from any of the revolutionary generals; her family, divided by a yawning generational gap, had spawned revolutionary scions who, in the end, brought about the demise of her own patrimony along with the economic system in which their family had thrived in the first place. She sent her entire personal collection of documents and letters from her sons, the Escuderos and their political activities, to an ex-President who never replied or returned any of the documents, not even at the explicit request by the widow. Perhaps without knowing, by the early 1930s, Acapulco's landed class, with their small haciendas and fruit and coconut palm tree orchards, was quickly becoming obsolete. Their patrimony only made sense in a rural economy connected to a commercial order that was fast disappearing in Acapulco.

Irene Reguera was not the only case. Ernestina Sutter, also a widow of the Sutter Morlet family, lost 300 hectares.<sup>367</sup> Manuel Uruñuela, a Spanish merchant, began losing hundreds of hectares to a nearby ejido until the expropriation of almost the entire Hacienda la Luz crippled his finances during Lazaro Cardenas's presidency. The lands were then handed over to a recently-created ejido. Merchant property, small landowners, cattle ranchers, fishermen, and collectively-owned parcels run by peasants and worker colonies created in the 1920s. All of these owners came increasingly under threat from three sources. First, it could be easily snatched by arrivistes, a new bourgeoisie whose access to different markets and political power allowed them to found *fraccionadoras* and build new hotels and businesses. Second, by the army, the navy, revolutionary veterans, and generals whose families received compensation from the government in the form of beachside property and holiday military colonies. The Icacos area was completely controlled by the navy and the surrounding area of la Zacatosa was colonized by residences owned by army retirees, revolutionary veterans, and their families. Third, by the mild wave of agrarian reform,

---

<sup>367</sup> Hispano Americano, 1948, Tiempo - Volume 14, Issues 340-365 - Page 473; LCR, caja 1454, (Q.112/110-Q112/245) 102331/39, exp.? Ernestina Sutter vda. De Morlet que la quieren despojar de 300 hectareas de terreno en Acapulco.

starting as a bottom up process in the 1920s, particularly under the tenures of Rodolfo Neri and Adrian Castrejón, but becoming a full-scale agrarian reform in the 1930s under Lázaro Cárdenas presidency, despite the obstacles placed by Guerrero's famous anti-agrarian governor, Alberto Berber. The result was a mosaic of different types of property, public and private and all the shades in between.

As for the old landed merchant class, not all merchants suffered the fate of the widows of the Escudero and Sutter families. Although many went bankrupt, some simply readjusted their economic activities, while others diversified their firms to accommodate new services into their business. Yet another group of merchant families would set up new businesses in the hotel industry and other tourism services. Less imaginative merchants sought refuge in diplomacy, either as consuls or commercial agents, a knee-jerk reaction when strained by difficult situations during the nineteenth century. Others went back to Europe or the United States in a permanent leave of absence. But all protested against the incursion of "outsiders." None was able to transform their business and thrive in the tourism industry. This signaled the gradual pauperization of the entire local merchant elite in Acapulco.

All merchants would initially join many public works associations in the port in the 1920s and 1930s, but once displaced by the federal government in the 1940s, they would set up their small businesses and ultimately join the ranks of local journalism and public service in Acapulco's municipality. In the end, they would all gradually fade into oblivion, becoming an undifferentiated sector of the seaport's "local society" of "Acapulqueños" who would now and then launch criticisms against the tourist city. Indeed, a prime example is Rubén H. Luz who in the early 1920s, in the midst of a wave of anti-foreign sentiments in the port, was accused of being an outsider of dubious foreign origins by Escudero, the son of a Spanish merchant. This Manichaean fight between "outsiders" and "locals" would continue to unfold in numberless forms and numberless

times, with each successive wave of newcomers accused of being outsiders by their older counterparts, those erstwhile foreigners and outsiders who would now define themselves as the real locals. In his memoirs, Rubén H. Luz, seeing how sweeping changes brought by tourism had pushed his own generation aside, wrote:<sup>368</sup>

Esta obra la dedico con mi más acendrado afecto a los auténticos acapulqueños, los antiguos nativos, nuestros ancestros, y a los viejos avecinados, quienes vinieron a convivir con ellos y nosotros los costeños, sin egoísmos ni ambiciones bastardas; contribuyendo desinteresadamente a la integración del hermoso y tranquilo Acapulco ya hecho desaparecer por los modernos “conquistadores,” sus actuales “dueños,” hijos de la “revolución.”

The Hudson, Stephens, Batani, Billings, Pangburn, Sutter, and Link families, most of them formed by intergenerational ties of Mexican and American merchants who had been, over the years, migrating in different stages since the Gold Rush, began setting up new businesses in the port, most of them devoted to a variety of services. Concha Hudson Batani recalled how her mom, upon hearing that the Great White Fleet from the United Fruit Line and other steamship lines were docking at the port, flooding Acapulco with new travelers, began to make recurrent round trips to Cuernavaca and Mexico City to buy handcrafts and other sellable artifacts to visitors. Many mobile rural migrants (Batani refers to them as indigenous) would also flood the port from Chilapa Tixtla, and Chilpancingo, selling their handcrafts to steamship travelers. The Hudson and Billings families also established a *ferretería* and a shop of utensils for snorkeling, scuba diving, and fishing for tourists and fishermen. Indeed, this brought them one step closer to setting up a full service and tour company dedicated to these activities.<sup>369</sup>

The Alzuyeta family, badly hit by the wave of popular Hispanophobia in the 1920s, took a lower profile in Acapulco's economy. They quickly went bankrupt, left Acapulco for Spain, and

---

<sup>368</sup> Rubén H. Luz, *Recuerdos de Acapulco* (México, D.F.: Ediciones Monroy Padilla), p. vii.

<sup>369</sup> Hudson Batani, *El Acapulco de antes*, p. 33-5 (La Quebrada 46-7).

eventually readjusted their economic activities. Some members set up a hotel, the Hotel Tropical, managed from a healthy distance, from Spain. Indeed, their merchant firm, which had long since been invested in the coaling and refueling business, completely went bankrupt and many records of mercantile tribunals in Mexico City show that their trading house Alzuyeta y Cia Sociedad en Comandita was heavily indebted to El Banco Capitalizador de Ahorros. By 1943 when commerce skyrocketed and other merchant houses profited from this bout of abnormal commerce, the Alzuyeta firm still owed nearly 100,000 pesos. They had mortgaged their properties in the port, including the hotel, and now the debt threatened to vanish their entire capital, lands, and business which they had acquired in the early 1880s. They had built the Hotel Tropical later, in the 1930s, which still stood there on the Boulevard Juan Andreu Almazán. Others became diplomats: Alberto Alzuyeta Echegaray became honorary Spanish consul, who served more as tourist agents and promoters, following the national guidelines on the professionalization of the tourism industry in Mexico.<sup>370</sup>

As motorists, steamship passengers, and demobilized revolutionary generals continued to flood the port, the slow and painful demise of Acapulco's merchants and stevedores was still

---

<sup>370</sup> The story of the collapse and transformation of the business of the Alzuyeta family can be stitched together from different pieces found in many sources. See TSJDF, AH IV, Box 404, F. 2288300. Juicio Alzuyeta y Cía; Deuda de sumas menores, 1,000 o 2,000 pesos; AGN, TSJDF, AH IV, Box 990, f. 038520, Alzuyeta y Cia 4,000 pesos Federico Jimenez O'Farril problemas financieros con el administrador del Hotel Tropical. Multiples bienes embargados; AGN, TSJDF, AH IV, Box 1170, f. 049487, Alzuyeta y Cía/Banco Capitalizador. Teófilo Berdeja demanda a Alberto Alzuyeta Juicio Sumario Hipotecario, July 2, 1943. El Banco Capitalizador de Ahorros S.A. vs Alzuyeta y Cía. Sucesores, Sociedad en Comandita. Demandan a Alzuyeta y Cía por 99,423 pesos de deudas. Intereses de 15% annual sobre 58,000 y 40 mil desde septiembre de 1940. La carta está dirigida a los residentes del Hotel Tropical. En 1940 pidieron créditos de 65 y 50 mil con 10% anual. Hipotecaron su casa y terreno, 2, 200 metros cuadrados (adquirieron en los años 30, precio 163,000. También se hipotecó el "Hotel Tropical" frente al paseo Juan Andreu Almazan, 387 metros (antecedentes, adquieren el terreno en 1884, precio 109,000). The "Hotel Tropical," "a hotel of absentee owners," is also mentioned and described in Rebecca Mina Schreiber. *Cold War Exiles in Mexico: U.S. Dissidents and the Culture of Critical Resistance*. (United States: U of Minnesota Press, 2008), pp. 156-8 Quoted from Willard Motley, an exile who described the emergence of "A tourism Town" on a fishing village. For other mentions of the hotel and the whereabouts of different members of the Alzuyeta family see also Francisco R. Escudero, *Origen y evolución del turismo en Acapulco* (Universidad Americana de Acapulco, 1998), pp. 103-8.

underway. Their demise reflected or signaled the end of the port and the society that had flourished, withered, and decayed with the coaling station. Meanwhile, land companies, the *fraccionadoras*, and the hotel industry carried on expanding, relentlessly, under the auspices of the Ministry of Communications and Public Works, the National Highway Commission, and a network of national and foreign businessmen whose real estate holdings and fiduciaries, coupled with their role as primary stockholders in public works and road building firms, were deeply reshaping the landscape of urban development not only in Acapulco but in Mexico in general.

Foreign migrant investors were pulled in to the port by cash crops and new real estate business opportunities. Wolfgang Schoenborn, a German migrant who had been living in New York and San Francisco, had moved to Hawaii. But a friend there suggested him to go see this place in Mexico called Acapulco where some opportunities could be found, “something to do with coconuts,” Schoenborn recalled. He made 42 trips to the New York Public Library and eventually made the first trip to Acapulco in July 1934; “I thought it was fabulous. Far more beautiful than Hawaii,” from where he brought most of his ideas of resort development. In no time, through fiduciaries, he bought great extensions of land in Acapulco, in the Peninsula Las Playas, where the Comonfort family had had most of their property but had sold it to Henry Weiss, who sought to build a Pacific Railway in Guerrero on the eve of the Revolution but found himself engulfed by the upheavals of the coup in Mexico City where he died. Now these uninhabited and barren lands, full of escarpments and some abandoned warehouses, were the property of ghost owners, the Comonfort family and Henry Weiss. When Schoenborn arrived he met Alberto Pullen, a Texan who had recently arrived too, and together with Anacleto Martínez and other architects and engineers from Mexico City created the Fraccionadora de Acapulco in 1934-5. Together with the Impulsora de Acapulco, both land developing companies would dominate the real estate business and the hotel industry from the late 1930s to the early 1940s. This saw the Papagayo bungalows

began to sprout all around the middle of the bay, near Hornos and the Farallón del Obispo, including a casino. Simultaneously, the army and the navy began to buy several plots of land east of the bay, in Icacos, for officials and their families, veterans of the Revolution, and retired generals. Meanwhile, another entrepreneur, Carlos Barnard started buying plots of land near La Quebrada and to build what would later become the Hotel El Mirador.<sup>371</sup>

Through cycles of boom and bust, many merchants in Acapulco went bankrupt in the 1920s but slowly began to adjust their retailing businesses to other services like the hotel industry. Most lost their property to land developing companies or saw their lands swept aside by mild agrarian reforms that unfolded somewhat haphazardly in Acapulco under the presidency of Lázaro Cárdenas (1934-1940). Then came the Second World War that saw a boost to the international port of Acapulco; merchants, seeing a window of opportunity, readjusted their production as well as their transportation and trading networks in the Costa Grande to war-time commodities and to what they thought was a new manufacturing reality in the region. They invested heavily in textile and manufactured goods, merged their trading houses under one umbrella firm called the ‘Ciudad de Oviedo S.A.,’ strategically placed most of their capital in small manufacturing industries.<sup>372</sup> Trying to recuperate from the expropriation of most of their property during the agrarian reform

---

<sup>371</sup> There is a lawsuit from Regil Casares to Carlos Barnard’s *fraccionadora* over “límites de lotes y carretera federal” AGN, TSJDF, AH IV, Box 1185, Folio 50254, pp. 13-14. AHCM, Archivo Particular Ramón Beteta, Bajas Documentales (En proceso de ordenación). See box 5, Exp. 57 for business ventures between Barnard, Ramón Beteta, and others; Barnard’s plans to expand development to Zihuatanejo. For an exchange of letters between Ramón Beteta’s family and H.C. Baldwin and Pullen from the Fraccionadora de Acapulco, AHCM, Archivo Particular Ramón Beteta, Bajas Documentales (En proceso de ordenación) see Exp. 189, 190, Casa Acapulco. The Fraccionadora built a summer house for Beteta. AHCM, Archivo Particular Ramón Beteta, Box 75, Folder 1, B, H.C. Baldwin recibió el cheque de 100 de la Sra. Beteta por el material para casa en Acapulco, details the different costs. For more on Schoenborn narrating his story see the interview of Wolfgang Schoenborn by Linda Anderson, *The Times-Weekend*, January 27, 1968. Mario Pani talks about Pullen and Schoenborn and sees Schoenborn as having “mucho visión” when he created the Fraccionamiento Las Playas, see Interview to Mario Pani by Graciela de Garay, August 8, 1990 Archivo de la Palabra del Instituto de Investigaciones Dr. José Ma. Luis Mora, PHO 11/4-6, p.4; Concha Hudson Batani. *Del Acapulco de antes*, (Mexico: n.p, 2005), pp. 33-5. The daughter of the merchant also recalls the deep transformation of La Quebrada, pp. 46-7.

<sup>372</sup> For more on the fusion and the consolidation of these merchant firms, under the Ciudad de Oviedo, see Hudson Batani. *Del Acapulco de antes*, (Mexico: n.p, 2005), pp. 55-60. Also talks about their connections to the small textile industry, the Fernandez Brothers, and the. Bola de Nieve and La Especial.

of Lázaro Cárdenas, the Fernández brothers invested most of their capital into the cotton and textile business, but soon began to falter under mounting debts as demand of cotton and textiles began to dry up. They never considered this would be a short-lived commercial boom; in fact, many thought this false start was in reality Acapulco's final take off as an important port in the Pacific. In no time, war-time commerce came crashing down. The war had ended. But it had ended along with Acapulco's short-lived boom in trade, and for merchants everything henceforth would start collapsing all around: the commercial port imploded, the new merchant houses caved in as merchants went bankrupt once again, losing all of their property, this time for good.

As the following chapters explore, changes in property rights in the port generated not only frictions between merchants and post-revolutionary parvenus, but also between army and navy officers and fishermen, stevedores, and small landholders in the outskirts of Acapulco. This meant that the displacement of the merchant class, at the top, also signaled a deep reshuffling of the entire social order that had grown around the coaling station and the port of call. Stevedores, another powerful group of workers who used to be the best paid in the port eventually found a common cause with other groups. As merchants became pauperized and became fierce critics of the nascent tourism industry, they joined efforts with a group of newcomers, many of them writers, journalists, and hacks who began to adopt the voice of "the people" in Acapulco to launch blistering attacks against Mexico's post-revolutionary bourgeoisie, tourists, veterans of the Revolution, and entrepreneurs who were deeply transforming Acapulco. The writer Juan Ramón Campuzano, by all standards a newcomer, since he had recently migrated to the port from Tixtla, Guerrero, began to work as a correspondent to a local newspaper in Acapulco in the 1930s. Mocking the tawdry business of tourism, and ridiculing the different phrases used to advertise the resort, Campuzano published in 1937 an equally shoddy pamphlet entitled *Guía lírica para*

*turistas. Acapulco, belleza trágica y otros paisajes*, responding mockingly to excerpts of tourism campaigns:<sup>373</sup>

Acapulco no tiene un comercio marítimo seguro, pero en cambio, cada año millares de turistas pasan sus vacaciones en sus playas, se divierten y gastan su dinero (guía de turistas) ... Visite usted en sus vacaciones la hermosa bahía de Acapulco, famosa en todo el mundo...

To which he replied, mockingly, in what one of his fellow writers described as “un panfleto flojísimo:”<sup>374</sup>

Y esto, en nada beneficia a los cientos de alijadores desarrapados del pueblo. Los turistas se hospedan en los hoteles del grupo de ríquillos del Puerto, que tienen acaparado también el comercio fuerte; y ese dinero de los turistas que siquiera cada año llega a Acapulco, no va a parar a los pobres que lo necesitan, porque pertenece a los ricos... A la bahía de Acapulco, no llega con seguridad un barco de importancia, ni siquiera cada dos meses. Los pequeños barcos que informalmente tocan el puerto, y el gran barco nacional de la desocupación y del hambre que está amarrado siempre al viejo muelle, no justifican de ningún modo la fama de la bahía.

Acapulco’s old history of mobility, which gave life to an intermittent port town throughout the nineteenth century, was reinterpreted in terms of a narrative of destitution and declension in the 1930s, a narrative that was slowly crafted by merchants who saw most of their interests in the port being swept aside.

Si no conoce usted Acapulco, no conoce lo mejor de México (propaganda turística) ... El arribo inesperado de un barco, que ocupa por unos cuantos días a un grupo de trabajadores debilitados por el hambre, constituye un verdadero acontecimiento de la vida del puerto.

In no time, this story was quickly appropriated and used by other newcomers, journalists, hacks, and writers in defense of “el pueblo,” a narrative that served well the interests of many

---

<sup>373</sup> The following quotes are from Juan R. Campuzano. *Acapulco, belleza trágica y otros paisajes*. (México: L.E.A.R., 1937).

<sup>374</sup> In a meeting of the Liga de Escritores y Artistas Revolucionarios, April 1937, Efraín Huerta recalled this “Tan solo Juanito R. Campuzano, antes de la conferencia, se dedicó a repartir, como si fueran volantes, su flojísimo ‘Acapulco’, guía lírica para turistas, que es un folleto de aspirante a describir ‘bellezas trágicas’ y otras cosas menos conmovedoras” see <http://www.milenio.com/cultura/resena-metropolitana>.

agrarian groups, small merchants, fishermen, leagues of “alijadores” (stevedores), muleteers, and many other workers in the transport industry who were holding fast onto a vanishing refueling port who were still connected to the old coaling station and its agricultural economy. They eventually formed a league in 1935 called the Liga Regional Obreros y Campesinos de Ambas Costas “Juan R. Escudero,” which pushed forcefully for an agrarian and labor reform in the port under Lázaro Cárdenas’s presidency. It is precisely this economy in transition, with the rise of tourism in Acapulco, what became the main object of criticism, but paradoxically, by further pushing for land reforms, workers in the port of call eventually crippled the entire social order in Acapulco, opening the door wide open for the resort and tourism services to take over the economy. The port of call was completely swept aside; many groups were displaced by new migrants or absorbed by different services in the tourism industry.

### III

#### **The Port and the Resort: A Mixed Urban Economy**

The turn to tourism as a response to the decline of a traditional economic function—fishing, maritime trade, or manufacture—is clearly something shared by many modern-day cities. Urban historians of British ports have delved into this problem of seaside economic collapse and reinvention. For them, it is paramount to escape from a prevailing set of assumptions that regards seaside tourism as simply an “escape route from the decline of fishing and maritime trade.” The tourist industry was not the only path. J.K. Walton develops an interesting argument for the case of ports: conflict and tension between port and city is a frequent characteristic; and yet, the very existence of tensions suggests the presence of both economic activities, until eventually one

disappears.<sup>375</sup> The tensions in a mixed economy, in transition, played out in Acapulco when the transport and service sectors took over Acapulco's rural economic base dedicated to trade, dismantling the last remnants of an ailing port that used to rely on commerce. Henceforward Acapulco became a port trading in services as a coaling station, then as a transport hub. The transition to a city trading in tourism services became easier when mobility and travel changed at an unforeseen speed during the first half of the twentieth century.

### ***Mobility and Travel***

Geographic mobility together with better communications, further connecting Acapulco to the Pacific Coast and the interior of Mexico, intensified the circulation of people through the port, which in turn provoked not only radical changes in the socioeconomic structure of the port, but also a change in attitudes towards the port, the beach, the bay, the shore, and the coast of Guerrero. Mobility and connections abruptly shifted the direction of Acapulco towards a mixed urban economy that would ultimately give way to a tourist city.

Low geographic mobility was the norm during the Porfiriato. Barring coastal traffic, slow internal migratory movements, and a trickle of foreign migrants like merchants and settlers, mobility was in large part dominated by forced population transfers— military moves, conscriptions, small wars of attrition (i.e. the Yaqui Wars), labor camps and indentured labor in Yucatán's henequen plantations, and other state-sponsored activities like colonization projects. With the Mexican Revolution, mobility immediately rose to staggering heights; epidemics, wars, famines, *la leva* and *la bola* swirled upon many regions and set the population on the move at a

---

<sup>375</sup> J.K. Walton "seaside resorts and maritime history", *International Journal of Maritime History*, 9 (1997), pp. 125-47 and *Resorts and Ports*, Peter Borsay and John K Walton, 13 These "stresses and strains" within and between different economies are often absorbed by spatial segregation. I would add that spatial segregation, moreover, became a defining feature of both port-cities and tourist cities, and urban segregation has its origin in this transition from port to resort.

massive scale. Mexican society was thus redrawn by the upheavals of Revolution along the lines of all sorts of socioeconomic distinctions and new forms of movement across society and regions; in other words, social and geographic mobility became a major force of change brought by the mass mobilization of people during the Revolution.<sup>376</sup>

Contemporaries of the so-called Mexican Miracle like Alberto Pani established a causal link between the deeper currents of population movements set off by the Revolution and a new type of mobility, tourism:<sup>377</sup>

El turismo en México es un producto genuino de la Revolución. La lucha armada contra el Viejo Régimen sacudió la población de toda la República y desarraigó de ella el *apoltronamiento*. El Nuevo Régimen, triunfante, ha prescrito las vacaciones periódicas a todos los trabajadores, incluso los del Estado, y caracterizado su política vial con la construcción de una red de carreteras pavimentadas que extiendan el uso del automóvil y estimule las excursiones, las encauce y las sistematice....desalojado transitoriamente el mexicano, por las corrientes turísticas establecidas, del terruño al que parecía estar incrustado para hacerlo admirar nuevos panoramas e incorporarlo a otras poblaciones... Las visitas de los extranjeros a nuestro país nos son tanto o más provechosas. Las corrientes turísticas relativas, con especialidad las que provienen de allende al Bravo, han despertado ciudades y regiones y, más que eso aún, han repetido el milagro de Lázaro, resucitando épocas y civilizaciones muertas.

Pani's depiction, evoking the words of the French Revolution to describe the Mexican Revolution, captures the recurrent theme that took hold of many Mexican narratives of modernization: the leitmotif of sleepy towns violently jolted out of their slumber by revolutions and tourists. Acapulco, Taxco, San Miguel de Allende, Guanajuato, Zacatecas, among countless other declining colonial ports and mining cities, off the beaten track of explorers, became those proverbial sleepy towns. Their ancient colonial splendor, like Lazarus' miracle, had to be

---

<sup>376</sup> “the upward (a growing urban middle class) and the outward (the “new immigrants,” the “old” overseas Chinese); the stagnant (rural unemployed) and the uprooted (“floating population” or internal migrants). Xin Liu “economic reforms have set the population on the run.”” In Julie Chu. *Cosmologies of Credit: Transnational Mobility and the Politics of Destination in China*. (USA: Duke University Press, 2010).

<sup>377</sup> Alberto J. Pani, Tres monografías: I. Revolucionarios y reaccionarios. -II. La política hacendaria del nuevo régimen. -III. La industria nacional del turismo. (México, D.F.: Talleres de la Editorial “Cvltvra”, 1941), 223-26.

resurrected. In this story, Acapulco became the fisher's village in the midst of breakneck modern transformations, though this could not be farther from the reality in a seaport so old, with such a highly stratified society in the nineteenth century, crossed and renewed through a series of conflicts and displacements by the constant movement of people to and from the sea. Acapulco's seaport society had always been caught between the stagnant backwater of its hinterland and the dynamic forefront of mercantilist capitalism. But as the space of Mexico's Pacific littoral declined, Acapulco's society found itself at the interstices created by the circulation of people and *cabotaje* in the nineteenth century.

Acapulco's long economic transition, through new and old forms of mobility, would bring to the surface this old mixture of coastal backwardness and cosmopolitanism. After the Mexican Revolution, the pattern of mass population movement continued, eventually overlapping with the process of demobilization. At the time, mobility, reform, and demobilization were perceived as steps towards pacification in the late 1920s, a seemingly unattainable goal in the country. Social mobility, indeed, refers to the movement of individuals, families or groups across stratified socioeconomic positions, while geographic mobility, the physical movement of people, goods, capital, and things; both types of mobility of people were channeled and facilitated by the opening of the road from Acapulco to Mexico City in 1927 and the building of the port's first airport in 1934. Scholars of mobility studies and the Mexican Revolution have established connections between these two types of mobility. Alan Knight writes that, after the armed phase of the Mexican Revolution, "rich families, already threatened by land and labor reform, saw their fortunes evaporate, their property being seized or snapped up by parvenus with access to gold, dollars, or political power. The geographical mobility provoked by the Revolution—extensive campaigning,

migration, and the flight of refugees to cities like the capital— was complemented by enhanced social mobility, the product not just of political renovation, but also socio-economic upheaval.”<sup>378</sup>

Acapulco went through a similar process of geographic mobility overlapping with social mobility, reinforcing each other as different groups, in waves, began arriving in the port, altering the port’s local socioeconomic ladder in the course of very few years, between the inauguration of the road in 1927 and the first strip of land for built for small airplanes in 1934. The first group of newcomers were drawn to the port from emerging tourism markets in Mexico City and the United States. Aside foreign motorists and steamship passengers, there was also a stream of national visitors.<sup>379</sup> arriving in the port. Buses and cars packed with visitors from the interior of Mexico visited the port. For instance, high school and university students from Cuernavaca asked the federal government to provide cars and buses to visit the port. They argued that tourism and visiting unexplored areas in the country, like the port of Acapulco, was an experience that enriched their education. The second group of newcomers was the stream of rural migrants who flooded the port from different corners of the state of Guerrero but also from different states in Mexico, this stream overlapped with all the mobile groups of displaced, refugees, and detainees who had been set on the move during years of Revolution and upheaval. But this highly mobile group will be explored in depth in the eight chapter. The third group, and slightly related to the second, was the group of foreign merchants who returned to the port after the Mexican Revolution, especially those of American and Spanish origins. One of the Spanish merchants referred to them, in many hairsplitting distinctions, as “emboladas” of Spaniards, “ultramarinos,” “refugiados” of the Mexican Revolution who returned but also those of the Spanish Civil War who arrived in the

---

<sup>378</sup> Alan Knight. *The Mexican Revolution: A Very Short Introduction*. (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2016).

<sup>379</sup> AGN, Fondo Presidentes, Abelardo L. Rodríguez, Box 10, 107.1/47.

port.<sup>380</sup> This period also saw American merchants returning with their families along with many new American and European businessmen arriving in the port, which takes us to the fourth and last group: all of those “parvenus” who led deep social transformations at a local level in many different regions in Mexico. This was a small sector of the Mexican post-revolutionary bourgeoisie, a mixture of generals, veterans of the Revolution, politicians, artists, architects and businessmen who arrived in the port, attracted by land developing companies and the emerging hotel industry.

Then there was tourist traffic, particularly automobile tourism, between Mexico and the United States. It boomed in the 1920s and 1930s, but the vast majority of these North American exchanges took place at the border between both nations. There was a sense that new highways were “opening up” Mexico not only to international tourists but also for internal tourist traffic. The Mexican National Highway Commission, the American Chamber of Commerce, diverse national and local tourism commissions as well as automobile associations in the United States and Mexico began to converge and work together, which resulted in border towns, hotels, and businesses flourishing all along the complex patterns of commercial exchange and along the vast system of highways that began to spread between Mexico and the United States.

Although routes between Texas, Tamaulipas, and Nuevo Leon stood as a major pole of economic exchange and mobility, their counterpart, routes in the North American West, in connection to Mexico City and the interior of Mexico, dominated the overall exchange as commerce and tourism boomed at the border. Lawrence Culver and other scholars have analyzed the reshaping of what they refer to as the Pacific borderlands into a site of leisure, tourism, and consumption spurred primarily by shared markets in the North American West, as large

---

<sup>380</sup> Alfonso Argudín, *Autobiografía del Almirante Alfonso Argudín*, p. 268-9 Las oleadas de diferente newcomers. 4 “emboladas” de españoles; los “refugiados;” “los ultramarinos” hablando sobre los Asturianos Las Familias de Comerciantes: [https://issuu.com/muva/docs/auto\\_biografía\\_del\\_almirante\\_alfonso\\_argudín/268](https://issuu.com/muva/docs/auto_biografía_del_almirante_alfonso_argudín/268).

infrastructural developments at the border and on the coast facilitated new transport communications like roads, cruise ships, and later commercial air travel that began to circulate passengers along the Pacific coast of North America.<sup>381</sup> A revealing form of measuring this exchange resulting from tourist traffic, at least from the perspective of American tourism in Mexico, is to trace tourist expenditures at border towns and regions collected by American consular officers, the United States Department of Commerce, and summarized and presented by Eyler Simpson, which are as follows for the year 1930:

**Figure 2: American Expenditures in Mexico (according to U.S. Consular Districts along the border)**

<u>United States Consular Districts along Mexican Border</u>	<u>American Expenditures in Mexico</u>
<u>(Arranged from West to East)</u>	
Ensenada, Lower California	\$ 22,124,000
Mexicali, Lower California	10,000,000
Nogales, Sonora	932,000
Agua Prieta, Sonora	2,976,000
Ciudad Juarez, Chihuahua	3,500,000
Piedras Negras, Coahuila	572,000
Nuevo Laredo, Tamaulipas	11,160,000
Matamoros, Tamaulipas	4,378,000
Total	55,642,000

Although imperfect, this data does reflect a pattern of tourist traffic and expenditure along the border: the western border, and particularly, the one that intersects with the sea dominated

---

<sup>381</sup> Lawrence Culver. *The Frontier of Leisure: Southern California and the Shaping of Modern America*. (Oxford University Press, 2010); and Culver, “Promoting the Pacific Borderlands: Leisure and Labor in Southern California, 1870-1950” and Rachel St. John, “Selling the Border: Trading Land, Attracting Tourists, and Marketing American Consumption on the Baja California Border, 1900-1934” in Alexis McCrossen. *Land of Necessity: Consumer Culture in the United States-Mexico Borderlands*. (Durham [N.C.]: Duke University Press, 2009); Jessica Kim. “Destiny of the West: The International Pacific Highway and the Pacific Borderlands, 1929-1957.” *Western Historical Quarterly* 46, no. 3 (September 2015): 311-33.

tourist traffic between both nations. It was also estimated that \$ 2,467,000 was spent in 1930 by American travelers in Mexico arriving by steamship [See figure 2 above]. Simpson further notes that expenditures increased from \$32,041,800 in 1928 to \$55,642,000 in 1930. Meanwhile, massive trans border infrastructural projects like the International Pacific Highway, projected from Los Angeles to Mexico City, between 1929 and 1957, further tied Acapulco to enormous urban clusters in the North American West and the interior of Mexico. “The highway project,” notes historian Jessica Kim, “created opportunities for tourism, trade, and political alliances far beyond the U.S.-Mexico borderline. Highway promoters constructed an alternative borderland, one that ran north to south along the countries' shared coastline.”<sup>382</sup> Given this macro picture, it is no surprise that Acapulco saw a massive shift from boat travelers to road and automobile visitors. This shift at a massive scale also heralded the redirection of tourism from border towns in the 1920s and 1930s to seaports and beach resorts in the postwar years in the 1940s and 1950s. This trend was further reinforced by the transition from sea to road to air forms of commercial traveling as traced in the statistics of the Inter-American Travel and Travel Expenditure, which in the 1930s were overwhelmingly dominated by road tourism traffic and travel.<sup>383</sup>

### ***Changing Attitudes towards the Port, the Bay, and the Seashore***

In his pioneering book on the invention of the beach and the spread of the seaside holiday, Alain Corbin explores how desire was finely attuned to seaboard spaces as social practices and sensibilities transformed one another. Slowly, between 1740 and 1840, attitudes towards the shoreline changed. Corbin ends his analysis at a turning point in the spread of the seaside holiday,

---

<sup>382</sup> Jessica Kim. “Destiny of the West: The International Pacific Highway and the Pacific Borderlands, 1929-1957.” *Western Historical Quarterly* 46, no. 3 (September 2015): 311–33.

<sup>383</sup> Segundo Congreso Interamericano de Turismo. Estimated in the Finance Division, Bureau of Foreign and Domestic Commerce. Based on volume of travel and average international expenditures. United States Travel Account 1938-1939. *Statistics of Inter-American Travel and Travel Expenditure*.

a moment in time when Europe's high-ranking nobility began to borrow from each other and emulate a combination of Victorian social practices and arrangements that had invented the modern beach resort. Aristocratic displays on the seaside were fanned out through Europe far beyond the small gloomy beaches of Victorian England, eventually propelling their counterparts in the nobility to recreate mirror displays along seaside "rivieras" and resorts in the more agreeable Mediterranean climates.

Along the same research lines, other historians have picked up where Corbin left his analysis, further exploring how society and the shore transformed one another in the late nineteenth century. Historian Catherin Cocks argues that the changes in the relationship between the seaside and broader sectors of a rising consumer society that "updated tropicality" in the early twentieth century occurred as part of an "intertwined transformation in medicine, horticulture, and transportation. Beginning in the 1880s, a network of fruit plantations, railroads, and steamships linked first Southern California and Florida to the rest of the United States and then Mexico and the Caribbean ever more closely to their northern neighbor."<sup>384</sup>

Acapulco became one of the pioneering "tropical beach resorts" that completely changed the nature of the modern seaside holiday, ultimately turning into one of the iconic sites of a reshaped beach landscape in the 1950s, as the last chapter will explore. When Edward the VIII, the Prince of Wales, as early as the 1920s visited Acapulco, the port had only been recently awoken by decades of revolutionary convulsions, from a situation that back then was perceived as a town in an endless state of malarial slumber. A narrative about Acapulco was slowly emerging in the late 1920s and early 1930s. The strayed British aristocrat, with a penchant for American tastes, would inadvertently help this godforsaken place, so goes the story, henceforth Acapulco would

---

<sup>384</sup> Catherine Cocks. *Tropical Whites: The Rise of the Tourist South in the Americas*. (United States: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), p. 5.

become an ideal site for fishing expeditions and explorers. His disturbance would have otherwise passed largely unnoticed, dismissed as an aristocratic quirk worthy of a nonconformist British noble, if only Acapulco had not become a renowned resort a few decades later. The times and seaside tastes were changing fast.

Acapulco boomed and became an iconic beach resort, and in retrospect, his visit became a turning point in those self-serving narratives carefully crafted by boosters and jetsetters who, during the postwar years, were eager to advertise and remind tourists of Acapulco's cosmopolitan, glamorous, and even aristocratic origins as a beach resort. "The ways in which time was used and space constructed," notes Corbin, "were shaped by the forms of sociability that were organized and then spread across the seaboard." He further argues that "the manner of being together, the complicity among tourists, the signs of recognition, and the procedures for making distinctions also determined the means of enjoying" the beach as a "new social scene developed." It was all "spurred on by the desire to enjoy the shore," but this image of how a desirable shore should look like was in constant change.<sup>385</sup>

Indeed, the visit to Acapulco by the Prince of Wales, like a puncture through beach social practices across time and space, showed how far aristocrats and members of the high-ranking nobility had come. Their "genealogy of social practices" and tastes had come a long way, changed beyond recognition by the 1920s, especially when placed next to that concoction of submersion treatments, shingly seashores, and dank prudishness that invented the "modern beach" in still nascent resorts in Europe during the early nineteenth century. By the late nineteenth century, however, new modes of transportation changed the means of appreciating the seaside in warmer climates as steamship passengers, motorists, and airplane travelers, all of them potential tourists,

---

<sup>385</sup> Alain Corbin. *The Lure of the Sea: The Discovery of the Seaside in the Western World, 1750-1840*. Translation, Jocelyn Phelps, (London, England: Penguin Books, 1995), 250.

became complicit in the invention of the “tropical beach.” Seaside traveling in Mediterranean-like climates in California and Northwestern Mexico gave way to nascent beach resorts in more semi-tropical and tropical coasts where new leisure habits and forms of sociability eventually converged. In Mexico, steamship travelers cruised off the coast and adventurous motorists took on the new networks of roads. New air routes and steamship lines were created to compliment these overland connections.

An American motorist, for instance, was “contemplating quite seriously a trip by automobile from the American border to Mexico City...and beyond.” Presenting himself as an editor and journalist he sent a letter to Calles soliciting him an interview. “Having made many cross-country trips...I feel it is not impossible to continue further [into Mexico]. If such a trip were possible [and] if I found the roads good... I would think with the publicity which I would give to it, that an automobile highway might be the result. This would bring,” he added, “the trade of thousands of American automobile tourists; and should strengthen good feelings between both great countries.”<sup>386</sup> We do not know the fate of the American motorist, whether he actually cruised Mexico and if he ever reached Mexico City, perhaps on the way from Torreon to Mexico City, *cristeros*, instead of Calles, gave him a welcoming interview in 1927. But what we do know is that from the mid-1920s onwards “thousands of automobile tourists” were cruising around Mexico, in the midst of the chaos; in their adventures, Mexican and American motorists seemed unruffled by the prospect of running into insurrections and upheavals on their way to unexplored destinations.

A New Yorker, Ernest Valentini, “held his breath all the ninety-odd miles from Chilpancingo down to Acapulco”, recalled his journey companion, “not because he feared disaster on that road...but because with all his roving [he] had never seen the Pacific.” Already by the early 1930s there was a rich collection of “Motorists’ Guide” and travelers’ accounts published in

---

<sup>386</sup> Letter from Cornelius Vanderbilt to P.E. Calles, 30 Dec. 1927, AGN, Ob/Calles, Box 27, 104-C-78, 50.

Mexico and the United States, all of them including Acapulco. The myth of colonial splendor had now turned into a legend, into the “Ruta de los Galeones” as one Road Comission handbook sold it in 1931: “[Valentini] rather expected it might be the day on which caravels were due from the Philippines, bearing their annual consignment of Eastern wealth...we topped the last rise and Val [his companion] gave a yell of triumph. The Pacific lay before us. Yes, but no caravels: he had arrived three centuries too late...”<sup>387</sup> During their sojourn in Acapulco they sold their car to a “buyer who was not the average car-torturing Mexican but an experienced aviator and a nephew of a former president of Mexico”—“distinctly *gente decente*,” he added, “as well as young and handsome.”<sup>388</sup>

Indeed, grimy revolutionaries had disappeared from the public imaginary, replaced by *gente decente* from Mexico City like Vito Alessio Robles who had never been to Acapulco. When the road opened in 1927, he could not wait any longer, only one year had passed when he grasped the opportunity, and quickened by the curiosity, visited the port for the first time. There he began writing his book *Acapulco en la historia y la leyenda*, published in 1932. He began with the proverbial history of the port, its “Asiatic splendors” long since vanished. For him, the only vestiges of this splendor were the huge granite rocks of its bay—“In Acapulco, stones speak the august language of its history,” he concluded somewhat dramatically for a port that preserved very little of the urban spaces that had kept alive such an old site in the Pacific.<sup>389</sup>

From his exile in San Diego and Sonoma County, ex-president Calles established an epistolary exchange in 1936 with his daughter and family who were spending their holidays in Acapulco. His daughter, Hortensia, explained to him the beauty of the beaches, how peaceful the port was, despite the overwhelming heat and sun that had led to herself and the family getting a

---

<sup>387</sup> Harry A. Franck, *Trailing Cortez through Mexico* (New York: Frederick A. Stokes Company, 1935), 304.

<sup>388</sup> Franck, *Trailing Cortez*, 308.

<sup>389</sup> Vito Alessio Robles, *Acapulco en la historia y en la leyenda* (Mexico: Ediciones Botas, 1948) 11-23. First edition was published in 1932, same title and same editorial.

scalding sunburn they did not expect. Calles, making a series of comparisons with Californian beaches, and with Playa Tambor in Northwestern Mexico confessed he had never visited the port:<sup>390</sup>

Indiscutiblemente que este puerto con el tiempo y a medida que vayan proporcionando comodidades modernas será uno de los centros turísticos más importantes del país. Por circunstancias muy especiales que prevalecieron en épocas pasadas, no me ha sido posible hasta el presente conocer Acapulco a pesar del gran interés que siempre tuve por la construcción de su carretera, cosa indispensable para que sea el balneario escogido por todos.

With a prologue in a second edition, published in 1948, Vito Alessio Robles reinterpreted the development of the port, how much it had changed since his first visit when he began to write his monograph on the urban history of Acapulco: “In 16 years Acapulco has experienced a radical transformation, wrote Vito Alessio Robles many years after, “with its numerous, well-conditioned, and modern hotels, with the urbanization of its most beautiful lands in its surroundings... nowadays,” he added, “Acapulco has become an ideal site for leisure and recreation [and] with this book I have modestly contributed... to the current of sympathy that runs towards the most beautiful port of the Pacific.”<sup>391</sup> Indeed, the reinterpretation of Acapulco’s “glorious history,” reformulated and mythologized during the nineteenth century, eventually caught up with Acapulco’s rapid transformation. Even sailors who had visited the port before, attracted by this romantic image of an old transpacific world long-since gone, wished to visit the port again<sup>392</sup> It took a century of turmoil and isolation from central Mexico, years of ill-fated experiments dissolving into violence, for the myth of colonial splendor to come full circle in a process of

---

<sup>390</sup> Calles to her daughter, Sonoma County, CA, Nov. 12, 1936. For the rest of the Exchange, see the Fideicomiso, FAPECYFT- FPEC, series, 12011000, file. 66, inv. 1266, legajo 1, foja 19. Elias Calles Chacón de Torreblanca, Hortensia.

<sup>391</sup> Vito Alessio Robles, *Acapulco en la historia y en la leyenda* (Mexico: Ediciones Botas, 1948) 11-23. First edition was published in 1932, same title and same editorial.

<sup>392</sup> AGN, Fondo Presidentes, Abelardo L. Rodríguez, Box 11, 107. 1/85. There is an interesting letter from a German sailor who in 1903 had visited the port and sent a letter to the president seeking to visit the famed resort many years later.

historical reinterpretation. Only then did a cycle of economic renewal begin, producing yet another long-lasting myth of splendor—the “Golden Years” of Acapulco as a beach resort.

### ***The War-Time Port and Resort: The Reemergence of Commerce in Acapulco and its Hinterland***

The port saw a brief revival in international trade during the Second World War. As the war raged for years on end in Asia and Europe, Mexico was able to export large volumes of manufactured goods, out of which a trickle was exported through Acapulco on its way to Central America, particularly Costa Rica and Panama. Even though overland transport costs to Acapulco were particularly high, since freight buses had to traverse the sinuous new road between Mexico City and Acapulco making transportation costly when return costs were included, yet overall, they were offset by cheap maritime transport in North America’s Pacific Coast. Transporting goods through the Gulf of Mexico to Central America was far costlier, despite railways and cheaper overland transportation to Veracruz, than through the Pacific Coast. Because of this, in 1942 the port reemerged as an international commercial port. The value of exports sharply rose from \$ 2,350.00 (MXN Pesos) in 1939 to \$1.934,484 in 1942 and it kept rising until it reached nearly 4 million and a half by July of 1948 [see Table below].<sup>393</sup>

The value of Acapulco’s exports, however, becomes negligible when compared to those of other Mexican Pacific ports of some importance in the world of international commerce. That same year of 1947, when Acapulco exported \$3.157,594.00 (MXN Pesos), [See figure 3 below] Manzanillo exported \$4.962,155.00, while far ahead was Mazatlán with \$11.594,893.00, and even farther ahead, leaving behind all Pacific ports, was Guaymas exporting \$18.233,244.00. Without any doubt, Acapulco’s commerce was relatively insignificant when compared to exports in other

---

<sup>393</sup> Moisés T de la Peña, *Guerrero económico* /Volume II. (Chilpancingo: Gobierno del Estado de Guerrero, 1949), pp. 519-27.

Pacific ports, let alone to those on the Gulf of Mexico. But it was far from inconsequential. 42% of the total exports in 1947 comprised yarns, fabrics and some textiles, the rest (between 400 and 700 thousand pesos) was in machinery, hardware, metal and chemical products, glassware, porcelain and earthenware.<sup>394</sup>

Once commercial routes had been established, exporting many products from Acapulco, older networks of transport and coasting trade along the Pacific were reactivated, stimulating traffic between Panama and San Francisco and, as a result, attracting a large influx of imports. The value of imports also rose staggeringly until it peaked in 1946 and 1947, most likely, as a result of a large number of commodities, goods, manufactured products, and construction materials needed in the expanding city and the tourism markets in Acapulco during the aftermath of the Second World War. Most of the imports came from California and they were mainly paper, chemical products, and light-weight machinery.

---

<sup>394</sup> De la Peña, *Guerrero económico* /Volume II, p. 524.

**Figure 3: Imports and Exports in Mexico from the Port of Acapulco, 1921-1948**

YEARS	IMPORTS		EXPORTS	
	Tons	Value (\$)*	Tons	Value (\$)*
1921	—	616,184	—	80,845
1922	—	416,330	—	71,083
1923	—	493,855	—	57,719
1924	—	245,292	—	37,764
1925	—	459,184	—	25,435
1926	—	348,963	—	125,461
1927	—	166,139	—	130,803
1928	—	330,070	—	128,997
1929	—	262,115	—	76,503
1930	1,047	221,985	344	24,469
1931	873	202,664	248	31,939
1932	601	147,561	642	92,718
1933	306	87,175	231	34,000
1934	328	145,216	263	68,173
1935	1,057	3,527,903	65	81,510
1936	250	31,739	151	8,441
1937	1,057	35,190	123	47,235
1938	1,273	72,481	27	14,589
1939	—	5,094	—	2,350
1940	2,298	132,091	2	4,707
1941	2,101	163,861	29	174,006
1942	9	40,417	399	1,934,484
1943	759	797,550	2,371	2,906,537
1944	2,406	2,105,905	2,401	2,523,080
1945	2,713	2,009,221	2,955	2,974,363
1946	9,351	6,791,281	2,972	3,133,562
1947	10,628	7,816,946	1,953	3,157,594
1948	3,351	2,562,272	954	4,278,920(**)

SOURCE: Table extracted from Moisés T de la Peña, *Guerrero económico* /Volume II. (Chilpancingo: Gobierno del Estado de Guerrero, 1949), pp. 519-27

Postwar cash crops became an additional obstacle to the resort as it failed to develop solid linkages with local agricultural belts in greater Acapulco. The emerging resort and its demands for

a rich variety of perishable goods far exceeded the capacity of Acapulco's weak agriculture economy to be able to satisfy this growing demand, particularly high during tourism seasons. Boosters thought greater Acapulco would turn into an Eden of agricultural products needed for the tourist economy, but this vision was ultimately stunted by this sea of coconut fields solely devoted to the mass production of copra. Acapulco would have to import and transport goods from remote places to fulfill a growing demand of basic goods in the tourist industry.

Coconut fields ultimately left the port and its agricultural hinterland disconnected economically, but intimately connected demographically and politically to the social and economic problems generated by this cash crop— indeed, a ticking time bomb. The social dislocation brought about by this process was temporarily assuaged by the opportunities of a rising economic pole in the tourism industry in Acapulco. In this process of agricultural displacements in Acapulco's hinterland, an emerging rural economy dependent on cash crops and commodities (coffee, copra, and sesame seed), disconnected from the tourism industry, would eventually supplant the meager rural economy of cotton and textile production that had spread across the Costa Grande in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Acapulco's international port began to disappear; war-time commerce subsided almost as quickly as it arose. More and more merchants went bankrupt and the entire class was pauperized. Many retailers and merchants became small hoteliers before slowly fading into oblivion. Fishermen and ejidatarios redirected their business to services in the tourism industry; stevedores, muleteers, and workers in the entrepôt economy joined the transport industry and other activities. The forces of agglomeration were finally set off. Agrarian reform, the *fraccionadoras*, and the hotel industry in the 1930s set in motion a piecemeal reshuffling of the multiple and overlapping land regimes and economic activities tied to the port. Only then did a blueprint for waterfront

redevelopment emerge and became a guide for the complete overhaul of Acapulco during the postwar years, a period explored in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER 7

### **Creating the Coastal City** *City Planning, Urban Development, and Postwar Tourism, 1945-1955*

“La carretera mató al puerto e hizo surgir al bello centro turístico” wrote Moisés T. de la Peña in his monumental study of Guerrero, from the Second World War to the postwar years.<sup>395</sup> The study, focusing on many aspects of the regional economy of the Southern Pacific state, can also be read as a monograph on the collapse of a seaport and the rise of a city. It became by the late 1940s a powerful economic pole in the region. A spell of war-time commerce, irregular by all standards, had temporarily lifted the port of Acapulco from a long period of commercial decline. But things quickly settled back into their everyday stillness when the war ended; and the port resumed its decline as it had done for decades on end.

Then, all of a sudden, the city began to expand rapidly in ever more aggressive ways, growing at the expense of both the commercial port and the fishing town. The age-old relationship between the port and the city was fundamentally unsettled, and part of this upheaval of roles came with Acapulco finally losing most if not all of its traditional connections to the sea. Commercial fishing, trade, and navigation, all began to dwindle by the end of the Second World War. From then on, the complex dynamic between the port and the city was reduced to a simple zero-sum game in which the port receded while the city expanded. Ultimately, Acapulco would thrive without the need of a port and its various functions, creating instead a cluster of services around tourism, a process that would radically alter the town and its age-old ties to the sea. By the late 1940s, the town had destroyed the port and grown rapidly into a tourist city that took over the

---

<sup>395</sup> Moisés T de la Peña, *Guerrero económico* /Volume I. (Chilpancingo: Gobierno del Estado de Guerrero, 1949), 521.

entire region, the hinterland, and foreland. It began spreading its urban imaginary to far-flung markets deep into the heartland of Mexico and the rest of North America.

The story told in this chapter explains why this particular city came to be, how Acapulco was imagined, planned, destroyed, and recreated; as well as why this resulted in a tourist city growing so rapidly at the expense of the port. The consolidation of a tourist economy in the 1940s was not as haphazard a process as it had been during its emergence a decade earlier. A great deal of coordinated destruction, creation, and imagination went into the resort and the emerging coastal city during the postwar years. Acapulco began to attract national and international attention not only because of its beaches, dramatic natural landscapes, and reputation as an old historic port, but because of its eye-catching and certainly odd urban reinvention. This stimulated the imagination of a host of planners and boosters who began to imagine Acapulco not as a port in decline in desperate need of revival, but as a modern city that needed to go through a process of “creative destruction” in order to finally revive. In their view, the revival of the port would thereby result as a natural consequence of this process of urban reinvention.

The central argument is built on the rejection of two previous interpretations. Acapulco was not a sprawling mess due to a basic lack of planning, as some scholars have argued; nor was it an over-planned failure, full of tidy regulations and footprints no one ever respected, partly because “locals” were ignored in these federal plans, as others have noted. Acapulco, I take it from here as my central argument, became at the time a referent in waterfront development and urban renewal after a century of false starts and economic stagnation. This was a momentous shift that has been largely ignored in historical scholarship, also forgotten in the public imaginary. Up until the 1960s, it became a highly attractive model of resort development in the hemisphere, but also a successful response to a universal trend taking place among many harbors that were quickly becoming obsolete. Many old port cities vanished and suffered many fates when they no longer

served as trading centers—due to various reasons we continue to explore. Acapulco, however, was one of these old ports that offered a successful way out when a new service-based economy emerged. Yet Acapulco became victim of its own success and image, always projected outwards to tourism markets and the world of urban planning. This success, I argue, created the ideal conditions for lack of economic diversification to ultimately bind the city to a one-track path from which it could hardly deflect in the face of too many unforeseen bottlenecks.

There is a corollary to the argument: the tourist city was neither inevitable nor predetermined. In fact, it will become evident that many boosters had in mind the creation of a coastal city with an international port: all from the start, Hong Kong or Los Angeles were in the minds of these busy planners, not Las Vegas. Yet at the time, no one could have ever imagined the final outcome of postwar planning and development in the city and the region (1945-1955). Even those actors who could actually foresee the direction the city was taking could do very little, partly because Acapulco's all-too successful reinvention cancelled out any serious criticism voiced by prescient observers like Moisés de la Peña. Time and again, they forewarned their sanguine colleagues of becoming so enthralled by the tourist city to the point of eventually ignoring more holistic forms of development for Acapulco. Planners, boosters, architects, and officials initially privileged the resort as a way to resurrect the port and the region, and ultimately create an important coastal city, but then lost control of the situation as Acapulco became firmly tethered to tourism, over-dependent on a single economic activity revolving around the real estate business, hotels, and a cluster of services in the tourism industry.

Thus lack of economic diversification was one of the unintended consequences set off during the postwar years. When planners tried to reverse course by resorting to more holistic forms of regional planning, it was already too late. The “agglomeration forces” of urban growth had become too difficult to rein in, especially after the 1950s. For the remorseful viewers, the strategic

error lay there in the designs and plans of boosters and urban planners. Once Acapulco's creators began to imagine the city separately from its port, completely divorced from its traditional sea-based functions, it became virtually impossible for the city to allow some space for other activities to bring diversity to Acapulco's economy and urban functions. Worse still, in the end, this "economy of agglomeration" brought about the complete collapse of the port which would later create a city containing the seeds of future and recurrent crises that, ironically, have pulled Acapulco's roots deeper into its one-track course of development, as the next chapter will explore. And yet Acapulco, against ever-dooming forecasts, has not only persisted over the years, it keeps growing, despite moving from one urban crisis to the next. This was another unintended consequence: the creation of a coastal city, with no active commercial port but with an ever-lasting tourist economy beset by urban crises, no different to the recurrent cycles of decline, reinvention, and renewal experienced throughout its long history as a port.

Three sections tell the present story in this chapter. The first briefly analyzes the postwar context: what might be called the period of the "golden age" of capitalism and mass tourism lasting from the 1940s to the 1970s. This period saw in Acapulco a postwar influx of tourists visiting the port. In response, city planning and urban development began to be considered more seriously as a means to overhaul the port and the city. The second section traces the process behind city planning and the imagining of its legal and regulatory framework for the implementation of Acapulco's city and regional plans. This process saw the creation of Acapulco's city plan, the *Plano Regulador* of 1945 and the overhauling of the Juntas Federales de Mejoras Materiales, a decentralized federal body in charge of public works and urban development in seaports and border towns. Both the federal board and the city plan were created to channel new and large volumes of resources, people, and capital flowing into Acapulco. The third section explores the interlinking

processes of planning and urban development, showing how they transformed Acapulco's foreland: the port, the city, and the shore.

The following story thus unfolds in a series of interactions between a splinter group of the post-revolutionary bourgeoisie—boosters, planners, architects, businessmen, federal officials, generals, and land developers—, foreign investors and businessmen who had migrated to the port, and displaced regional groups (fishermen, *ejidatarios*, small traders, merchants, and *colonos*), in the context of growing floating populations of rural migrants and tourists. All of these actors will eventually dominate the scene of urban development in Acapulco. Their disputes and interests often clashed or converged around the actions of land developing companies, the *compañías fraccionadoras*, the Junta Federal de Mejoras Materiales, and around the formulation and execution of the *Plano Regulador*. The political and social clashes that resulted from these interactions were often framed, discursively, as a dispute between arriviste “newcomers” and longstanding “residents,” locals versus foreigners, rich interlopers versus poor members of the seaport community; in sum, a Manichaean story that many historians have followed to show how the port of Acapulco was transformed into a tourist city. The reality, however, as the present chapter will demonstrate, was a much more complicated one.

With these actors and social conflicts in mind, one can proceed to an analysis of the two interlinked processes of planning and urban development in Acapulco, which might also be referred to as the processes of *imagining* and *creating*. Both lie behind the destruction of the port, the creation of a city, and the formation of Acapulco’s larger system of regions, markets, routes, and towns.

The first process, *imagining* the city, was carried out by a group of urban planners, architects, lawmakers, boosters, and officials who had been deeply involved in the planning of the city of Acapulco since the 1930s. Most of them received a boost from the federal administration

when their interests converged in the formulation of Acapulco's master city plan, the *Plano Regulador*, during the postwar years. They envisioned the several different paths Acapulco could take to achieve diversification and economic recovery. Miguel Alemán's presidential campaign and administration (1946-52) stood as a turning point when they put together architectural designs and new urban plans, presenting their work as a comprehensive strategy to incorporate the bay and its natural landscape into the growing city. Simultaneously, they created a legal and regulatory framework that would guide Acapulco's specific type of urban development along the coast. In the end, they brought in widely circulated ideas on modernist cities, regional and shoreline planning, and waterfront development. Different representations of the city were invoked: the city and the port, the region and the coast, the hinterland and foreland.

Second, the process of *creating* the city can be interpreted as a story of Acapulco's *Plano Regulador* and how it was implemented by *fraccionadoras* and construction companies jointly working with the Junta Federal de Mejoras Materiales. Their actions eventually crossed paths with multiple classes and organized groups in the public and private sectors of society in the port city of Acapulco. As they were incorporated or displaced, the Junta trudged on with its public works while urban constructions progressed sweepingly through the shore and the hillsides of the bay's amphitheater. But most of these groups had high stakes invested in Acapulco, quickly creating new conflicts and shifting alliances; alliances that sometimes but most of the times involved odd bedfellows. In no time, they turned the whole process of planning and development into a highly protracted one in Acapulco, a process full of hasty negotiations, displacements, contestations, and disputes. The result was a trail of urban footprints in the city's built environment; the footprints of legal disputes, politicking, architectural experimentation, corruption and speculation, all carrying their unintended outcomes and predictable conflicts, leaving behind urban projects, some finished, others unfinished. In sum, this chapter explores how displaced groups and the post-revolutionary

bourgeoisie, through their plans and actions on the built environment, began to imagine, recreate, and destroy the port and city of Acapulco as they reacted to the larger forces of urbanization and tourism that took hold of the port during the postwar years.

## I

### The Postwar Years and the “Mexican Miracle”

Acapulco during the “Golden Age” of Capitalism and Mass Tourism, 1945-1970

Tourism in Mexico boomed during the “Mexican Miracle;” a “genuine product of the Revolution,” as A.J. Pani noted. Tourism coincided with those thirty “magical postwar years” when Mexico and many other countries seemed set on a global race to catch up on economic growth after decades of war, revolution, and economic depression.<sup>396</sup> This period of bonanza, from the Marshall Plan to the Oil Crisis, created a global trend of economic growth, manifested in the Brazilian, Mexican, Japanese, and Italian “miracles;” in the “Wirtschaftswunder” in West Germany or the “Trente Glorieuses” in France, the “glorious thirty.” All would come crashing down with the first oil shock of 1973.<sup>397</sup>

Acapulco was a genuine product of this moment. During these years, tourism was considered a novelty in both scale and intensity. It was a period when tourism became a mass phenomenon, creating exceptional forms of leisure and resort development. The present chapter and the ones that follow trace the rise of a tourist city modelled on the form of resort development

---

<sup>396</sup> Alberto J. Pani, *Tres monografías: I. Revolucionarios y reaccionarios. -II. La política hacendaria del nuevo régimen. -III. La industria nacional del turismo.* (México, D.F.: Talleres de la Editorial “Cvltvra”, 1941), 223-26.

<sup>397</sup> Thomas Piketty and Arthur Goldhammer. *Capital in the Twenty-First Century.* (Cambridge Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2014), pp. 11-15, 96-99. Piketty presents an analysis of the comparative evolution of postwar economic growth in the United States (referred to as “North America” in his categories, while excluding Canada and Mexico) and Western Europe. Then, unfortunately, he ignores the rest of the world in this particular analysis while still universalizing his findings. But most interesting is his insight on the period, his criticism of the illusions of those “magical postwar years” when income inequality was perceived as a temporary phase of economic growth before inequality levels would automatically begin to decrease. Moving beyond the reductionist focus on Western Europe and the United States, this nevertheless reflects a general mood of optimism based on exceptional patterns of growth in many regions of the world. Tourism was a product of this mood of growth and optimism.

of the post-war Keynesian consensus: that is, a consensus of quick economic growth, economic dirigisme, high employment, welfarism, and most importantly for the tourism industry, high consumption and new forms of transport, advertisement, and mobility. They all combined to create the first wave of mass travel, reaching millions of international tourists by the 1970s. As a result, tourism became the new and indispensable part of the “invisible trade” in the balance of payments, the total account of outflows and inflows of services, funds, and goods a country sends and receives. For tourism receipts helped stabilize the income flow of many countries during the postwar years. Such stability in the balance of payments was desperately needed to carry out Mexico’s economic transformation during the postwar years.

Thus Acapulco became part of this model of tourism widely shared among many resorts. The Pacific resort came to represent these exceptional years, becoming an iconic site of this golden age of mass leisure and capitalism. Yet the model of tourism that emerged from these miraculous years was full of contradictions, optimism, and illusions. Cycles of boom and bust in the city went on in the context of exceptional global economic growth. As Barry Carr argues, tourism became one of the most important areas of investment for “a fragment of the new ‘revolutionary bourgeoisie’ who began to consolidate their political and financial “position in the private sector from the late 1920s onwards – partly through the increasingly politicized allocation of bank loans from development bodies like the Banco de México and Nacional Financiera, and through the distribution of profitable government contracts for public works and infrastructure development.”<sup>398</sup> This spurred a real estate boom that contributed to a lack of economic

---

<sup>398</sup> See Barry Carr’s Conference “Land, Accumulation and Resistance: Writing the Socio-Economic and Political History of Tourism in Acapulco, 1929-1970,” University of Sydney, 10 September, 2015. [http://sydney.edu.au/arts/political\\_economy/about/events/?id=3941](http://sydney.edu.au/arts/political_economy/about/events/?id=3941) and his other work, Carr, “Acapulco and Cancún: Two Models of Tourism Development, 1927-2012” in the XIII Reunión de Historiadores de México, Estados Unidos y Canada (2010 Conference, Querétaro, Mexico). For work by other scholars who have focused on this model of state-led tourism development, see Alex Saragoza, “The Selling of Mexico: Tourism and the State, 1929-1952” in Gilbert Joseph et al., editors, *Fragments of a Golden Age. The Politics of Culture in Mexico since 1940* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001) 91. Niblo, S.R. & Niblo, D.M., “Acapulco in Dreams and Reality.” *Mexican Studies/Estudios Mexicanos*, Vol. 24, Number 1 Winter (2008).

diversification for the growing city, while simultaneously creating bubbles of speculation with service and land prices.

Acapulco and Mexico City spearheaded a mixed model of urban and tourism development. During the postwar years, there was a concerted effort, unprecedented in its scale and forcefulness, to tie Acapulco to Mexico City's consumer markets and to the rest of the heartland of North America. Even though the state was one of the most important propellers of tourism, there was a great deal of investment coming from the private sector. Private capital oiled the machine of a growing public sector and any argument that Acapulco was purely the result of state-led tourism is without doubt a wild exaggeration. In this way, the private and public sectors created a full circuit of tourism markets in Acapulco, bringing about the meteoric rise of the tourist city and the precipitous fall of the port town after the Second World War.

**Image 9: Visa panorámica del puerto, Acapulco, circa 1940s**



"Vista panorámica del puerto," Acapulco, Gro. (No date, probably 1940s) Courtesy of Archivo Fundación Miguel Alemán Valdés (AMAV) Collection "Méjico fotográfico. Portales de toda la república."

Miguel Alemán campaigned in the fall of 1945 when Acapulco was still a small port town, scarcely populated [See Image 9]. He sought to be elected as the new postwar president of Mexico. His presidential campaign was designed to reshuffle the traditional revolutionary party sectors that had been cosseted by his predecessors, Ávila Camacho and especially Lázaro Cárdenas. His campaign heralded a time when large entrepreneurial sectors of society embraced a conservative and nationalistic vision of rapid industrial progress based on economic modernization, the Import Substitution Industrialization model. Efficient administration would relegate politicking to the background. With this more technocratic vision in mind, Alemán organized a series of round tables in different regional economic zones in the country, rallying businessmen and investors, local groups and politicians, and diverse associations coming from specialized industries, while subtly excluding the traditional sectors of the corporatist party. One round table was dedicated to the textile industry in Puebla, another to the sugar economy in Morelos, yet another to cattle ranching in Chihuahua, and so on and so forth. In this way, regional economic modernization became one of the watchwords of alemanismo.<sup>399</sup>

One of the round tables was organized in Guerrero and it focused on tourism, turning Acapulco into the epicenter of business, political activity, and boosterism associated with the national tourist industry. In September of 1945 a conference was organized in the Hotel Los Flamingos to address the main “Problems of the National Tourism Industry.” “Technicians” from diverse sectors of the Asociación Mexicana del Turismo would from then onwards become the main boosters and lobbyists of Acapulco’s rise as a tourist city. These were representatives from travel and advertisement agencies, transport companies (trains, buses, automobiles, planes, and

---

<sup>399</sup> María Antonia Martínez. *El despegue constructivo de la revolución: sociedad y política en el alemanismo.* (México: CIESAS, 2004), 42-44.

steamship lines), representatives from the hotel industry and other complementary services, from restaurants and investment and construction banks.<sup>400</sup>

Several points were discussed at the round table, while some concrete actions were laid out for the development of tourism in Acapulco and the rest of the country.<sup>401</sup> First, it was necessary to coordinate national publicity campaigns with the growing number of tourism services. Second, workers in the tourism services, particularly those in the hotel and restaurant industries, would receive technical training “escuelas de capacitación técnica.” If hotels and restaurants provided their workers with this training, the federal government, in return, would lift tariffs on food products and other goods for hotels to import cheaper goods and maintain low costs and services for visitors and guests. Third, both foreign tourists and “Mexican values” had to be protected during the development of the industry. Moreover, tourists had to become, like “permanent clients,” promoters and protectors of Mexico and “Mexican values.” Fourth, it was necessary to improve connectivity: more public works had to be carried out in places like Acapulco, and better communications had to be built together with private and public transport companies. Fifth, so far “la publicidad de México en los Estados Unidos, cuyo turismo se disputan todos los países,” had acquired over the last ten years high levels of professionalization, according to the tourism representatives at the round table, but Mexico’s advertisement campaigns in the United States had to become much more aggressive and ubiquitous in order to conquer new consumer markets in North America. The sixth point was to regularize holiday seasons so that foreign and national tourists would not coincide. Infrastructure in the port was increasingly overstretch, and the port overcrowded. The state would grant its workers staggered holidays to prevent overcrowding and spread out seasons of high occupancy in the port. Seventh, urbanization had to be brought under

---

<sup>400</sup> Archivo Fundación Miguel Alemán Valdés (AMAV), Box 8, File. 220: Turismo/Conferencia. Estudios y Conferencias, Guerrero, Acapulco, 1-12.

<sup>401</sup> AMAV, box 8, File 220: Campaña Presidencial. Programas. “El problema nacional de la industria del turismo,” Acapulco, Gro., September-October, 1945

control through city planning and public works that would also benefit the rest of the population.<sup>402</sup> Lastly, the round table anticipated a massive influx of foreign tourists that would join the growing flows of national visitors already circulating through Acapulco and other remote coastal destinations in Mexico. Acapulco, as a result of having long since been connected by sea to transnational flows in the Pacific and North America, made a particular transition from a small town to a coastal city when it was connected, by air and land, to massive markets in the heartland of Mexico, the United States, and the Caribbean.

If one can make sense of the changing moments of tourism flows, national and foreign, it is possible to talk about three distinctive periods: 1) 1929-1945, 2) 1946-1955, 3) 1956-1970. The first moment partially deals with the period covered by the last chapter, and it runs from the late 1920s to the mid 1940s, a period marked by the increasing arrival of tourists via Mexico City who joined the trickle of passengers drawn from the traffic between Panama and San Francisco. The period continues through to the Second World War and ends in the postwar years with the election of President Miguel Alemán in 1946. The second moment, from 1946-1955, runs from the election of Miguel Alemán in 1946 and ends with the dawn of the “Jet Age,” a period that saw the exponential but stable growth of tourist flows, marked by a gradual increase in land and air traffic of passengers eventually supplanting maritime traffic altogether. The third period, 1955-1970 deals with a demographic boom of rural migrants, tourist flows, and a floating population that soared to unprecedented heights. It became a veritable “rush to the coast,” qualitatively different from the two preceding periods. For that reason, this third and last period will be explored and analyzed in

---

<sup>402</sup> In his campaign speech in Acapulco, October 1945, he bombastically claimed that “No basta construir grandes hoteles.” Indeed, the construction of thriving hotels like Los Flamingos where the round table took place or the Hotel Papagayo and fraccionamientos like those in Las Playas were not enough: “se requiere que la población se modernice en si misma, que cuenten con todos los servicios de que disfrutan las grandes ciudades.” Speech in *Palpitaciones Portenas* 32, 1 November 1945; originally quoted in Sackett, “The making of Acapulco,” p. 111.

the final two chapters. For the moment, the present chapter will only analyze the first two periods from the 1930s to the late 1950s.

During the Second World War tourism flows decreased due to travel restrictions, but they quickly bounced back after the war. At the same time, there was a significant change in the nature of tourism flows as their direction shifted from border towns (which had seen their heyday in the 1920s) to a more durable type of tourism that sought the amenities offered by port towns and beach resorts along Mexico's coastline. In this centralized country, Mexico City's markets hinged on this transition as tourism flows continued to flow into the emerging megalopolis only to continue their journey onto other Mexican destinations recently opened up by roads connecting the coast with the capital and the highlands.<sup>403</sup>

---

<sup>403</sup> Evan Ward explores this transition in "Finding Mexico's Great Show Window: A Tale of Two Borderlands, 1960-1975" in Alexic McCrossen. *Land of Necessity: Consumer Culture in the United States-Mexico Borderlands*. (Durham [N.C.]: Duke University Press, 2009), pp.196-216. There is a significant shift in the volume, direction, and duration of flows and amount of spending at borders and coastal towns from the 1920s to the 1970s, see a comparison of entries Banco de México (1925- ). *El turismo norteamericano en México, 1934-1940*. (México: Gráfica Panamericana, 1941), 66 and annexed tables; and CNT, *Memoria del Consejo Nacional del Turismo 1971* (Mexico, D.F.: CNT, 1971), pp 278-343.

**Figure 4: Tourism Growth in Mexico, 1934-1958**

Year	International Arrivals	Year	International Arrivals
1929	19 164	1944	142 276
1930	29 775	1945	182 047
1931	50 994	1946	286 723
1932	43 382	1947	274 785
1933	46 342	1948	[data missing]
1934	68 949	1949	325 785
1935	78 872	1950	402,000
1936	100 226	1951	443,000
1937	136 558	1952	460,000
1938	112 026	1953	439,000
1939	139 010	1954	526,000
1940	133 209	1955	264,000
1941	191 501	1956	626,000
1942	134 546	1957	662,000
1943	152 518	1958	697,000

SOURCE: Banco de México (1925- ). *El turismo norteamericano en México, 1934-1940.* (México: Gráfica Panamericana, 1941), 40-44; Moisés T de la Peña, *Guerrero económico* /Volume II. (Chilpancingo: Gobierno del Estado de Guerrero, 1949), 527-9; Secretaría de Economía-Dirección General de Estadística, *Compendio estadístico*, 1952 (México, D.F.: Talleres Gráficos de la Nación, 1952); Michael Clancy. *Exporting Paradise: Tourism and Development in Mexico.* (New York: Pergamon, 2001). 44-5 [ SECTUR, *Estadísticas básicas de la actividad turística* (Mexico: SECTUR-Bancomer, 1992: 59, 100); IMF (Various Issues) Quoted from same source]

Moises de la Peña used the raw data from the Dirección General de Estadística to analyze and trace the new movement and flows of tourists from 1926. He also used the information from the Department of Commerce of the United States. There is a discrepancy, however. [See Figure 4 above] During the period of 1939 and 1947, while the Department of Commerce reports a total of 2, 116 700 the Dirección General de Estadística and the Banco de México reports 1, 655 218. There is a difference of 461 000 nearly half a million, and even though most statisticians in Mexico did not “know the problem well enough” and found American statistics to be more reliable, since Americans had been documenting tourism for more years, they nevertheless used Mexican

statistics in their analysis. Yet Alemán quoted numbers from U.S. statistics during his campaign. That is why there is such a stark discrepancy between numbers.<sup>404</sup>

Since this was a relatively new phenomenon, byzantine classifications were introduced at the time to differentiate new forms of mobility. What nowadays would be considered a certain type of tourism, up until the 1950s, was referred to as a form of “trans-migration;” that is, those who visited the country on their way to their final destination but, legally, could only stay no more than one month were categorized as *transmigrantes*. Temporary migrants were those who stayed no more than two years. Whereas the category of “visitors” was reserved for foreigners, whose purpose was business or work, but could legally stay in the country six months. “Business tourism” had not yet entered the quixotic list of legal classifications regulating different forms of international movement. Tourists were those who “entran al país con fines exclusivamente de recreo y por un término no mayor de seis meses.”<sup>405</sup> There was no classification yet for visitors, trans-migrants, or tourists who became permanent residents in Acapulco, hence migrants (some of them wealthy businessmen) who went back and forth between the tourist resort and other places. Yet in the 1920s and 1930s, it is likely that passenger traffic from Panama and San Francisco was not counted in the records on foreign tourist flows. Most of the passengers arriving onboard steamers were excluded as “visitors” and “transmigrants” in hairsplitting exercises by contemporary official statisticians and demographers who were trying to create new guidelines for categorizing tourists in national statistical counts.

---

<sup>404</sup> “Y aunque [Estados Unidos] se destaca por sus magníficas estadísticas de toda índole, en tanto que las nuestras son muy deficientes, en tesis general, no conocemos suficientemente este problema del turismo para opinar con acierto, y en tal caso optamos por atenernos los datos de nuestros órganos oficiales” De la Peña, *Guerrero económico*, volume II, p. 527-533.

<sup>405</sup> For a definition of the several different classifications of movement in the 1940s see Secretaría de Economía-Dirección General de Estadística, *Compendio estadístico*, 1948 (México, D.F.: Talleres Gráficos de la Nación, 1948), p. 26

These hairsplitting oddities, as strange as they may sound, are no different from our modern-day classifications. In fifty-years time, they will sound as Byzantine as past legal classifications of movement, always multiplying at a dizzying speed when new forms of mobility emerge. At least for the 1950s, the bottom line of this confusion in classification, hence in producing statistics that would allow us to understand and register changing patterns of tourism flows more accurately, lies in the fact that officials and demographers during the postwar years were trying to deal with a new phenomenon: mass tourism and travel. Tourism, in such unprecedented scales of movement, was after all a relatively new phenomenon and statisticians were catching up with the count of rapidly growing tourism flows. In the next chapter, we will study this problem in-depth, once again, for the period of 1958-1970.

Unfortunately, and partly for this latter reason, there is not enough consistent data to analyze the balance between the arrival of national and foreign tourists in Acapulco from the mid 1930s to the late 1950s. Moreover, there are different ways to find out what the distribution of national and foreign tourism flows in Acapulco was. Room occupancy found in hotel registers, forms filled in by guests and tourist, documents from the *oficinas de población*, and other mechanisms used by the Dirección General de Estadística, were all inconsistently collected to get estimates during random years.

Yet there is an interesting tendency revealed in many official statistics that trace how the balance between national and foreign tourist arrivals was changing in Acapulco. They registered a significant change in population inflows, from a movement that was solely national towards a more balanced pattern of national and foreign inflows of tourists. Some estimations mention how the balance, overwhelmingly national in the 1930s— although the estimations excluded visitors, trans-migrants, merchants, and businessmen, the bulk of foreigners passing through Acapulco from the 1920s to the 1940s— gradually began to be more mixed, ending in the late 1940s with an

average of 25% foreign and 75% national tourists. Unfortunately, the only complete year I was able to find for this crucial early period, during the tipping point postwar years, is the year of 1947 for Acapulco: during which 54,789 national tourists were registered in Acapulco versus 20,736 foreign visitors. But the statistical information is insufficient and the immediate postwar years represent economic and political anomalies that certainly affected tourism flows. 1947, however, because of the economic and political crisis, was an anomalous year. Therefore, any findings on tourism in the year of 1947 are not representative of the general pattern of tourism inflows (nor of the distribution of national and foreign tourists) that Acapulco followed well into the 1950s.<sup>406</sup> Even then, the number of tourists (both national and foreign) significantly rose throughout the postwar years.

## II

### **The Legal and the Imagined City**

The Origins and Creation of Acapulco's Junta Federal de Mejoras Materiales  
and the *Plano Regulador*

The present section explores how a legal and regulatory framework was created to guide urban development in Acapulco. The process saw the creation of a city plan, the *Plano Regulador* and Acapulco's Junta Federal de Mejoras Materiales. They were created and overhauled during Alemán's administration with the sole purpose to invest in public works and infrastructure development as well as to channel new and large volumes of resources, people, and capital flowing into Acapulco during the postwar years.

One of the major contributions of scholars like Juan Manuel Ramírez Sáiz, Andrew Sackett, and Emilio de Antuñano lies in their efforts to debunk persistent myths and assumptions that urbanization in Mexico and Acapulco went awry precisely because of a lack of planning.<sup>407</sup>

---

<sup>406</sup> De la Peña, *Guerrero económico*, volume II, p. 565.

<sup>407</sup> Juan Manuel Ramírez Sáiz. *Turismo y medio ambiente: el caso de Acapulco*. (México, D.F.: Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana, Unidad Xochimilco, División de Ciencias y Artes para el Diseño, Depto. Teoría y Análisis, 1986);

The story they have all unearthed was quite the opposite: there was a great deal of planning, perhaps too much planning, involved in the destruction and reinvention of the cities, in Acapulco's case, the destruction of the port and the creation of the tourist city. Master plans proliferated in tandem with successive ancillary and updated plans to urbanize the port, particularly during the second half of the twentieth century.<sup>408</sup>

Planning, in short, is not missing in the history of Acapulco. Yet the story resulting from this reinterpretation has solely focused on how urban planning ultimately failed in Acapulco, merely repeating a dominant narrative that emphasizes the history of spoliation and urban chaos. Acapulco, the story goes, went awry from “all the tidy modernism” projected in the original visions of urban planners and architects like Carlos Contreras and Mario Pani, precisely when “reality” caught up with Acapulco’s urbanization and the city became an ugly mess.<sup>409</sup> To support this story of compulsive failure historians and scholars have resorted to the local press to support their

---

Jonathan Andrew Sackett. “The Making of Acapulco: People, Land and the State in the Development of the Mexican Riviera, 1927-1973.” Ph.D., Yale University, 2009. Indeed, this was not exclusive of Acapulco. Mexico City went through a similar process, which has been fascinatingly questioned by Emilio de Antuñano in “Planning a ‘Mass City’: The Politics of Planning in Mexico City, 1930-1960” (Ph.D., The University of Chicago, 2017).

<sup>408</sup> Urban and regional planning continue to be a subject of much research, see Margarita Ramírez Bravo. “El desarrollo urbano en Acapulco la normatividad para su ordenamiento y sus efectos en la Zona Diamante” M.A. Thesis, Instituto Politécnico Nacional, Escuela Superior en Ingeniería y Arquitectura, 2009, pp. 96-9; and Erika Patricia Cárdenas Gómez, “Crecimiento y planeación urbana en Acapulco, Cancún y Puerto Vallarta (México),” *Investigaciones Turísticas* N° 12, July-December 2016, pp. 99-120. They have put together a long list and analysis of the history of planning in the tourist city: Nicolás Uruñuela and Enrique Lallier created the Primer Plano Regulador de la Ciudad, 1889; then the Actualización del Plano Regulador, 1945; the Comisión de Planificación Regional de Acapulco, 1951; the Plan de Acapulco, 1970; the Fideicomiso Acapulco, FIDACA, 1980; the Plan Director Urbano de Acapulco, 1980; the Reglamento de Zonificación y Usos del Suelo del Plano Regulador del Municipio de Acapulco, 1985; the Plan Director Municipal 1988; the Plan Parcial de Acapulco Diamante, 1990; the Plan Parcial de Desarrollo Urbano; la Declaratoria de Usos y Destinos del Suelo para la Zona del Acapulco Tradicional, 1991; the Plan Parcial de Desarrollo Urbano de Acapulco Dorado, 1991; the Plan Director Urbano, 1993; and finally, the Plan Director Urbano de la Zona Metropolitana de Acapulco, 2001.

<sup>409</sup> Sackett, “The Making of Acapulco,” PhD Diss, p. 69. He argues, for instance, that “in re-visioning and rebuilding Acapulco, national (and, often local) officials chose to put aside concerns raised by and for *acapulqueños*. Instead, benefits for investors, corrupt officials, and tourists predominated, all of which were worsened by piecemeal development despite the existence of a unified plan. Moreover, its implementation was tempered by real world conditions, including politics, budgetary constraints, local resistance, geography, and corruption. For all its tidy modernism, the Acapulco Regulatory Plan was often enforced through brute force. The development process quickly began to implode, pointing to the failure of strategies that focused only on tourism. It is unsurprising that this was taking place in the state of Guerrero, where control of the state by the citizenry had historically been weak.” p. 69.

arguments. But they often end up adopting the voice of journalists and “muckrakers” writing for Acapulco’s local vibrant press at the time. As this dissertation has shown, romanticizing the “locals,” or the *acapulqueños*, often makes little sense in a city with a floating population twice its size and with a permanent population that is being renewed, endlessly, by the uninterrupted stream of floating populations flowing and some of them staying in the port.

A model of its own, deeply local but also universal in its solutions, was created in Acapulco in the 1940s precisely as a response to floating populations and urban decline. In time, a service-based economy emerged and, as a result, a highly innovative form of urban renewal, catering to this new economy, completely transformed Acapulco’s waterfront. But urban planning as well as a legal and regulatory framework guided this process all along. Antonio Azuela calls for a change of paradigm in the way we study Mexico’s urbanization in the twentieth century.<sup>410</sup> It is imperative, he forcefully argues, to move beyond the hackneyed interpretation that a sharp distinction between the “legal” and the “real” city has guided urbanization in Mexico and the Americas. Focusing exclusively on how laws were breached and never followed, means retelling the simple story of how no one abided by the rules, and yet cities kept functioning. Moreover, emphasizing lawless chaos in cities has also led many scholars to conclude that the city and its legal framework are two completely different worlds that evolved separately and disconnected from one another. In sum, it has lead excellent scholars to summarize their work, after so much rigorous research, with the hackneyed old saying that in Mexico and Latin America there will always be a “legal” and a “real” city. This is a wild exaggeration, an easy conclusion to more complicated processes. Even though

---

<sup>410</sup> Antonio Azuela “La hechura jurídica de la urbanización. Notas para la historia reciente del derecho urbanístico” in v. 2. *Desarrollo urbano y regional*, Manuel Ordóñez, and Jean François Prud’homme. *Los grandes problemas de México*. (México D.F.: Colegio de México, 2010), pp. 585-8; Emilio de Antuñano. “Planning a ‘Mass City’: The Politics of Planning in Mexico City, 1930-1960.” Ph.D., The University of Chicago, 2017. Antuñano calls for a change of paradigm when he explores these aspects with the creation of the Plano Regulador or Master Plan in Mexico City.

Mexico's urbanization is not exemplary, Azuela argues, there is nonetheless a complex relationship between the city and the law that needs to be explored. I adopt this latter approach, arguing that laws and urban planning in Acapulco did guide, to a certain extent, the real process of urbanization, a story that is often overlooked in narratives, so prevalent in the literature of urban studies in Mexico, that merely emphasize urban chaos

### **Acapulco's Plano Regulador**

Plans multiplied as the urban horizon of Acapulco broadened and the city, the region, and its hinterland were incorporated into booming consumption markets in North America. The rising importance of *el imaginario de Acapulco* in the realm of tourism and cross-cultural consumption markets in Mexico and the United States meant that, for businessmen, officials, and urban planners, the possibility of both imagining and boosting the city became a rewarding exercise. In this way, as the city expanded in Acapulco during the twentieth century, the process of urbanization became interlaced with multiple zoning laws, ordinances, and decrees. Simultaneously, politicians, engineers, architects, and urbanists began to put forth their plans in ever-more repetitive ways as a succession of master plans and partial plans, city and regional plans, regulatory plans and director plans sought to guide urbanization in the city of Acapulco and the system of metropolitan areas dependent on the rising economic pole.

Since the late nineteenth century, urban planning in Acapulco combined the city's future possibilities with nostalgic assessments of the old port and the vanishing commercial world it represented. The creation of the first urban plan for Acapulco began in the 1890s when Nicolás Uruñuela, a Spanish merchant, and the federal engineer Enrique Lallier created the first city plan to guide modest public works in the commercial port. The plan back then was to galvanize the derelict waterfront. Henceforward, plans for different forms of economic development, often

presented in opposing visions and conflicting programs, abounded during the Revolution and the 1920s, as chapters 4 and 5 have shown. Yet none of these plans considered any serious overhaul of Acapulco's basic urban form beyond modest but desperately needed public works. The process of imagining the city began in the 1930s, and this urban imagination really proliferated in the mid 1940s with a multiplicity of plans from which Acapulco's Plano Regulador eventually emerged and was put into action. Throughout the second half of the 1940s, it was then amended, expanded, updated, and later turned into a comprehensive regional plan directed by the Comisión de Planificación Regional de Acapulco in 1951.

The original Plano Regulador was completed in the mid 1940s under the direction of modernist architect Carlos Contreras.<sup>411</sup> Trained at Columbia University, Contreras brought many of the modernist-urban models to Mexico and conceived an interesting form of modernist city planning adapted to Mexico through the creation of *planos reguladores* or 'master plans' for many cities in Mexico. The origins of Acapulco's plan, for instance, can be traced back to the 1920s when Contreras presented a project on Mexico City and mentioned some elements of the plan and other city plans at the International Housing and Town Planning Conference in New York 1925.<sup>412</sup>

The plan that eventually emerged in Acapulco in the mid 1940s incorporated changing models from two distinctive sources: modernism and shoreline planning, which had continuously evolved between the 1920s and the 1960s. The first source, modernism, rejected ornament and

---

<sup>411</sup> Acapulco's Plano Regulador was published in the *Diario Oficial*, Tomo CLIII Num. 36, 13 December 1945.

<sup>412</sup> The 25th and 26th conferences were held jointly with the American Civic Association. The proceedings of the 17th Conference, held in New York in April of 1925 in conjunction with the 9th congress of the International federation for Housing and Town Planning were issued under the name: International City and Regional Planning Conference. International federation for housing and planning.). *International Town Planning Conference, New York, 1925: Report. Conférence internationale de l'aménagement des villes, New York, 1925. Compte rendu. Internationale städtebauagung, New York, 1925. Bericht.* [Baltimore, Maryland: The Norman, Remington, 1925]; Carlos Contreras to Manuel Ávila Camacho, 15 July 1943. AGN MAC 545.21/21; for an excellent analysis of the creation of Mexico City's Master plan see Emilio de Antuñano, "Planning a 'Mass City': The Politics of Planning in Mexico City, 1930-1960" (Ph.D., The University of Chicago, 2017).

embraced functionalism and minimalism, as well as structural innovation and the creation of free-flowing, functional spaces. Modernism mixed urban planning techniques from the United States and California with ideas on European urbanism. Shoreline planning and functional modernism were eventually melded in Acapulco in the form of city and regional planning. Historian Arturo Almadox argues that “as functional modernism prevailed as a trend from the 1940s, Latin America’s transit from local-based urbanism into a regional *planificación* and *planejamento* (planning) was to occur amid postwar urbanization, industrialization, and US-backed developmentalism.”<sup>413</sup> This shift in the discipline’s scale and approach is neatly exemplified by the architect and urbanist Mario Pani, whose trajectory took him from his studies in Paris to Mexico, where he introduced Le Corbusier-style modernism, reflected in emblematic buildings like the Central Campus of the UNAM and the Tlatelolco-Nonoalco housing tower complex, but also in many of Acapulco’s architecture like the Hotel Pozo del Rey and the Club de Yates. Through Pani’s trajectory, it is possible to trace the transition from local-based ideas on urbanism and design, found in the small monographs of cities of the 1920s and 1930s, to the larger regional and shoreline planning of the postwar years found in his architecture journal *Arquitectura/México*.

Shoreline planning came from models based on modernist conceptions of cities. This series of ideas brought and conceived by a group of architects, urban planners, engineers, anthropologists, historians, and men of letters who in the early 1930s put together a brief but comprehensive study on the city of Acapulco. The project was carried out by a commission formed by the Secretaría de Comunicaciones y Obras Públicas and led by art historian Justino Fernández. Carlos Contreras together with the architect Juan Legarreta, who was deeply involved at the

---

<sup>413</sup> Latin American Urbanism, 1850-1950 - Latin American Studies - Oxford Bibliographies - [obohttp://www.oxfordbibliographies.com.proxy.uchicago.edu/view/document/obo-9780199766581/obo-9780199766581-0008.xml?rskey=Jy9AwA&result=7&q=modernism+mexico](http://www.oxfordbibliographies.com.proxy.uchicago.edu/view/document/obo-9780199766581/obo-9780199766581-0008.xml?rskey=Jy9AwA&result=7&q=modernism+mexico).

moment in solving the housing problem, creating the *vivienda social* in for workers in Mexico, sketched most of Acapulco's nowadays destroyed old buildings like Acapulco's Palacio Municipal and the old merchant houses that flanked the Calle Escudero. Legarreta slowly evolved his architectural ideas into a form of radical functionalism until his untimely death in a road accident on the way to Acapulco in 1934. Carlos Contreras designed urban plans and projected a great deal of future works in the port, showing the direction the city was heading to. His plans were also put forth to correct some current problems of traffic, insalubrity, and economic stagnation in the port.<sup>414</sup>

They called their plan the *Aportación a la monografía de Acapulco*. Inspired by Vito Alessio Robles's nostalgic ruminations on the port, which he wrote upon his first visit in the late 1920s, the plan's main goals revolved around two strategic principles: "recuperar y prever." This meant fusing conservationist and modernist planning strategies, which at times seemed impossible a task. The conservationist impulse was driven by local studies on Acapulco's original architecture and urban design. But it was mixed, in conflictive ways, with the destructive force of modernism that favored mobility, free flowing traffic, simplicity, and efficiency over urban conservation. Renewing the port and the old urban core of Acapulco became a project subservient to the creation of a modern tourist resort and the exigencies of this new economy. To ground these principles, Contreras condensed his study into a series of actions he called the Programa Constructivo Sumario. His action plan comprised two major cornerstones: the program focused, on the one hand, on the provision of sanitation services, landscaping, and basic services in the old port; and on the other, on public works and large infrastructural projects.

The first cornerstone of his plan entailed one of the most important undertakings for Acapulco's permanent and seasonal populations: this was to clean and expand the supply of water

---

<sup>414</sup> Justino Fernández, *Aportación a la monografía de Acapulco*; [prol.] José Luis Cuevas (Mexico: Alcancia, 1932).

for domestic use in the port as well as to improve sanitation services. Equally important was to carry out a comprehensive plan of reforestation, landscaping, and conservation of the bay's natural beauty, but also to continue some sanitation works, already being carried out, and negatively affecting the port's habitat and environment. One of these was to continue draining the, now extinct, lagoon near Hornos and to keep channeling and redirecting rivers and streams as a way of fighting the spread of malaria and other mosquito and waterborne diseases. The strand of beaches in the area would be expanded and sanitized.

The second cornerstone of Contreras's plan was to redirect and channel population growth from the old urban core to the eastern side of the bay where Playa Hornos was already being developed by entrepreneurs and generals, as the previous chapter has already explained. From the perspective of planners and city officials, for the first time in an entire century, Mexico City's markets were within reach of Acapulco, and their proximity was reinterpreted as a source of opportunity and potential growth for the port. "Por su cercanía a la Capital de la República y sus excelentes condiciones, Acapulco merece toda atención para lograr el desarrollo real y ordenado del programa constructivo...[para] que se convierta en el más bello balneario de la América del Norte."<sup>415</sup> To attain this end, building a pier was necessary, though it would be designed solely for the arrival of passengers disembarking at the new structure. New avenues and roads would be built and paved on the old course of streams that had once irrigated the lower hillsides of the port. But the most important of all was the construction of a coastal boulevard, a "Calzada Costera" that would run along the bay from the east side in Puente Morelos to the vast beaches in the Revolcadero, west of the bay of Puerto Marqués. The commercial port disappeared from this new mapping of the city.

---

<sup>415</sup> Justino Fernández, *Aportación a la monografía de Acapulco* (México, D.F.: Conaculta INBA, 2004), pp. 22-3.

This last point of Contreras's plan leads us to the second source of inspiration for Acapulco's 1940s Plano Regulador. It came primarily from models of beach modernization and shoreline planning. As many old ports around the globe became obsolete, boosters began resorting to other economic activities as a substitute for the declining commercial functions of waterfronts. This saw a resurrection of old ports with the circulation of models of waterfront redevelopment design to repurpose obsolete piers. Concurrently, urban attitudes towards the water, the beach, and the sea had been changing drastically. In the course of one generation, the beach and the sea in tropical and subtropical regions was no longer seen as dangerous and insalubrious, but as sanitized sites of leisure and recreation. "Sun and sand" was emerging as a powerful mode of tourism and resort building for coastal cities.

This meant that urban planning for coastal cities began revolving around the beach, the sea, and scenic views. Boosters at the time noted that South American and European Rivieras were the inspirational model of Acapulco's coastal boulevard. It was likened to similar projects of waterfront development like the *Promenade des anglaises* in Nice on the French Riviera, or to the "*rías costaneras*" in San Sebastián, or Biarritz, Copacabana or Mar del Plata in France, Spain, Brazil, and Argentina.<sup>416</sup> Alejandro Gómez Maganda at some point boasted, pompously, that "nuestro mar, con su azul imprevisto y su collar de caletas y ensenadas" could "compete" with the Mediterranean Côte d'Azur and the Spanish Costa Brava. "Through human intervention," he further noted, and "an artistic sense and reasonable comfort," planners could "finish the stupendous work of nature" in Acapulco.<sup>417</sup> Andrew Sackett picked up on this reinterpretation of Acapulco, echoing the sanguine appreciations of the emerging coastal city by contemporaries. They all deemed Acapulco the "Mexican Riviera." Yet Wolfgang Schoenborn, the German migrant who

---

<sup>416</sup> Fernández, Aportación a la monografía de Acapulco, p. vii.

<sup>417</sup> Alejandro Gómez Maganda. *Acapulco en mi vida y en el tiempo*. (México: Libro Mex, 1960), 211.

first had settled in California and Hawaii before moving to Acapulco in 1930s, where he spent the rest of his life, playfully dissuaded a reporter from calling it this way. Acapulco was not “the French Riviera of the Pacific. Riviera beaches are rocky, dirty, and crowded,” scoffing at such comparisons in the media.<sup>418</sup> The inspiration, when he built his summer residences and beach bungalows all around the port, came from the “Hawaiian style” of houses with open air spaces and scenic views.

Indeed, there was a real sense at the time that Acapulco was creating its own model from a patchwork of different beachfront designs, architectural lines, and forms of waterfront repurposing and development. Other models and ideas were floated around. As explained in the previous chapter, when General Almazán arrived with a group of “California capitalists,” he began to build his bungalows near the mouth of the Papagayo River, which would eventually lead to the creation of the Calzada Juan Andreu Almazán and a larger hotel in Los Hornos in the early 1930s. He drew inspiration from a visit to Miami with his family in the 1930s. Profoundly impressed by the resort city, Almazán brought back to Acapulco ideas on how to carry out the spectacular development of a small coastal town. Miami had been experiencing, since the turn of the century, a real estate boom that brought a great deal of experimentation with novel ideas on beachfront architecture and shoreline planning.<sup>419</sup> Barry Carr would argue that behind the reinvention of Acapulco lies this earlier, less-acknowledged model that began to circulate with the emergence of tourist resorts all along the Florida-Atlantic Coast during the first three decades of the twentieth century. One could argue that the Circum-Caribbean (particularly Cuba, the West Indies, and the Bahamas) also brought the circulation of tourists, boosters, and ideas on the reinvention of coastal cities which would also add to the circuit of models that in Acapulco began to tap into.

---

<sup>418</sup> Interview of Wolfgang Schoenborn by Linda Anderson, *The Times-Weekend*, January 27, 1968

<sup>419</sup> Interview with the Andreu family, Margarita Andreu and her mother, Real del Mayorazgo, Mexico City, July 2015.

Other models were drawn into the mixture. There is yet another circuit of tourist resorts that influenced general patterns of shoreline development and architecture but that has been left largely understudied: the Hawaii-Los Angeles-San Diego-Acapulco circuit. As the last chapter shows, it was particularly Hawaii and Honolulu the places that most saw Acapulco as a threat to their tourist markets, especially when the Mexican city boomed in the late 1950s. For this reason, there was a great deal of competition and borrowing of models between both Pacific cities. One could argue that Schoenborn and modernist architect Mario Pani, two very important developers and creators of Acapulco, had Hawaii and the Pacific littoral in their minds when they sought to transform the port's urban structure and built environment.

This model had been born in the Pacific, circulated among resorts that not only shared the same traffic on ideas but also competed over the same tourism markets. It had all started with leisure boosters in California like Charles Fletcher Lummis who began to promote Los Angeles and the “Great Southwest” as not only a site of leisure but also a lifestyle. Hawaii and Acapulco from the 1930s would complete the equation by introducing their own models of “tropical” tourism that shared and catered the same circuits and leisure markets of North America and the Pacific. Indeed, “between the 1940s and the 1960s, engineers, city officials, urban planners, and the business elite” would “modernize” beaches in Los Angeles’s; a group of boosters in California that Elsa Devienne referred to as a powerful “beach lobby” that “reinvented the beach experience for the suburban age” in growing coastal cities.<sup>420</sup> California and the West Coast of Mexico transformed the very idea of seasonal leisure. Lawrence Culver noted that, “over time, tourist

---

<sup>420</sup> Elsa Devienne. “Shifting Sands: A Social and Environmental History of Los Angeles’s Beaches, 1920s-1970s.” *California History* 93, no. 2 (June 30, 2016): 61.

leisure became resident leisure, as vacationers built seasonal and permanent residencies—houses adapted to the climate and emerging leisure culture of the Pacific borderlands.”<sup>421</sup>

### **The Junta Federal de Mejoras Materiales and Acapulco’s Legal and Regulatory Framework**

The Juntas Federales de Mejoras Materiales (JFMM) that emerged during the mid twentieth century have their origin in the legal and fiscal regimes created for maritime and land frontiers during the nineteenth century. The idea of “mejoras materiales” evolved into a jurisdiction regulating customhouses on the peripheries. Throughout the long nineteenth-century, liberal reformers, coming from many different strands of Mexican liberalism, would often use public works as a watchword to modernize the country and promote progress and urbanization in many remote corners of Mexico. Urban reform, public health, social welfare, transport and communication improvements, all fell under the catchall liberal vision commonly referred to as *Mejoras Materiales*. It all began as a diffuse set of actions, visions, reforms, and political sensibilities in the nineteenth century, but over time hardened into a twentieth-century system of clearly defined ideas and liberal policies for urban and social reform for cities and towns. In this way, *Mejoras Materiales* evolved from a bottom up, decentralized process carried out by local associations and societies like the *Sociedad Mexicana Promovedora de Mejoras Materiales y Morales* (1852)—a process guided by regional leaders and associations, specifically tailored to meet the local needs of cities and municipalities—to a more top-down, centralized, federally-planned, and bureaucratized process that became, since the Porfiriato, a major marker in the urban development of port-cities, provincial towns, and border cities.<sup>422</sup>

---

<sup>421</sup> Lawrence Culver, “Promoting the Pacific Borderlands: Leisure and Labor in Southern California, 1870-1950” in Alexic McCrossen. *Land of Necessity: Consumer Culture in the United States-Mexico Borderlands*. (Durham [N.C.]: Duke University Press, 2009), pp.168-173.

<sup>422</sup> The earliest appearance I have been able to find is in the early 1850s, see Sociedad Promovedora de Mejoras Materiales (México). *Revista mexicana de la sociedad promovedora de mejoras materiales: abril de 1852*. (México: Imprenta de Ignacio Cumplido, 1852) It was an appealing popular liberal discourse that emerged with full force during

In this manner, seaports and border towns continued to be placed together under the same frontier regime that had guided urban development in cities along land borders and coasts throughout the nineteenth century. The series of ordinances from the 1880s, *ordenanzas generales de aduanas marítimas y fronterizas*, are a testament to the formation of territorial jurisdictions that coupled border town with seaports. From the late nineteenth century up until the 1930s, finance of public works was based on custom taxes on imports. But both administering revenue and channeling public works oscillated between federal and municipal control in a tug of war between administrative centralization and decentralization. The Ordenanza General of 1881 established an additional two per cent customs tax on imports that would be funneled into a special account held by the Federal Treasury that would follow the ordinances of the Secretaría de Hacienda y Crédito Público. But a decree from 1893 ordered the tax to be assigned to municipal governments to carry out urban public works related to the administration of ports and customhouses, both still under federal control. This law tried to balance the sphere of influence of municipal governments and the federal government. In 1920 there was an impulse for decentralization and the control of finances for public works was handed over completely to the municipalities. But in 1934 the federation wrested control, once again, only to end up sharing the management of ports with municipalities.<sup>423</sup>

It was then, in August 1934 when the government tried to provide financial aid to borders and ports that a federal law created the Junta Federal de Mejoras Materiales (the Federal Material Betterment Board-JFMM). The law was further revised in 1948 under Alemán's administration. Indeed, the 1948 "Ley para el Funcionamiento de las Juntas Federales de Mejoras Materiales"

---

the period of Maderista reformism, but that had its roots in the "cherished" *mejoras materiales* of nineteenth century liberalism. Alan Knight, *The Mexican Revolution. Vol. I. Porfirian, Liberals, and Peasants* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1986), 443-445.

<sup>423</sup> The Ley de JFMM was passed on 29 August, 1934. Andrés Serra Rojas, "La naturaleza jurídica de las Juntas Federales de Mejoras Materiales," *Revista de la Facultad de Derecho de México* (51), online, <https://revistas-colaboracion.juridicas.unam.mx/index.php/rev-facultad-derecho-mx/article/view/26010>.

exemplifies the culmination of a slow transition in the history of public works and urbanization in Mexico that overlapped with a decisive movement towards centralization that, nonetheless, gave a constricted role to local governments.<sup>424</sup> Luis Aguilar Aboites notes that Mexico City created the juntas out of a deep suspicion of regionalism, municipalities, and their local administrators, such federal bodies were meant to wrest control over public works and substantial sources of funding from the hands of local officials in the *ayuntamiento*, deemed corrupt and inefficient by federal authorities.<sup>425</sup>

The JFMM were supposed to offer public services and public works to those gateways and entries to the country. Of the thousands of municipalities in Mexico, only 45 of them contained customs offices and either had a seaport and/or a tourist and trade crossings along the United States, Guatemala, or Belize. An analyst in the 1970s noted that the criterion guiding the selection of these 45 municipalities was that cities in these jurisdictions were even more burdened than their counterparts of comparative size, partly because they had to assume “the extra demands for various public services required by the passage through these cities of exports and imports and tourists.”<sup>426</sup> It was basically the flow of goods and people that elevated the costs of public works and public administration in these towns and cities.

Yet legislation and law-making in the 1940s left behind four structural inconsistencies that would create serious problems for the JFMM-Acapulco. These were the territorial, jurisdictional-administrative, legal, and financial aspects of urbanization in Acapulco between 1940 and 1971. This specific period of roughly thirty years comprised a series of legislations, laws, edicts, and

---

<sup>424</sup> Miguel Alemán passes the federal law 30 December 1947, and both the Secretario de Bienes Nacionales, Alfonso Caso and the Secretario de Hacienda y Crédito Público, Ramón Beteta, were the main architects. *Diario Oficial de la Federación*, 13 January 1948.

<sup>425</sup> Luis Aboites Aguilar, “En busca del centro. Una aproximación a la relación centro-provincia en México, 1921-1949,” *Historia Mexicana*, vol. LIX, 2, Oct-Dec, 2009, 738.

<sup>426</sup> Marvin Alisky. (1970). “Mexico's Federal Betterment Boards: Financial Mainstays of Border Municipalities.” *Public Affairs Bulletin*, 9(4), 1-5.

ordinances that can be clearly defined as a specific period of urban law for ports, border towns, and seaports. The period is bracketed by the passing of the 1940 and the 1971 laws and regulations on territorial waters and coastal zones.

These four problematic aspects of urbanization in Acapulco will appear recurrently in this chapter and the following two. They ended up entangling the framework of Acapulco's urban development. First, Article two of the 1947 law established two scenarios: those ports with sufficient resources and those that did not. There were those self-sufficient boards with the largest revenues from import-export taxes: towns on the U.S.-Mexico border— Nuevo Laredo, Matamoros, Nogales, and Mexicali— and important port-cities, Veracruz, Coatzacoalcos, and Tampico. But there was another category of cities, mostly port towns in decline with rising tourist cities, all of which were located on the Pacific littoral: Acapulco, Guaymas, Puerto Vallarta, and Mazatlán. Their source of revenue from customs taxes was meager and they often had to rely on federal subsidies to help meet demands for public services in booming tourist industries. But subsidies also proved to be insufficient for boomtowns like Acapulco and the JFMM had to resort to other financial means which complicated the financialization of the board and made it vulnerable to legal challenges.

Second and directly related to the first problem was the role of the JFMM in the private and public sectors. The legal underpinnings did not specify if the Juntas had the capacity to create private capital and build its own financial patrimony or if they were merely there to administer and channel federal resources, earmarking and assigning federal subsidies to public works. During the 1940s and 1950s, the Junta's two main sources of revenue were drawn from the selling of redeveloped lands to private owners and from a series of informal taxes, called "cooperaciones," levied on the population who benefitted from the public works. The last chapter will deal with this problem in-depth, when the entire operating budget and financial structure collapsed under legal

cases from merchants and previous landowners, which led to the deep restructuring of the Junta's finances and the emergence of private investors.

Third, the Juntas's specific duties were not clearly defined, they were too vague and too broad. This indeed created permanent frictions between the municipality, the State of Guerrero, and the Federal Government. Public works and public administration ranged from the building of urban streets; the management of public lighting, drainage and sewage, and provision of potable water; to the construction of hospital facilities, municipal markets, and public schools; the creation of beach and recreation facilities; forestation, landscaping, urban planning, and even the erection of monuments and statues. Ideally, the Junta, comprised of different federal and local members, including the Municipal President, would select the public works of the highest priority, invest in the project, hire contractors who were often private construction and real estate companies, and once the project had been completed, the Junta would then turn it over to the Municipal Council, Park Board or any other local authority for the control and administration of the recently-created public work. It was the selection process and the criteria for establishing which project was the most important what caused explosive problems between the JFMM, the State of Guerrero, and Acapulco's Municipality.<sup>427</sup>

Fourth and last, the regulation of beaches and coastal lands, although federally managed, did not specify clearly the spheres of influence between the Marina Nacional and the Secretaría del Patrimonio Nacional. The jurisdiction over territorial waters, seas, navigational routes, beaches, and coastal zones, of which its regulation was established in January of 1940, was not entirely clear when federal boards began to administer coastal lands and beaches.<sup>428</sup>

---

<sup>427</sup> Alisky, "Mexico's Federal Betterment Boards," p. 2; It was ambiguously defined in the *DOF* as "ejecutar obras y establecer servicios públicos, nuevas fuentes de trabajo, mejorar las ya existentes y para otorgar en caso necesario subsidios a los municipios." "Delimitación de las Funciones Administrativas entre el Municipio y las Juntas Federales de Mejoras Materiales" B.A. Thesis, UNAM, Facultad de Derecho, México, 1965.

<sup>428</sup> The law was passed 30 January 1940 "Reglamento para la Ocupación y Construcción de Obras en el Mar Territorial, Vías Navegables, Playas y Zonas Federales."

Jurisdictionally, the JFMM was constantly overstepping the role of the Navy which was the actor supposedly in charge of administering coastal federal lands. Yet over the years, the Navy gradually delegated its managerial role to the Junta.

Things became clearer in 1971 when the Reglamento para la Zona Marítima was passed under Luis Echeverría's administration. The Secretaría del Patrimonio Nacional, to which the Juntas Federales belonged, would now be in charge of regulating territorial waters and coastal zones. Their management fell no longer under the purview of the Departamento de la Marina Nacional; and their responsibility was reduced to the exclusive role of defending such federal lands from foreign occupation. Legislation under Echeverría ended many of the structural inconsistencies that had guided Acapulco's urbanization between 1940 and 1971. Indeed, this period was described, in retrospect, by a lawyer of the Secretaría del Patrimonio Nacional, as a period marked by “usos y costumbres” when referring to the actions of the JFMM-Acapulco. The 1971 legislation was logically seen as an important first step in regulating a framework that, for nearly thirty years, had bedeviled many urban planners and city officials in Acapulco and Mexico at large:

“Por primera vez se presenta un reglamento que carece de antecedentes legislativos en este sentido. La práctica, los usos y costumbres han servido de base para la administración y cuidado de esta parte territorial sometida a la soberanía nacional...El reglamento viene a llenar una laguna en el ámbito del derecho administrativo”<sup>429</sup>

By December of 1971 the JFMM-Acapulco signed a contract with the Secretaría del Patrimonio Nacional. The Junta would now be able to freely occupy these coastal lands for the sue and exploitation of the land-maritime domain, “zona marítimo-terrestre,” beaches, and maritime adjacent lands along the Pacific littoral that comprised the jurisdictions of the municipalities of

---

<sup>429</sup> “Reglamento para zona Marítima” 1971 and “Algunas consideraciones en torno al anteproyecto y reglamento de la zona marítima terrestre que formula la JFMM de Acapulco,” Nov. 1971. AGN, Secretaría del Patrimonio Nacional, JFMM-Acapulco, Contraloría, Box 51, Acapulco, Gro. 15.

Acapulco, Zihuatanejo, San Marcos, and Coyuca de Benítez. Moreover, the third and fourth articles in the in the Ley General de Bienes Nacionales of 1969 clarified another thorny issue related to the Junta's financial framework in relation to their ability to regulate maritime adjacent lands. They could now lease these lands at their discretion and the revenues that they would extract from this management would be deposited in an account exclusively dedicated to the Junta's finances in a local or regional bank.<sup>430</sup> Shoreline area law was changing at a rapid pace, but this meant that it was too little, too late for Acapulco which had substantially developed by then. As a result, structural problems and social conflicts had surfaced in the wake of breakneck urbanization.

The following analysis is organized around different conceptions of the port, the city, and the region of Acapulco. They were conceived by boosters and officials in relation to broader processes of urban planning and development generated by the influx of migrants and tourists during the postwar years. As the last two sections have explored, Acapulco's connection to Mexico City's markets and to international circuits of tourism saw an unprecedented surge of visitors and migrants arriving in the port. During these postwar years, both the Junta Federal de Mejoras Materiales and the Plano Regulador were devised in order to channel federal funds, develop the city, and administer these population movements all the more to create economic benefits for Acapulco. The process of urban development generated by this confluence of factors refers primarily to the building of infrastructure and public works, population displacements through changes in land tenure, and to the wave of constructions led by the real estate business in the public and private sectors. These amounted to a complete overhaul of Acapulco that spelled the end of

---

<sup>430</sup> AGN, SPN, JFMM-Acapulco, Contraloría, Box 51 Diciembre 1º de 1971, "Secretaría del Patrimonio Nacional y la JFMM-Acapulco respecto de la ocupación gratuita para el uso y explotación de la zona marítimo-terrestre y playas comprendidas a lo largo del litoral de las jurisdicciones municipales de Acapulco Zihuatanejo, San Marcos y Coyuca de Benítez. Ley General de Bienes Nacionales Tercera. La concesionaria queda facultada para celebrar contratos de arrendamiento sobre parte o toda la superficie de zona federal y playas concesionadas... Cuarta Los ingresos que perciba la concesionaria por concepto de los arrendamientos, se depositarán en cuenta especial en una institución bancaria de esa localidad." *Diario Oficial de la Federación*, 30 January 1969.

the port and the frenzied building of a city that had no real connection to its previous urban forms as a old transport hub, trading post, and fishing town.

The next two sections tell this story from the perspective of urban planning and development, showing how they transformed the foreland and hinterland of Acapulco. The next section (III) focuses on the transformation of the foreland: the city, the port, and the shore; while the next chapter focuses on Acapulco'sf coastal region and hinterland in relation to Mexico's urban heartland. Both city and regional planning through federal planning and intervention in the construction of public works, together with the forces of urban development they unleashed, resulted in the complete collapse of the port and the emergence of a coastal city that would turn into a major pole of mass tourism in North America.

### **III** **The Foreland** Acapulco's Urban Development in the City, the Port, and the Shore

From 1945 onwards, both the Plano Regulador and the JFMM rose to prominence as the main actors of urban development in Acapulco, many of them in the private and public sectors, began to conceive, imagine, project, and put into action their urban visions and ambitions on three distinctive levels of Acapulco's foreland—the port and city, the beach, and the waterfront. They ultimately created a tourist city whose influence on consumer markets expanded to its hinterland and to the heartland of Mexico's urban markets. The JFMM, through its actions in infrastructure development and public works, loosely following the guidelines of the Plano Regulador, precipitated the rise of the city of Acapulco at the expense of the port and fishing town.

A wave of expropriations and population displacements followed suit. Together with the real estate business and land developing companies, they all left a series of urban footprints. The built environment was quickly marked by legal disputes and politicking, corruption and

speculation, negotiations and conflicts, demolished old port buildings and architectural feats of the modernist tourist city. These all emerged from interactions among many groups whose actions were loosely and capriciously governed by Acapulco's legal and regulatory framework for urban development. Collectively, they amounted to a significant change in the built environment, which further swayed Acapulco's economy in the direction of a tourist economy, hence contributing to the complete collapse of the port.

### **The Public Sector: Urban Development, Planning, and the Junta Federal de Mejoras Materiales**

Overcrowded conditions created water shortages in Acapulco, setting off calls for the government to intervene and carry out much-needed public works in the mid 1940s. Traffic, congestion, and basic social services, as the next chapter will explore, became ever more urgent as rural migrants and a surge of tourists began to weigh heavily on the overstretched facilities of Acapulco, still a small town by any standard. Contreras added yet another layer of urgency, perhaps of naïveté, to these demands by conditioning the implementation of his plan upon a quick solution to Acapulco's water problems. Meanwhile, business owners in the old core of the port, together with hotel owners like Carlos Barnard and a number of small shop owners and old merchant families from Acapulco, also began to call for a quick implementation of Contreras's Plano Regulador.<sup>431</sup>

---

<sup>431</sup> Calls for the solution of water problems had started since 1942-3, Carlos Contreras to Secretaría Particular, 17 March 1943, AGN, Fondo Presidentes, Manuel Ávila Camacho, 111/4058, and there's examples of earlier calls. Upon his return from New York, he quickly requested an interview with the President to call for an urgent intervention in the port of Acapulco, including a solution to urgent water problems, before proceeding to the implementation of the Plano Regulador. See the exchange between Carlos Contreras, Roberto Amorós from the Secretaría Particular, and outgoing President Ávila Camacho during the spring of 1946, AGN, Fondo Presidentes Manuel Ávila Camacho, Box 54, 111/4058; "Tuvimos 35,000 turistas," *Palpitaciones Porteñas*, 69, 1 May 1947. Gabriel Ortiz, "Agua potable para la ciudad de Acapulco", *Ingeniería Hidráulica en México*, vol. XII, núm. 2, abril-mayo-junio (1958), pp. 31-56. Pedro Pellandini, *El agua potable y anécdotas históricas de Acapulco*. (México, Comisión Editorial del H. Ayuntamiento Constitucional de Acapulco, 1990); *El Trópico*, 2 September 1945; for a detailed discussion on these events prior to the implementation, see Andrew Sackett, "The Making of Acapulco," pp.78-83 He recovered a series of interview by the daily *El Trópico* businessman Carlos Barnard on the Plano Regulador: *El Trópico*, 19 August, 1945; with Jose

Unintentionally, all actors involved—businessmen, boosters, urban planners, including Contreras himself, together with small merchants, local journalists and shop owners and city officials—mistakenly turned the Plano Regulador and the JFMM into the panacea of all ills. The entire project had to meet exceedingly high expectations, thus the joint effort was all but destined to succeed, at least in the eyes of the local public sphere. Meeting such high demands, with such expediency, created the perception that the Plano Regulador was never implemented, and calls for its “final” implementation continued well into the early 1960s. Boxes and boxes, piling high with internal documents from the JFMM, show how bureaucrats collected clippings from diverse newspapers, most of them calling for the implementation of some new “updated” Plano Regulador, as if the first had never been carried out. Indeed, the JFMM failed to communicate the many actions it carried out in the port in the late 1940s and early 1950s.<sup>432</sup>

Urbanization problems in no time began to kick in. High expectations and the ugly realities of a rapidly growing city—a city, one must bear in mind, that would triple its population size during holiday seasons—represented thorny issues during the first years of urban development. Yet the most contentious problem of all was, naturally, the land question and the suburbanization of Acapulco’s fast disappearing agricultural belt: ejidos, unused haciendas, merchant property, federal coastal lands, and other recently acquired lots by ejidatarios, generals and veterans of the Revolution. None of these landowners were involved in the real estate business, nor were they able to defend themselves from the rapacity of new land grabbers and speculators who were quickly changing the face of Acapulco. These problems had already become more contentious throughout

---

Villalvazo involved in the Aeronaves de Mexico S.A. and owner of a shoe store in the *barrios históricos* of Acapulco (“Zapatería Esther”) Villalvazo mentions the Plano Regulador and speaks in the name of business owners of old urban core (even though he himself was very not very representative of this group of merchants and small retailers in decline).

<sup>432</sup>See for instance the collection of clippings by the Junta in which newspapers renewed their calls for the updating of the Plano Regulador in 1958, AGN, Secretaría del Patrimonio Nacional, JFMM-Acapulco, Departamento de Cooperación, box 15, Exp 74; *Diario Oficial*, Tomo CLIII Num. 36, 13 December 1945, 7; Earlier in the 1940s, other newspapers often called for the putting into action of Contrera’s plan, *El Trópico*, 11 June 1941, 1; *El Trópico*, 27 May and 12 August, 1945, for budgetary issues, the Plano Regulador de Acapulco and urban reconstruction.

the 1930s, as the previous chapter shows, but matters worsened as the tourist city expanded in the 1940s.

Particularly, ejidos and old merchant property were caught in the middle of growing conflicts over urbanization. Speculation with land and a booming real estate business was making matters as urgent as the water shortages and congestion that had been overwhelming Acapulco since the 1940s. Land “speculators have their eyes fixed on Acapulco’s surrounding ejidos,” forewarned an official of the agrarian department. Private land companies, post-revolutionary generals, and opportunistic businessmen kept encroaching on old merchant property and ejidal land, pushing willy-nilly the process of suburbanization of ejidos to its limits. At risk of ending up in the hands of one of these land grabbers was the ejido El Jardín, one of the most coveted for building purposes. It comprised a vast stretch of valuable land, 2,048 hectares where a huge residential area could be built. Situated west of the bay, near the old urban core and on the road to Pie de la Cuesta and Zihuatanejo, beaches and high cliffs overseeing the Pacific Ocean formed the edges of the ejido, while its inland portion conformed a jagged scrubland torn abruptly by large granite rocks that created spectacular views of the ocean. According to studies carried out by the Agrarian Department, only 25 per cent was fertile, 512 hectares, but within such an area only 75 hectares were in fact being cultivated every year. Even then, that small portion of land produced marginal yields of crops, mostly tropical fruits and corn, and its cultivation required imaginative agricultural tools and techniques exclusive to the region: “*tarecua*” to clean the land and “*espeque*” to till the soil.<sup>433</sup>

The ejido had originally been formed during Cárdenas’s presidency on a large portion of land expropriated from the Hacienda Ejido Viejo which for half a century had covered an extensive area of nearly 16, 000 hectares. Their previous owners, the Spanish Compañía Hermanos

---

<sup>433</sup> AGA, El Jardín, Acapulco de Juárez, Expropiación: 272.2/184, legajo 6.

Fernández, had retained these barren lands since the mid-nineteenth century, growing fruit orchards but mostly using them for storage and cattle. The fact that the legal entitlement to their hacienda went virtually unchallenged—only up until the late 1930s, when the hacienda was expropriated in favor of the *cuadrilla* El Jardín—speaks of both the infertile conditions of the immediate lands surrounding Acapulco’s bay and the lack thereof of protracted agrarian conflicts.<sup>434</sup> The lands further east near Pie de la Cuesta and on the opposite side, further west, Iacos and Granjas del Marqués, and those on La Laguna de Tres Palos were a different story. These lands were extremely fertile, naturally irrigated by the wetlands and lagoons covering this location. That is one of the reasons why, as explored in the previous chapter, the expropriation of Iacos generated such a violent clash between ejidatarios, fishermen, and revolutionary generals.

By contrast, El Jardín and many other similar escarpments of rugged scrublands surrounding the bay’s cliffs were seldom used for agricultural purposes. The expropriation and re-expropriation of these type of lands did not have the potential to replicate those fierce land conflicts that had happened in the case of fertile agricultural lands and fishing areas like Iacos and Hornos. In fact, when the Hacienda Ejido Viejo was expropriated in favor of the *cuadrilla* El Jardín, the transfer of lands took place without any major hassle. By the early 1940s, the company of the previous owners, the Spanish Compañía Hermanos Fernández, was on the verge of bankruptcy, buried under lawsuits and debts that, as the previous chapter exemplified, revealed the last struggles of an impoverished merchant class losing all of its local power in Acapulco as the port town declined and the tourist city grew. The Fernandez brothers had abandoned most of these lands during the bankruptcy.

---

<sup>434</sup> AGA, Ejido El Jardín, Acapulco de Juárez: Dotación, exp. 23/19415; Presidential Resolution June 21, 1937. “Definitive possession” was completed on 27 August, 1939.

The Hacienda Ejido Viejo was finally expropriated in 1937 but, by the mid 1940s, many ejidatarios of El Jardín were abandoning their parcels of land to work in the diverse economic activities of an expanding tourist industry. Very few remained to continue to grow orchards. For the most part, the lands of the ejido were quickly being emptied out and resettled by newcomers, mainly rural migrants who worked in hotels, houses, beaches or the transport services. Simultaneously, two private land companies, Fraccionadora Mozimba and Compañía de Urbanización, were stimulating the occupation of empty lots by rural migrants who had recently arrived in the port. In this way, these private land developers would build a strong case of expropriation claiming that the ejido was being overrun by *paracaidistas* who could create communication problems between the old town and Pie de la Cuesta, an obstacle to the orderly growth of the city. By contrast, these colonos sought to build houses for workers in the growing city of services. Consequently, an informal alliance of speculators and rural migrants was slowly colonizing these unused lands, but it could all easily fall apart into violent clashes once ejidatarios had been pushed out, legally or otherwise. This was beginning to happen in the neighboring ejidos of El Progreso and Santa Cruz.

The *fraccionadoras* filed an expropriation demand. One can conclude, from their aggressive legal actions to get hold of these lands, that the *fraccionadoras* foresaw the direction of urban growth of this economy in transition. This is precisely what led the Agrarian Department to forewarn the JFMM. Speculators had, indeed, their eyes firmly fixed on Acapulco's surrounding ejidos. In the blink of an eye, ejidatarios and the JFMM could lose all of these lands to private actors as it had already happened in the 1930s, when Alamazán took over the lands near Hornos, displacing the Escudero merchants, a story explored in the last chapter. Paradoxically, the JFMM seemed to be a passive actor in these matters, and its actions were constantly catching up with events in Acapulco. It took two unsuccessful expropriation requests from speculators and

private land developers for the JFMM to realize that many eager competitors in the private sector were expanding their property and driving land market values through the roof. Stirred into action, “before it got too late”, the JFMM filed a successful request to expropriate the lands of El Jardín.

435

Shortly thereafter, Alemán responded to this situation and, pursuing his strong interest in developing the port, formulated a financial plan for the JFMM, proclaiming the purported actions in a presidential decree in 1947.<sup>436</sup> The Ejido El Jardín was expropriated one year later. In fact, rising competition among the JFMM, private *fraccionadoras*, individual colonizers of ejidal lands (mostly recent migrants), and some ejidatarios who were “selling” their lands to the highest bidder, had all become the main driving force behind the series of aggressive expropriations of ejidos that took place in Acapulco after the mid-1940s.

Since the JFMM could not rely on import tax revenue, a reflection of Acapulco’s disappearing port, then the federal board had to seek out alternative sources which, in turn, required designing a new financial plan. The plan consisted of the Junta directing a gradual process of urbanization of ejidos and other lands seen in the eyes of boosters as an obstacle to the “natural” and “organic” eastward expansion of the old urban core of Acapulco. From then on, any expropriation would fall under the legal provisions of public utility. As explored in the previous chapter, some ejidos like Icacos had already been expropriated in the name of public utility, but this process of expropriation was more haphazard and had not followed any consistent plan. Now the financial plan introduced by Alemán was much more explicit and aggressive. The scope of expropriation broadened: El Jardín, and El Progreso would be initially expropriated along with eight other ejidos surrounding Acapulco’s expanding urban core. Pie de la Cuesta, Santa Cruz, El

---

<sup>435</sup> May 10, 1945 “Compañía Urbanización, S.A Solicitud improcedente” and another one earlier in 1944, involving C. Arturo M. Carrasco, see AGA, El Jardín, Acapulco de Juarez, Expropiación: 272.2/184, legajo 4

<sup>436</sup> Miguel Alemán’s Presidential Decree of January 9, 1947 and published in the *Diario Oficial de la Federación*, January 28, 1947

Placer, La Garita, El Veladero, Las Cruces, El Marqués, and El Revolcadero would gradually cease to be ejidos through compensation, permutation, expropriation or “by any other means.” Ejidal lands would then be handed over to the JFMM, and the federal agency would clear them out and develop them into building lots for private bidders to buy them at rising market values. The financial benefits obtained from this transaction would be channeled to road works, municipal buildings, schools, and hospitals. This would compensate for the lack of customs tax revenue, offsetting the rising cost of public works destined to buttress the town and the growing tourist destination.

But the plan, laid out in one paragraph, took a decade to be partially realized. As expropriations progressed, reactions naturally varied and there was no unified front that dealt with the Junta. Some displaced ejidatarios turned to tourism and used the expanding labor market as an escape valve to the precarious conditions they found themselves in after the expropriation. Some used the reparation money to invest in small businesses— guest houses, food stands, bars, and inns— in the old urban core of the tourist city. Others accepted the offer of land permutation and moved their agricultural business to the port’s hinterland, and yet another group of ejidatarios joined many landless workers who fled their lands to eke out a living in the tenements of Acapulco’s old *barrios*, increasingly precarious and overcrowded by the 1950s.

The history of expropriations in Acapulco, what the sociologist Francisco Gómezjara called in the 1970s “la gran marcha de las expropiaciones,” advanced in reality at a more arrhythmic pace.<sup>437</sup> All different kinds of tactics were employed along the way. Permutation, expropriation, speculation, compensation, negotiation, and repression were simultaneously used and confused by all parties involved. At times, critical cases that could have been easily negotiated

---

<sup>437</sup> Francisco A. Gómezjara. *Bonapartismo y lucha campesina en la Costa Grande de Guerrero*. (México, D.F.: Editorial Posada, 1979), pp. 186-206.

in peaceful terms were dealt with brutal repression by the army, the navy, or gunmen hired by the Junta, while unimportant cases or those involving flagrant speculators and interlopers were dealt with in the most delicate of negotiations. At times negotiations went smoothly and were dealt with successfully, leaving all parties content.

Meanwhile, Acapulco's vibrant local press, full of imaginative local politicians and muckrakers, agitated the port's public sphere with stories of abuses from the Junta, widely circulating their stories through a series of increasingly read papers. The *Palpitaciones Porteñas*, *La Verdad* sometimes *El Trópico*, and countless others denounced the actions and flagrant abuses of the armed forces during the expropriations. The powerful Melchor Perusquía, president of the JFMM from 1944 to 1953, became one of the favorite and most reviled targets of journalists, reporters, and muckrakers, projecting him as a corrupt speculator, out of touch with local concerns, and secretive in his plans to overhaul Acapulco's urban works. The bi-weekly *Palpitaciones Porteñas*, for instance, published in 1948 an editorial denouncing Alemán's cronies from Veracruz in Acapulco:

[Los amigazos del Presidente]... Nos referimos aquí, en Acapulco, se dicen muy amigos del presidente Miguel Alemán y quienes bajo su sombra y nombre hacen negocios magníficos. Casos concretos tenemos a Méndez y Villela y a Melchor Perusquía, llegados de Veracruz y que sin conocer el puerto de la noche a la mañana se hicieron amos y dueños del estado de Guerrero. Sólo por ser 'amigazos' del presidente han manejado muchos millones con los que han endeudado al puerto para sus obras públicas y hoy las han dejado a medias. Y es que el dinero ya se acabó y Perusquía a Europa voló.<sup>438</sup>

Many journalists and directors of newspapers had their stakes and political fortunes involved in Acapulco's Municipal offices and, naturally, they saw in the presence of federal officials a direct threat to their political power. Many scholars have focused on this tit for tat between the actions of the Junta and the local press to explain why urbanization went awry in

---

<sup>438</sup> Xavier Campos Ponce, "Amigazos del Presidente," *Palpitaciones Porteñas*, October 15, 1948. Anituy Rebolledo Ayerdi and Juanita Lobato, both journalists of the modern-day *El Sur* have carried out a great work of recovering Acapulco's journalistic past, including some of these issues.

Acapulco. The result is a simplistic story of urban expansion in the port dictated by popular heroes, passive victims, and corrupt villains.<sup>439</sup>

Lack of knowledge of Acapulco's changing society, on all sides of the conflict, added confusion to the entire process of urbanization. At times, the Junta publicly staged the handing over of compensations to people who were not ejidatarios; and those who were the real ejidatarios were confused with squatters and brutally evicted from their lands. The press often confused many actors, most of which were after all newcomers in the port: migrants, boosters, squatters, and speculators who constantly launched fierce battles over the primacy of "residency;" over who got there first, who was the original owner, who was considered *acapulqueño* before the arrival of tourism and thereby had more rights over the newcomers.<sup>440</sup>

The heart of the problem, however, was the legal and regulatory framework for urbanization. Its contradictions, ambiguities, and grey areas ended up placing the Junta in an imbroglio when expropriations of ejidal lands began. Moreover, jurisdictionally, the JFMM was overstepping the role of the Navy which was the actor supposedly in charge of administering coastal federal lands. But the Navy had tacitly delegated its managerial role to the Junta, while keeping its coercive role which was then carried out on behalf of the federal agency against migrants, squatters, colonos, fishermen, and ejidatarios. While the Junta built houses for the ejidatarios in five hundred lots, through a deposit of nearly half a million pesos in the Banco del

---

<sup>439</sup> Xavier Campos Ponce wrote in an editorial of *Palpitaciones Porteñas* during the 1952 elections, endorsing the candidacy of a journalist for the municipal presidency of Acapulco. The description of the group reveals a tightly knit group with a powerful influence in local politics: "Con un alegre convivio ofrecido por el periodista acapulqueño Emilio López Torres, en el conocido negocio "El Pájaro Azul", miembros del Centro Mexicano de Periodistas Sección Guerrero, hicieron público el pronunciamiento en favor del periodista Manuel Pérez Rodríguez, Director del diario "El Trópico" como candidato a la Presidencia Municipal de Acapulco... Estuvieron presentes un buen número de periodistas porteños entre los que destacan: Rogelio Noriega, Reemberto Valdés Ortega, Juan Caballero Aburto, Alfredo G. Lobato, Manuel Ávila González, Pedro Huerta Castillo y Jaime Abarca Manzanares entre otros."

<sup>440</sup> "Optimismo entre los ejidatarios del 'Jardín,'" *La Verdad* 3 January 1949. For an example of the confusion of the expropriations see, and particularly the one at "El Progreso" see "Perusquía gestiona el conflicto más peliagudo que haya visto Acapulco," *La Verdad*, 9 June 1949; "Demandan el pago de los terrenos de Hornos," "Cómo reclaman la propiedad del fraccionamiento de Hornos," *Palpitaciones Porteñas*, 24, 1 July 1945; "Adiós ejidos," *Palpitaciones Porteñas*, 65, 1 March 1947.

Sur, the few remaining thatched houses in El Jardín were torched by soldiers in the areas where crops were actually being grown, which led the ejidatarios, backed by the CNC and Guerrero's Federal Senator, to protest and send a letter of complaint to Alemán.

The torching of lands and violent repression by soldiers against displaced groups would now and then burst into the public sphere creating storms of criticism leveled against the Junta. Yet the Junta, rather than marching violently in lockstep unity, pushing expropriations against ejidatarios, staggered clumsily, instead, stumbling from one problem to the next as the number of displaced groups multiplied in tandem with growing and ever-changing demands. The number of stakeholders also exploded. Suddenly associations of fishermen, street vendors, revolutionary veterans, *colonos*, small-time speculators, and recent migrants all had a stake in the recently expropriated ejidos. Letters and petitions flooded the offices of the JFMM and the Agrarian Department with diverse demands. For instance, veterans with political stakes entered the scene. Luis Alemán, the treasurer of El Jardín, who had just received a lot of land when the ejido was expropriated, asked for reparations, presenting himself as a veteran of the Mexican Revolution and showing his credential of the Coalición Nacional Revolucionaria.<sup>441</sup> In other cases, speculators, upon hearing that a certain ejido would be expropriated, would immediately file a request to receive compensation from the government. But then it took longer for the ejido to be expropriated and remained active, with ejidal commissioners irregularly receiving double compensation. Brokers also began to take advantage of the situation. Ruperto Rodríguez, for instance, from the ejido Santa Cruz began “selling” ejidal lands to recently arrived rural migrants.<sup>442</sup> El Progreso generated a heated dispute among *colonos*, ejidatarios, and the JFMM. Private actors made transactions over ejidal lands with other actors. Pani and Enrique del Moral, and their group of

---

<sup>441</sup> Luis Alemán to MAV, June 5, 1947. AGA, El Jardín, Acapulco: Expropiación, 272.2/184, legajo 4, foja 53.

<sup>442</sup> Andrew Sackett unearthed this story. For more information, see his article “Fun in Acapulco? The Politics of Development on the Mexican Riviera” in Dina Berger, and Andrew Grant Wood, eds. *Holiday in Mexico: Critical Reflections on Tourism and Tourist Encounters*. (Durham NC: Duke University Press Books, 2010), pp. 161-3.

architect friends from Mexico City, carried out happy talks with forty or fifty fishermen negotiating the transfer of lands in Tlacopanocha. The fishermen received private compensation for these beachfront lands while Pani and his group of friends continued to construct their houses on federal lands, building on the future prospect that the Navy would lease the lands to them on a ninety-year lease. But none of this happened. Their houses were eventually expropriated, and the fishermen were relocated to Pie de la Cuesta by the Junta.<sup>443</sup> Neither fishermen nor architects had a stake in these federal and ejidal lands, and yet they had been able to profit from these informal transactions.

The port's forefront was becoming highly coveted as the shoreline was reinvented during these years. Once more, beaches were transformed and modernized in Acapulco, sparking off intense conflicts with fishermen, boatmen, and vendors in a growing informal economy. No matter how strenuous the efforts of city officials to regulate their work and business, these workers would inevitably return to provide their services to eager beach goers in Acapulco. Beaches began to be populated by workers and visitors from all walks of life, socioeconomic classes, and backgrounds. But the question of who had the right to access the beach either through work or leisure will be explored in the next chapter.

Land problems really became explosive in those fertile areas in “greater” Acapulco (along the coasts) and in the bay’s hinterland in Cumbres de Llanos Largos, Granjas del Marqués, Icacos, La Sabana, and Pie de la Cuesta. There, tourism, agriculture, and fishing all overlapped and competed with each other, a situation that resembled the port’s transitioning economy in the 1920s and 1930s, but also suggesting that development of the tourist economy was advancing unevenly through different areas in Acapulco. In most of these recently-developed places there was still a fierce competition over which form of land use, base economy, and urban function would prevail

---

<sup>443</sup> Sexta entrevista al arquitecto Mario Pani por Graciela de Garay, August 8, 1990 Archivo de la Palabra del Instituto de Investigaciones Dr. José Ma. Luis Mora, PHO 11/4-6, pp. 8-9.

in Acapulco. There was no space for complementary economic activities given the aggressive and exclusionary expansion of tourism.

These slow-burning conflicts would erupt with full force in the 1960s when the tourist city boomed and there was an attempt by the municipality to solve these problems in favor of other groups who did not belong to the tourism business sector, a story that will be told in the next chapter. During the 1940s and early 1950s, however, the JFMM had to deal with highly organized pressure groups of ejidatarios who collected diverse demands from various displaced sectors of society. Ejidatarios and their federal protectors became a receptacle of grievances and local concerns, spurring small protests everywhere. Most of the protesters eventually rallied behind the federal senator representing Guerrero, Nabor Ojeda, who organized and mobilized one of the most belligerent agrarian factions of politics in the region and began opposing Alemán's developments in the port.<sup>444</sup> He would later seek the governorship of Guerrero, eventually losing to the Alemanista governor Alejandro Gómez Maganda (1951-54).

The situation eventually settled down, if momentarily, by the early 1950s; but the expansion of public works and federally owned *fraccionamientos* continued. The built environment of these public and residential areas reflected a mixed record of legal disputes, solved and unsolved, violent conflicts and successful negotiations, hasty political decisions and carefully planned residential areas, corrupt transactions with cases legally solved. This relentless advance left a contrasting trail of urban footprints that became visible in the built environment as urbanization spread across the bay area, from one end to the other, parallel to the construction of

---

<sup>444</sup> For Ojeda's intervention in El Jardín see AGA, EL Jardín, Acapulco, Expropiación: 272.2/184, legajo 1, foja 10. Several times Nabor Ojeda defended the Martinez brothers in Icacos and along with 64 other ejidatarios from the ejidos of El Jardín and Las Cruces. Nabor Ojeda to MAV, June 18 1947 in AGN, Fondo Presidentes, MAV, 545.22/30. He received many letters and petitions from all of these displaced groups who protested against the reviled JFMM and Melchor Perusquía. For examples of those who supported Ojeda when he ran for governor against Alejandro Gómez Maganda, see petitions and correspondence AGN, Fondo Presidentes, MAV 252/11.

the Costera Miguel Alemán, which was being funded by revenue from the selling of lots in the Junta-owned *fraccionamientos*.

During the fiscal year of 1947 and 1948, the board that most spent was Acapulco's (\$7,703, 978.77 MXN Pesos), followed by Veracruz's board (\$ 6, 243, 802.51 MXN Pesos), and Nuevo Laredo (\$ 3, 060, 000.00 MXN Pesos).<sup>445</sup> Yet regarding Nuevo Laredo, almost the full amount was paid with import tax revenues (\$ 2, 710, 000.00 MXN Pesos), while Acapulco mostly drew its revenue from federal subsidies (\$ 6, 985, 000.00 MXN Pesos) and the rest came from “private cooperations,” “public services,” and “special contributions.” Veracruz’s sources of revenue were much more mixed, although most revenues also came from federal subsidies. The following years, when Acapulco’s JFMM began to profit from its recently-acquired lands, the structure of the board’s financial system, the distribution between federal subsidies and the Junta’s own revenue became more balanced; at times, especially during the fiscal years of 1950-1951 and 1951-1952, most of the revenues came from the board’s own investment in recently acquired lands. Indeed, the years between 1947 and 1949 saw massive investments and gargantuan public works and infrastructural projects. Spending oscillated between multiple smaller investments— in diverse public works, reparation projects, and other basic services— and a series of large-scale projects: the construction of the Calzada Costera, including drainage and potable water, that was completed in 1949, the airport, the system of potable water and the treatment of polluted water, a thermoelectric plant, and the construction of the Scenic Highway between Icacos and Puerto Marqués, all between 1948 and 1952.

---

<sup>445</sup> The following analysis is based on the reports from the Secretaría de Bienes Nacionales e Inspección Administrativa (SBNIA, which would later become the Secretaría del Patrimonio Nacional, under the executive branch) in charge of the 45 local JFMMs, from the fiscal years July 1947 to June 1948, July 1948 to June 1949, July 1950 to May 1951, June 1951 to May 1952. For these specific comparative figures see *Informe de la Secretaría de Bienes Nacionales e Inspección Administrativa correspondiente al período primero de junio de 1947 a 30 de junio de 1948*, (Mexico, D.F.,: Dirección Técnica de Organizaciones, SBNIA, 1948) pp. 101-7 and comparative tables on annual “ingresos” and “egresos.”

The Junta's reports reveal the undertaking of a dizzying array of public works in Acapulco.<sup>446</sup> Historians have merely focused on the most visible projects, the paving of the town and the creation of a waterfront boulevard from one end of Acapulco's bay to the other. Their conclusion is that the federal board completely ignored the necessities of the rest of the population by merely investing in infrastructural works that would solely benefit the tourist city. Yet the Junta undertook major public works and major infrastructural projects for the provision of public services, ranging from the municipal and federal palaces, to farms, multiple schools, houses for fishermen and ejidatarios.

The following table [See Figure 5 below] is a snippet of the kind of public works carried out by the JFMM. It reveals a massive flow of investment from 1948 to 1951:

**Figure 5: Public Works and their Respective Costs in Acapulco for the Fiscal Year 1948**

alumbrado de la calzada costera	800 000.00*
teatro al aire libre, edificio comercial de baños caleta y caletilla	1 231 000.00
malecón de turismo	1 500 000.00
toma de agua para la base naval de icacos	220 000.00
escuela de puerto marqués	37 000.00
reparación de la escuela y ampliación del camp aéreo en zihuatanejo	350 000.00
reparación y ampliación del hospital civil	261 000.00
parte de obra en el acueducto	500 000.00
estacionamiento en caleta y caletilla	500 000.00
terminación de la carretera costera	2 500 000.00
prestashop a ejidatarios de 'El Jardín'	560 000.00
Prestación a ejidatarios de 'Las cruces'	819 000.00

SOURCE: Information taken from the Informe de labores de la Secretaría de Bienes Nacionales e Inspección Administrativa for the years 1948, 1949, 1950, 1951 (México, D.F.: Dirección Técnica de Organización, SBNIA, 1948, 1949, 1952) in the Library of the Archivo Fundación Miguel Alemán Valdés (AMAV)

\*MXN Pesos

<sup>446</sup> Not only do the *Informes de la Secretaría de Bienes Nacionales e Inspección Administrativa* from 1947 to 1955 reveal this, but so do the private correspondence and reports found in the underexplored archives of the Secretaría del Patrimonio Nacional in the AGN, JFMM-Acapulco, from the 1940s to the 1970s. The investment was truly massive during the late 1940s and up until the early 1960s. See, for instance, the huge investment during the year of 1959, "Resumen de las Obras Realizadas en el '59", AGN, SPN, JFMM-Acapulco, Contraloría, box 102, file O-59 (566 but also other files in the box).

On balance, the major changes and legacies of the JFMM in Acapulco can be summarized, in terms of waterfront redevelopment, as transforming Acapulco's seaport bayside into a resort's beachside and promenade. The JFMM, through large infrastructural works, completely redefined the urban space of the city's economic center. But the JFMM and the public sector were only one side of the story of urban development in Acapulco. The other major actor was the private sector, construction and land companies, which also left a visual mark on the city. Their drive to speculate and expropriate lands left fertile ground for future conflicts over land titles and property rights to grow uncontrollably as the port became urbanized. But in this ugly process of land expropriation and speculation, as in the case of so many other fast-growing cities, there was also a great deal of architectural beauty thrown into this mixture of corruption, patronage, natural beauty, and urban experimentation with beaches and scenic views of Acapulco's bays.

### **The Private Sector: Boosters and the “System of *Fraccionadoras*”**

Alongside the process of urban development sponsored by the JFMM, there was also a veritable explosion of urban *fraccionamientos* in Acapulco carried out simultaneously by many private land companies that had been created in the 1930s only to become very powerful by the 1950s. Both private and public land companies kept expropriating ejidos, encroaching on private property from old merchants and revolutionary veterans. They redeveloped these lands into residential lots and began commercializing them in new urban market in Mexico: the growing post-revolutionary bourgeoisie that had become rich during the years of the Second World War, a new class whose elite began to profit from the first years of the implementation of the Import Substitution Industrialization (ISI) economic model.

Against this economic background, businessmen, architects, and speculators in the private sector all left behind a series of built and unbuilt projects in a city quickly being transformed by

members of the post-revolutionary bourgeoisie in collaboration with international actors. This urban explosion was part of a nationwide trend during Alemán's administration, when Mexico City saw Ciudad Satélite and El Pedregal emerging from suburbanized ejidos and turning into new affluent suburban neighborhoods. Most of these new affluent areas in Mexico City, for instance, were planned and spearheaded by the influential architect and engineer Luis Barragán, who created a specifically Mexican form of modernism in many of his works, most notably in Ciudad Satélite as well as other house and building projects, together with other architects and urban planners from the Modernist architectural movement in Mexico, which was briefly explored in the first sections of this chapter.

A similar situation took place in Acapulco, partly because the real estate markets in Mexico City and the port were interconnected. What had started in the 1930s and early 1940s as a timid process of expansion of private *comañías fraccionadoras* eastwards to La Mira and La Quebrada, and westwards to Hornos would gradually pick up steam and move to the Península Las Playas, encircling the old historic barrios of Acapulco. But by the early 1950s, these companies had become another powerful motor of urbanization that spread to the rest of the bay and its surrounding areas. This drive for urbanization eventually connected other partially developed areas in the middle of the bay, Hornos, El Farallón, and Condesa, where Almazán, Portes Gil, Manuel Suárez, and Azcárraga had initially built their houses, casinos, and bungalows in the 1930s.

Here also, construction of residential properties advanced in great speculative leaps as entrepreneurs close to Alemán's political group like Manuel Suárez, a Spanish entrepreneur who arrived during the Revolution and turned into a wealthy businessman by the 1940s. He began to buy, in advance, vast areas of relatively cheap and undeveloped land upon hearing the area would soon be developed. The entrepreneur's construction company, Techo Eterno Eureka, that was also a fiduciary to avoid regulations barring foreigners from owning coastal property, was hired by the

JFMM in multiple contracts involving the construction of public works and large infrastructural projects. Along the way, his company bought large lands from one of the descendants of the Fernández brothers in El Farallón and near La Laja, in the middle of the bay, where urbanization was heading.<sup>447</sup> On one occasion Suárez boasted how he had bought nearly eleven million square meters of empty lots. He would then sell them to federal agencies or private *fraccionadoras* at an exorbitant market value, once construction works had reached the area. He explained this process of urbanization through *fraccionadoras* as “a system,” “a political act” worthy of businessmen like himself who “se las barajeaba en la creación:”

Sin embargo, cargos administrativos sí podía tomar pero no, yo era un creador y me las barajaba en la creación. Veracruz fue una creación; Tampico; México; Manzanillo; Cuernavaca; El Paso de Cortés; hemos ido siguiéndolo, comprando terrenos en los lugares y fraccionando... adelanté a México varios años con mi sistema de fraccionamiento que venía a ser a la vez un acto político [...] Hace negocios el que está atento. Camarón que se duerme, le lleva la corriente. Es cierto que compré once millones de m<sup>2</sup> de terrenos baldíos alrededor de Acapulco, que entonces no pasaba de ser un pueblo de pescadores, y tuve la fortuna de que aquella inversión tan arriesgada saliera bien. Acapulco pasó de tener treinta mil habitantes a dos millones y medio.<sup>448</sup>

Acapulco’s real estate futures and housing market turned urban development into a carnival of corruption, like any other rapidly developing major city in North America. For instance, the trick of land speculation Suárez boasts about was the exact same technique described as “honest graft” by the infamous George Washington Plunkitt, from New York’s Tammany Hall machine, who defended himself from attacks to his great acts of speculation, which were also driving New York’s uncontrollable urban explosion at the turn of the century. Similarly, during Mexico rapid

---

<sup>447</sup> For instance, María Fernández de Bermúdez, descendant of the Fernández merchant brothers and related to Ignacio Fernández, owned the Hacienda El Placer near La Laja which she would then sell to the EUREKA construction company, property of Manuel Suárez and Raquel Ruiz de Suárez. This is an example of many. For the Hacienda El Placer, see ARC 404.1/4042.

<sup>448</sup> Remembering numbers was certainly not his forte, most estimations are wild exaggerations. The businessman, luckily, left a rich trail of testimonies and interviews. This paragraph is composed of two separate interviews, for reference see: (Archivo Fundación Miguel Alemán Valdés) AMAV, Caja 9, Suárez, Manuel: exp. 234, fojas 8 Testimonio al sr. Manuel Suárez, 9 de octubre de 1985 Foja 2; Interview to Manuel Suárez by Ignacio García Noriega in “Manuel Suárez, un indiano con garra,” *La Nueva España*, 7 November 2005.

urbanization in the mid twentieth century, a few decades later, many cities saw this type of cronyism and land speculation propelling urban development in great leaps.<sup>449</sup> Acapulco was not an exception when it comes to these unsavory aspects of urban development.

In this way, Suárez exploited his association to a group of developers, businessmen, and politicians in Guerrero and Mexico City, allowing him to seal various contracts with the JFMM and pave many roads and build most of the major public works in Acapulco. In fact, the Mexican nationalized Spanish businessman, whenever he asked for a favor or signed a contract with the federal government, would literally sweeten the deal by sending sacks of sugar from his plantation to Manuel Beteta, whose house was probably stacked with yearly supplies of sugar.<sup>450</sup> But what this odd tribute reveals is the close association of a group that thrived in the real estate business. Suárez belonged after all to a tightly-knit group of politicians and entrepreneurs from the Alemán era who invested a great deal in the construction business and hotel industry, helping to connect Mexico City's thriving markets to Acapulco's. They were all partly responsible for aggressive urbanization in Mexico City and Acapulco; two interconnected built environments and real estate markets.

If Manuel Suárez had been able, since the 1930s, to survive and maintain his business by building bridges with sacks of sugar across many different presidencies, other actors and their

---

<sup>449</sup> Arguing that speculation and corruption were the origins of uncontrolled and sprawling urban growth in any major city undergoing aggressive urbanization would be an unoriginal claim. But arguing that corruption and speculation is characteristic of any city in the so-called "Global South" is frankly mistaken. It would imply that urbanization does not progress in equally great speculative leaps in other cities regarded as "models" of urban success, most of them located in the so-called "North Atlantic." This pervasive narrative still dominates most of the literature in urban economics in the United States.

<sup>450</sup> AHCM, Archivo Particular Ramón Beteta, Bajas Documentales (En proceso de ordenación) Box, 90, Exp. 1165, Manuel Suárez: Private Correspondence between Suárez and beteta throughout the years 1949 and 1950. Suárez was originally introduced in 1949 to Beteta by Ricardo Giménez Arnaud, Agregado de Economía Exterior, (Spanish Public Servant, Subsecretario de Economía Exterior y Comercio); Manuel Suárez through the Empresa Techo Eterno Eureka, S.A. in Mexico City, made products of asbestos and cement. Through his construction Company he would send two sacks of White sugar, 50kgs each and a watercolor painting, then he would send 5 sacks of 50kgs each, between 1951 and 1950.

descendants were less successful or imaginative. Successive changes in political administrations, and particularly the transference of power between Ávila Camacho and Alemán, left many casualties and cronies who fell out of favor with the new incoming administration. In the wake of this transfer of power, a series of urban transformations took place in iconic areas of the port. No other example is as revealing of this pattern of rivaling networks and conflicting political loyalties shaping urbanization in the city as is the story of the house of Maximino Ávila Camacho, the infamous brother of President Manuel Ávila Camacho. In the early 1940s, Maximino appropriated to himself the island that separated the exclusive beaches of Caleta and Caletilla. He took the island not by force, like when he stormed in and took over the Secretaría de Comunicaciones y Transportes with a group of gunmen, eventually expelling his brother's political appointee and declaring himself as the new secretary in charge. Force was not needed in the case of the island of Caleta. He merely occupied it, successfully, without creating too much hassle; then hired a renowned architect who proceeded to build a beautiful house with a bridge connecting it to the spit of sand that divided the beaches of Caleta and Caletilla.<sup>451</sup>

Yet the 1940 federal law regulating the use of coastal lands was still in place and active. Too often, it was unevenly and capriciously invoked, for its application depended on the changing political fortunes of those who resorted to it. But this time, upon Maximino's death, the 1940 law was invoked and applied, implacably. The widow received a kind notification from the federal government letting her know that she was renting it out from the federal government. The amount she would now have to pay for this isolating privilege was as prohibitive as it was exorbitant. Not

---

<sup>451</sup> Indeed, the displacement had already started during Alemán's campaign, particularly after the death of Maximino, see Hilario Zamora from the Sociedad Colonia General Maximino Ávila Camacho. Zamora was a small businessman from Puebla whose restaurant and business in the port had been taken over, strangely, by a "Chinese man," thus his fortune and business had collapsed. Zamora to outgoing President Ávila Camacho, 25 August 1945, AGN, Fondo Presidentes, Manuel Ávila Camacho 509/5; Andrew Paxman. "Maximino Ávila Camacho: El Narciso que se creía Centauro." In *Los Gobernadores: Caciques del pasado y del presente*, edited by Andrew Paxman. (México: Grijalbo, 2018).

surprisingly, the widow of Maximino blamed the reviled Perusquía for her mistreatment and forceful removal from the island along with her family members. After hopeless protests and complaints, she abandoned the island and the house together with an entire group of business owners, land grabbers, and politicians from Ávila Camacho's war-time era who had irregularly occupied Acapulco during the first half of the 1940s. The house was quickly repurposed and a kindergarten was built. Many years later it would be replaced by the city's aquarium.<sup>452</sup>

Shifting political alliances and the legal disputes that surged from these shifts left visible marks on Acapulco's ever-changing built landscape. However, some land companies had been able to survive and successfully adapt to these political shifts. By 1951, the Fraccionadora de Acapulco, owned by Wolfgang Schoenborn and Alberto Pullen, had sold nearly all of the lots in Las Playas, near the beaches of Caletilla and Caleta, one of the most exclusive areas in the rapidly developing resort.

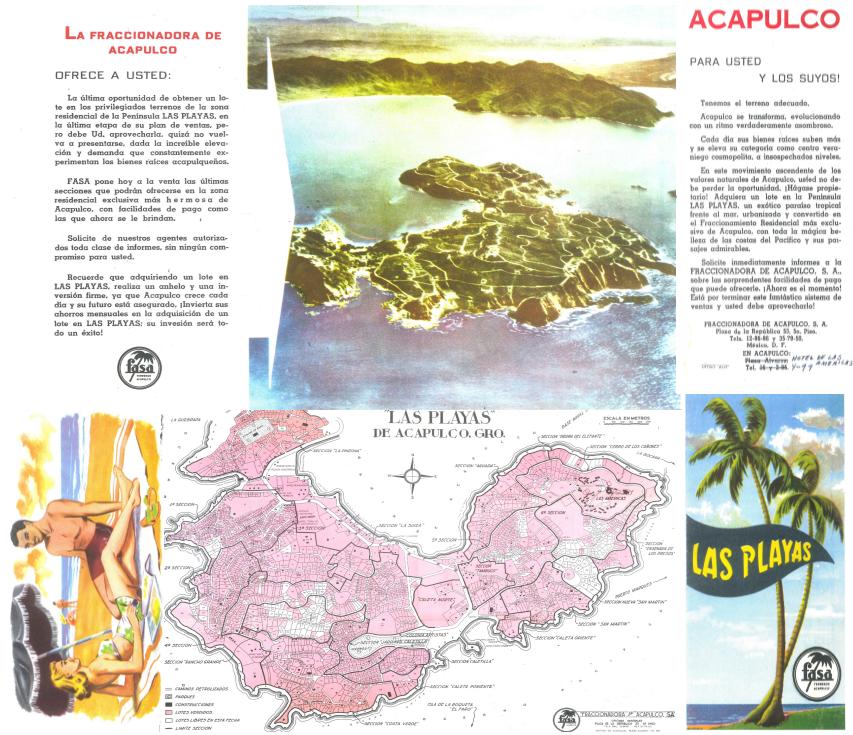
The aerial photo at the top image of the flyer, received by Alemán's minister of economy, Ramón Beteta, shows where Las Playas was located. It shows how large swaths of the land still remained undeveloped, not only in the peninsula at the picture's forefront, but especially in the far west side of the bay's "amphitheater," near Icacos in the background, top side of the aerial photo. On the forefront, only the one-lane winding roads can be seen, like white worms twisting their way through the green hills and cliffs of an otherwise barren peninsula. Yet the drawn map below reveals how most of the lands, shaded in pink, had already been sold; those under construction, shaded in black, were beginning to cover the area, and the very few remaining white areas had not yet been sold. But "it was the last chance," the flyer advertised [See Image 10 below], as "Acapulco se transforma, evolucionando con un ritmo verdaderamente asombroso." "En este movimiento

---

<sup>452</sup> Edna Ávila Camacho to Miguel Alemán, 14 October 1947 and the legal controversy Hugo Rangel Couto to Fernando Toussaint, 26 September 1947 and notification, 8 August 1946 AGN, Fondo Presidentes, MAV, 545.22/43.

ascendente de los valores naturales de Acapulco, usted no debe perder la oportunidad! Hágase propietario!”<sup>453</sup>

**Image 10: Flyer and Map of Fraccionamiento Península Las Playas, Acapulco, 1951**



Archivo Histórico del Colegio de México, Archivo Particular Ramón Beteta, Box 3 (Personal Documents), File 977, Flyer and Map of Fraccionamiento Península Las Playas, Acapulco, 1951

Very little space was left for the projected commercial port to be built. Speculation, population displacement, and the expansion of *fraccionamientos* left a mixed trail of affluent neighborhoods, creating and encircling poor tenements and barrios in the old merchant core of the city of Acapulco. The old core was quickly becoming an ancillary servicing the strip of hotels and wealthy residential areas that began to grow along the lower hillsides of the bay. But the informal

<sup>453</sup> Archivo Histórico del Colegio de México, Archivo Particular Ramón Beteta, Box 3 (Personal Documents), File 977, Flyer and Map, Fraccionamiento Península Las Playas, 1951.

city will be the focus of Chapter 9. Suffice to say, for now, that as urbanization progressed westwards along the Santa Lucia Bay, each passing residential area further transformed the main bay's natural landscape on the crescent-shaped hillsides. The process relentlessly continued. It began on the far east side of the bay in the Fraccionamiento Las Playas, moved on to El Farallón, La Condesa, Icacos, which were already under development since the 1930s. It continued onto to Las Brisas and ended in Pichilingue in the bay of Puerto Marqués by the late 1950s, only to resume forcefully its westward expansion to Revolcadero and the strips of land in the Laguna de Tres Palos in the 1960s, a new area of development that later became an explosion of constructions in Punta Diamante from the 1970s onwards. All of these affluent neighborhoods gradually became interconnected as the JFMM continued to build the Costera Miguel Alemán. In the end, urban experimentation with modernist cities and shoreline planning left a trail of built and unbuilt houses for a city with no connections to the sea beyond the beach and the shore. It all became part of Acapulco's architectural landscape, along with its beaches and natural scenic views of the bay, devoid of any remains of the old port.

### **Conclusion**

The beachside in Acapulco was ultimately created on the seaport's derelict bayside. It became a city designed like a *ciudad-escenario* for the spectacle of nature and tourism consumption. Urban planning in Acapulco went from a local-based urban planning found in the monography of Acapulco in the 1920s and 1930s to the *tabula rasa* approach to the city in the 1940s with the Plano Regulador. Urban planners like Contreras and Pani realized, after a moment of reckoning, that in actual practice, the port had been ignored when the JFMM began construction works along Acapulco's waterfront and foreland. In the 1950s, there were several attempts at reviving the commercial port, and industrialize Acapulco, by connecting it to the heartland of Mexico. This entailed a new form of development in the larger region, Acapulco's hinterland,

which saw the emergence of regional planning that, combined with a series of external factors, a revolution in air travel and mobility, which contributed to the making of a boomtown, the focus of the following chapter.

Acapulco ultimately became in the postwar years an integral part of a circuit of tourism through which growing cities began experimenting with the coast. The Pacific town helped disseminate these evolving urban attitudes towards the beach and the sea, which resulted in a radical transformation of Acapulco's forefront. This initial attempt was led by modernist planners and architects like Mario Pani and Carlos Contreras. But this earlier generation of boosters was quickly displaced by a new "professional class" that arrived in the late 1950s. The urban and regional project in Acapulco was picked up by engineers, regional planners, and functionalist architects in the 1960s. All along, the federal body in charge of implementing the original 1945 Plano Regulador was the Junta Federal de Mejoras Materiales which went through a series of financial crises in the late 1950s.

From a different angle, the next chapter deals with these issues and analyzes planning and urban development but at a broader regional level, when in the early 1950s, planners and boosters began to focus on Acapulco's hinterland and its relationship to urban markets in the heartland of Mexico. The immediate region occupied the imagination of planners who tried to connect Acapulco to North America's consumer markets, while promoting regional development and diversifying Acapulco's economy. These latter attempts, however, ultimately failed to translate into a more mixed economy for the rising coastal city.

## CHAPTER 8

### The Making of a Boomtown

*Regional Planning, Big Business, and the Rush to the Coast c. 1950-1970*

Coastal cities borrowed from one another as the traffic of ideas and models of shoreline planning began to circulate in quicker ways, alongside a rush to the coast of people, business, and capital that set off a widespread reinterpretation of the role of obsolete port cities like Acapulco. A new relationship to the sea and shore emerged in Acapulco and many other ports. The result was that beaches in these new tourism boomtowns became part of the same urban space; in some cases, like Acapulco, the entire city began revolving, not around the port as it used to, but around the shore, all the more to satisfy the needs of an emerging culture of leisure, water-gazing, and beach tourism. In the end, Acapulco became subsidiary to two enormous consumer markets in postwar North America: California and the Mexican heartland. Both acted like pincers on urban growth in the new city.

The chapter is divided into four sections. The first two analyze how the rise of regional science and sectorial economics influenced resort and regional planning in the 1950s in regard to Acapulco. Planners, in an attempt to diversify the port's economic activities in order to revive the commercial port and, naively, create an industrial port city next to the tourist city, unwittingly destroyed the port and contributed to the creation of a tourism boomtown that completely redefined Acapulco's relationship to its hinterland and maritime foreland. Simultaneously, I argue that Acapulco's Pacific littoral was quickly becoming a historical map when commercial connections among ports and coastal regions grew weaker and passengers stopped using this route for commercial and transportation purposes. New harbors and massive industrial ports emerged and Acapulco was ultimately excluded from commerce in this maritime space. Moreover, the ties between Acapulco and the Panama-San Francisco connection became tenuous, as Acapulco was

increasingly tied to Mexican and American postwar consumer markets, mostly in urban places, articulated by Mexico City and tourism circuits in North America, California, and the Caribbean.

The city was ultimately tied to postwar consumer markets in North America, especially in California and the Mexican heartland. In this context, I explore a financial, political, and legal crisis that emerged in Acapulco in the late 1950s. Boosters stumbled upon forgotten remnants of old Acapulco, the old landed merchant class of the extinct port. Merchants, long since declared dead, became revenants of an old order who set off recurrent legal disputes. Acapulco's revenant merchants completely redefined the JFMM's federal plan of public finance which was basically to sell and redevelop lands so as to accumulate public capital and give financial liquidity and structure to Acapulco's Regulatory Plan. The case of the ejido El Jardín is particularly telling. It not only reflects the unexpected consequences of old land conflicts, generated in the region by agrarian reformers, ejidatarios, land developers, merchants, and rural migrants, as explored in-depth in the last chapter, but most importantly, it also reveals that the JFMM's financial plan was also actively stirring up already conflictive situations, unintentionally bringing old actors to the surface who, in their last attempt to save their forlorn status, completely redefined the direction, financial structure, and urban shape of the city. Old Acapulco, however, was completely razed in the process. It did not survive the transition from the more modest geography of business and capital in the 1940s to the emergence of big capital, big business, and a booming chain hotel industry in the city from the 1950s onwards.

But in trying to deal with the resulting legal and financial crises, boosters had inadvertently opened up a space for the emergence of veritable "magicians of money," most of them postwar North American tycoons, who brought enormous flows of private capital not only into the JFMM, but into land development companies and the hotel business, and into the city of Acapulco in general. The last section deals with this rush to the coast of capital and business and how it

combined with a tourism rush. The section explores how Acapulco received an unprecedented flux of tourists between 1955 and 1960 as two revolutions, a transport Revolution and the Cuban Revolution, radically transformed international markets and circuits of mobility. The shift to air travel reinforced two larger forces. I argue that at play was the postwar boom of consumer capitalism, which completed the urban transformation of both California and the Pacific littoral in Mexico, as coasts and harbors were turned into sites of beach leisure, urbanization, and consumption. Moreover, the 1959 Cuban Revolution cut off La Habana from Caribbean circuits of mass tourism generated in the United States, which were quickly redirected to other resorts and markets. Acapulco, in some way, benefitted from this momentous shift, ultimately booming into a capital of leisure and mass tourism business.

Merchants, magicians of money, tourists, and a new generation of boosters and “professionals” (architects and engineers) are the main protagonists of this story of clashes, convergences, and deep urban transformations as Acapulco burst forth into a boomtown of mass tourism. Yet this chapter and the next show how despite the persistence of litigations, violent land conflicts, population displacements, and legal disputes, the city stimulated the imagination of thousands of visitors and inhabitants whose futures were invested in the city. It married the imagination of rural migrants and tourists, by then flowing into the port by the thousands with the imagination of boosters—tycoons, businessmen, urban planners, architects, politicians, central state officials, and local entrepreneurs. Acapulco’s spectacular development, in the end, spliced together the imagination of city officials and federal bureaucrats with speculators and engineers, writers and advertisers, who tied the boomtown to the enormous postwar consumer markets of the Mexican heartland Mexico City, California and the rest of the North America.

## I

## **Hinterland, Heartland, and the Making of a Boomtown**

*Acapulco's Urban Development in Relation to the Costa Grande, Guerrero, and Mexico City*

As the 1950s progressed, Acapulco began to be perceived as an important economic pole in the region. In the eyes of planners and politicians, the port and the city formed an intricate system of its own. But equally complex was the port city's hinterland: the relationship between Acapulco, the state of Guerrero, and the broader coastal region. Instead of focusing on the development of a single city, including its immediate "greater" region, as federal officials had done so in the 1940s, urban planners began to see Acapulco's hinterland not as a region merely defined by geographical proximity, but as a sphere of influence, waning and waxing as the city grew and the region expanded into a network of smaller cities, agricultural regions, and transit hubs that the rising tourist city was influencing and transforming.

This became evident in the mid 1950s when the former governor of Guerrero, Gerardo Catalán Calvo, exhorted the government to call in "technicians" to create "un plan integral del desarrollo de la unidad económica de Acapulco."<sup>454</sup>

Acapulco en sí es únicamente el núcleo principal, pero la unidad económica comprende la Costa Grande hasta más allá de Zácatula en territorio de Michoacán y la Costa Chica hasta la comarca de Pinotepa en Oaxaca. Por el oriente se liga con la zona minera y agropecuaria de Chacahua. Por el Poniente se une a la fuerte unidad económica del Tepalcatepec. Su desarrollo integral depende de todo un sistema.

Indeed, he described Acapulco's "system" as a network of towns, entrepôts, roads, coasts, and agricultural regions—all connected in between by roads from Mexico City to Acapulco, Acapulco-Zihuatanejo-Zacatula, and from Acapulco-Cuajinicuilpa-Pinotepa. Catalán Calvo called

---

<sup>454</sup> "Con la intervención directa de los técnicos... Su desarrollo integral depende de la realización de todo un sistema de obras adecuadas cuyo plan completo debe incluir las carreteras México-Acapulco, Acapulco-Zihuatanejo-Zacatula y Acapulco-Cuajinicuilpa-Pinotepa (en su oportunidad el ferrocarril); obras de riego, grandes y pequeñas; desmonte y roturación de tierras para cultivos agrícolas; hasta el adiestramiento de los agricultores para el mayor aprovechamiento de sus tierras, con auxilio de los elementos técnicos, fitosanitarios, de química, selección y dotación de cultivos, etc.; todo esto o cuanto a los recursos terrestres. Por otra parte los parámetros, enormes dentro de esta misma unidad, que en el aspecto industrial representan un factor de primer orden. Letter from Gerardo Catalán Calvo to Adolfo Ruiz Cortines, Acapulco, Gro. March 11, 1955 in AGN, Fondo Presidentes ARC, 111/4061.

for the construction of a number of public works in this area, creating a larger agricultural region of interconnected irrigation systems that would allow ejidatarios, fishermen, farmers, and peasants to cultivate fertile lands as well as to exploit other land and maritime resources in the area.

In the eyes of regional planners, Acapulco became part of a larger whole, and many studies began to see the city's urban crisis emerging in connection with the region's abandonment and underdevelopment. The region became both the cause and the solution to Acapulco's problems. As a result, memos, reports, articles, and in-depth studies on Acapulco and its relationship to other regions began to proliferate in the channels of information and communication of Acapulco's JFMM. "The Port and City of Acapulco and their Relationship to the State of Guerrero" was the title of a long study distributed among officials of the Junta, with an accompanying memorandum that highlighted the "urban crisis" in Acapulco. It was of utmost importance, the study argued, for Acapulco to tap into this region if city officials ever wanted to solve the port city's urban problems. Indeed, the planning profession was quickly changing as Acapulco began to be perceived as part of a larger urban system, and boosters began planning their projects accordingly. They placed the story of urban change in Acapulco at the center of a growing regional economy that had remained in oblivion for too long.<sup>455</sup>

### **Plans for Regional Development and Economic Diversification, 1945-1958**

Carlos Contreras's urban plan was linked to a broader impulse for development in Acapulco's immediate region of influence, its highlands and coastal surroundings. Between the 1920s and 1960s, the urban profession saw the transition from modernist conceptions of *urbanismo* in cities to *planificación*. This entailed the "enlargement of the territorial scope of the plans

---

<sup>455</sup> "La ciudad y puerto de Acapulco y su relación con el Estado de Guerrero," December 23, 1957 AGN, Secretaría del Patrimonio Nacional, JFMM-Acapulco, Box 17, Nacional Financiera, 1959-1967, File 80/3370.

produced by the planning profession, from city to region.”<sup>456</sup> In the imagination of urban planners, politicians, and boosters, Acapulco’s hinterland acquired a level of significance unseen in programs that had previously sought to revive the port and compensate for the city’s lack of economic motor.

Many blueprints for regional development had been flurrying around in the 1940s until everything settled down a decade later. Two well-defined plans began to take shape. Each plan was supported by rivaling groups: one by Guerrero’s engineers, agronomists, and agrarian leaders like Catalán Calvo, Nabor Ojeda, and Manuel Mesa Andraca, and the other by politicians like Melchor Perusquía, serving under Alemán’s administration, as well as by modernist urban planners and architects such as Carlos Contreras and Mario Pani. Both groups presented utopian images of the region, showing how future developments could be projected onto the city of Acapulco: some were bucolic agrarian revivals, others modernist visions of regional development.

These ephemeral projects, however, overlapped on crucial aspects, particularly on the way they viewed the role of the region in buttressing Acapulco’s development. There was an older bond that connected these two seemingly opposed projects: the invention of Acapulco’s hinterland as a subject of city planning in the form of modernism and agronomy that guided regional science in the 1950s. They oddly resembled those agrarian projects spearheaded by coalitions of *agraristas*, workers, and military colonists who had experimented in the mid 1920s with different regional forms of development in Guerrero’s Pacific Coast. Carlos Contreras in the 1930s had already picked up on these undercurrents, describing the Balsas River basin of Acapulco as an economic region of utmost importance for Guerrero. The port and its surrounding coastal region were equally important, revealing Acapulco’s potential to take off. He had noted that:

---

<sup>456</sup> Arturo Almundoz, “From urban to regional planning in Latin America, 1920–50,” *Planning Perspectives*, (2010) 25:1, 87-95, p. 93.

Acapulco satisface todos los requisitos que debe llenar un puerto de primera importancia; es el centro de distribución de una cuenca económica, la del Balsas, muy extensa y muy rica en recursos naturales, agrícolas y minerales especialmente; es un puerto seguro y abrigado, adecuado como estación de paso para el servicio de carga y pasaje nacional e internacional, y es un centro turístico de una potencialidad muy grande.

Having explored these ideal conditions for development, Contreras presented seven points that would boost the port and city of Acapulco along with its hinterland. The first three points suggested the construction of a coastal road, an airport, and a railroad. The scenic road would run from the jagged crest of La Sabana all the way to Pie de la Cuesta, which would then be connected to the town's center and to the Calzada Costera. This artery would become part of the broader coastal highway projected to run from Ensenada to Tapachula. The airport would be built on the wetlands of La Sabana in Acapulco's hinterland, an enterprise which had in fact taken place in 1934 with the building of a rudimentary one-track airstrip, although it was later moved and turned into a full airport designed by architect Mario Pani on the lands near Barra Vieja and La Laguna de Tres Palos. Aside roads, airports, and the development of a tourist economy, there were other points suggested by Contreras: to create an Institution of Oceanography dedicated to the study of marine biology; to refurbish the shipyard in Tambuco on the far east of the bay; to foster the fishing industry through the creation of packing districts (Casas Empacadoras) and Escuelas Prácticas de Pescadores as well as to raise marine nurseries for the cultivation of mollusks and shellfish.<sup>457</sup> Tourism was not the only project Contreras had originally envisioned.

There were other regional planning projects running alongside modernist plans to reorder greater Acapulco and its hinterland. One of them, closely studied by Sackett, was designed and proposed by Guerrero's congressman and subsequent federal senator, Nabor Ojeda, who envisioned a bucolic agricultural zone with a series of irrigation systems connected by roads, all

---

<sup>457</sup> Carlos Contreras, "Obras de carácter regional y nacional" in his "Programa constructivo sumario" in Fernández, *Aportación a la monografía de Acapulco*, p. 23.

stretching from one end of the coast to the other, integrating along the way all of those scattered fishing villages and disconnected fields in Acapulco's hinterland. Yet the plan was hardly a plan. It was a program sketched out in a brief memorandum, written in telegram style, with clipped words and shortened sentences adding very little to projects that preceded his. This did not stop the senator from presenting it as a completely new plan while he exhorted the Junta Federal de Mejoras Materiales to adopt it. "Realizando estas grandes obras" will forever put and end to "el mal aspecto de Acapulco, la especulación inmoderada en todos los órdenes y [que] realmente sea un gran puerto que se baste asimismo y pueda el turismo mexicano y extranjero gozar de sus bellezas."<sup>458</sup>

Two relatively novel elements can be extracted from his memorandum. Yet another boulevard would connect the port, but this plan would connect the ejidos in its hinterland through two systems of irrigation. This had not been considered when creating the Plano Regulador; and the idea that the port should become self-sufficient, through the development of Acapulco's hinterland, was fairly novel. His memorandum reflects how, at the time, such ideas on regional development were sold as quick remedies for the ills produced by urban planning and development

---

<sup>458</sup> Nabor Ojeda's plan consisted of "Obras gran boulevard de Pie de la Cuesta dando vuelta Caleta, Acapulco, Base Nava, Puerto Marqués, Diamante y Terminar en Revolcadero. Mercados, jardines, campos deportivos, pavimentación, dos sistemas riego, oriente y poniente Acapulco, carreteras Costa Grande y Chica, universidad sur o politécnico, centros escolares y secundarias, para hombres y mujeres, ampliación Acapulco sobre ejidos y expropiación estos terrenos hasta Veladero, Pie de la Cuesta, Garita y Puerto Marqués, ventas lotes alcance todas fortunas debidamente saneados con mercados y jardines, granjas para ejidatarios y reacomodo estos en dos sistemas riego con maquinaria y adelantos modernos en habitación y sanidad..." See Col. Nabor A. Ojeda, Senator of the Republic, Memorandum, México D.F., 10 July 1945, AGN MAC 545.21/21-1. The work of Nabor Ojeda, his political activism and plans to revitalize Acapulco were originally unearthed by Sackett. See Sackett, "The Making of Acapulco," p. 91-2. Sackett notes that "this meant the area surrounding Acapulco could be developed as a large agricultural zone, with farms, collective agricultural enterprises, stables, and beekeeping, among other endeavors, turning the poor areas that surrounded Acapulco into "cities of agriculture." The irrigation systems would include the ejidos in Acapulco's hinterland, the ejidos of La Venta, El Quemado, El Kilómetro 18, La Sabana, Colonia Emiliano Zapata, Las Casuelas, Cayacos, Tehuitzingo, Tres Palos, Llano Largo, and Puerto Marqués, together with those on the west side of the city, from Pie de la Cuesta to Coyuca de Benítez. and Nabor Ojeda to MAC, 14 February 1944, AGN MAC, 545.21/21. Ojeda tried to lobby the real estate business to shoulder the construction of public works like markets, parks, public buildings, schools and other educational and cultural centers. The plan was redundant since this was precisely what was already being done at the time. Nabor Ojeda to MAC, 28 February 1944, AGN MAC, 545.21/21. Nabor Ojeda to MAC, 7 November 1944, AGN MAC, 545.21/21.

in Acapulco. Notwithstanding, Ojeda's plan was unsurprisingly ignored in the 1940s, not because the JFMM and federal officials were out of touch with the port's reality, as the senator had argued. In fact, local footprints and suggestions, originally presented by associations and by Acapulco's municipality, were already being put into action by the JFMM. Nor was his plan ignored because Ojeda knew more of Guerrero's local reality and problems—at some point, in an argument with his fellow congressmen, he lambasted reports on the prosperity of Acapulco, arguing that "Acapulco no es Guerrero."<sup>459</sup> The reason why Ojeda's plan was ignored was simple. The federal senator was merely repeating Carlos Contreras's *Plano Regulador*, suggesting widely-circulate ideas on regional planning—like Moisés de la Peña's study—, presenting them as new and then proposing the kind of public works that the JFMM was already carrying out.

Notwithstanding what critics at the time argued, the municipality did have a say in matters concerning expropriations, public works, and the direction of Acapulco's urban growth. This is evident in the piles of boxes of construction permits given out by the municipality, most of them stacked in the nearly-destroyed archives of Acapulco's *ayuntamiento*. Dolores del Río, Manuel Suárez, and Ramón Beteta are all seen seeking for a permission from the municipality to build their houses.<sup>460</sup> Local demands were thus incorporated into the process of planning and development. Simultaneously, Acapulco's "fuerzas vivas," as local pressure groups and associations liked to call themselves, kept pushing for more public works, arguing that the

---

<sup>459</sup> For an interesting discussion of Nabor Ojeda's political posturing defending these matters in Congress, see Sackett, "The Making of Acapulco," 96-7. Exchange between Ojeda and others in Congress. See Dip. Nabor A. Ojeda to MAV, 18 June 1947, AGN MAV 545.22/30 He sends his plan again to Emilio Portes Gil on 29 August 1945; 28 December 1945, MAC 525.21/21; Nabor Ojeda is then involved in the defense of the brothers Martínez, ejidatarios of Icacos who were excluded from compensation when the ejido was expropriated. AGN MAV 545.22/30, 18 June 1947;

<sup>460</sup> See Guerrero's local expropriation law in Archivo General del Ayuntamiento de Acapulco de Juárez, the box: Poblados, 1946-47 and Fraccionamiento las Playas, the municipal president sought to expropriate the lands of Otto Roher in the name of public utility to grow much-needed public gardens and parks in the exclusive residential area of Las Playas, Memorandum and the resolution of the Cabildo sent to the Governor of Guerrero, 18 February, 1957; and Permission from Municipal President, Ismael Valverde, to architect Jorge Madrigal on behalf of Dolores del Río, 25 April, 1951, File 155: Dolores del Río (For Manuel Suárez's file, see file 148), Box Licencias de Construcción, January-July, 1951, Archivo General del Ayuntamiento de Acapulco de Juárez.

insufficiency of basic services for a growing population was a real problem that would eventually lead Acapulco into a severe urban crisis. These “fuerzas vivas,” together with local journalists, would often blow things out of proportion to forcefully articulate the demands of many groups that had been displaced by urban development in the 1940s and early 1950s. Ojeda was certainly voicing these concerns at a federal level, and his plans to develop the region can be read with this political context in mind. What cannot be done is to take at face value these criticisms and then repeat them *ad nauseam* as other historians and scholars have done, all the more to show how Acapulco’s urban development was a failure.

### **The Comisión de Planificación Regional de Acapulco, 1952**

Urban politics eventually converged with regional planning in the 1950s. In the imaginary of urban and regional planners, greater Acapulco and its hinterland began to be construed as a region that could keep serving the city. A new narrative emerged from this reinterpretation: if only the region and the commercial port were developed, then Acapulco’s problems would disappear.

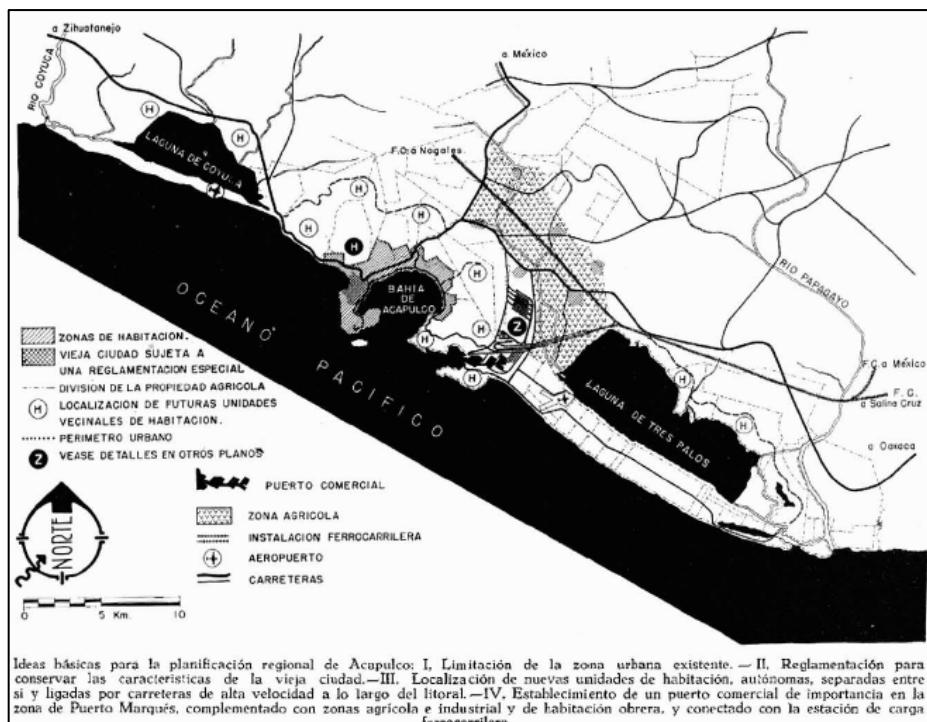
As regional planning began to gain traction in the late 1940s, these ideas, debates, and contributions would become fully integrated into the official plan for Acapulco’s regional development that began in the early 1950s. Yet all of these conflicts through their iteration, eventually amounted to what became in 1951 the Comisión de Planificación Regional de Acapulco. The Comision took many of the proposals of 1945 and turned them into a well-structured plan for regional development and economic diversification. The commission was led by architect Mario Pani and many of his peers who were as involved in new ways of thinking about urban and regional planning, not only in Acapulco but in other ports and resorts.<sup>461</sup> The

---

<sup>461</sup> In the series of interviews Mario Pani described in details his involvement in the regional planning of Acapulco, serving as director of the Comisión de Planificación Regional de Acapulco in the early 1950s. See Sexta entrevista al arquitecto Mario Pani por Graciela de Garay, August 8, 1990 Archivo de la Plabra del Instituto de Investigaciones Dr. José Ma. Luis Mora, PHO 11/4-6, pp. 9-12.

commission was meant to spur holistic development inside and around the port; Acapulco, in this manner, would be dedicated to agriculture, tourism, mining, fishing, and industrial development. The Commission was supported by Guerrero's governor Alejandro Gómez Magaña and by Alemán. It was an elaboration of Carlos Contreras's points for "regional works" that were already established in his original plan of the "Calzada Costera" which became the Costera Miguel Alemán. The boulevard would run from Puente Morelos to Revolcadero and it would eventually be connected to the Camino Costero Nacional del Pacífico from Ensenada to Tapachula, which by then was being connected to the International Pacific Highway that ran down Mexico's Pacific littoral from Los Angeles to Guaymas.<sup>462</sup>

**Image 11: Sectorial Map of the Greater Region of Acapulco, 1954**



A sectorial map of the greater region of Acapulco, divided by zones and economic activities in "Planificación de Acapulco. Ideas Fundamentales," *Arquitectura México*. Tome X, No 46, 1954.

<sup>462</sup> Fernández, Aportación a la monografía de Acapulco, p. 22.

The unintended consequences of the plan would lead to the further decline and final destruction of the commercial port. As the *Revista Acapulco* put it: the city had traded its port for a boulevard, and many sought to reverse this trade off: “Calzada costera a cambio de un puerto”<sup>463</sup> Part of the original plan was to destroy the old, rotting pier west of the bay of Santa Lucía in Tambuco and create a new one east of the bay of Puerto Marqués, thereby moving the entire commercial port to the strip of land in the Laguna de Tres Palos, between the Revolcadero and Barra Vieja. The bay of Santa Lucía would be destined exclusively to beach leisure, water-sport tourism, and non-commercial navigation. There were some plans to turn the Bay of Puerto Marqués into the commercial port, but these ideas never prospered. [See Image 12 below] As the maps from the *Arquitectura México* magazine reveal, the main bay’s amphitheater would become a national park, separating the tourist city in the bay from the projected development of an industrial hinterland in La Sabana. Puerto Marqués would become the port’s new terminal in this projected industrialized area.

---

<sup>463</sup> “Calzada costera a cambio de un puerto,” *Revista Acapulco*, 13: January 16, 1950.

**Image 12: Map of the Projected Plan of the Industrial Port of Puerto Marqués, 1954**



Anteproyecto del puerto de Acapulco en la zona de Puerto Marqués. Esta ubicación tiene las siguientes ventajas: magnífico protección del viento. La Bahía del Marqués, creciente ilimitada del mismo, ya que puede desarrollarse desde la bahía hasta la Laguna de Tres Palos; amplia zona plana que facilita los accesos ferroviarios, la estación de carga y las zonas industrial, obrera y agrícola. La región elevada que está al Oeste protege perfectamente el Acapulco turístico de los vientos producidos por las ráfagas de costa. — Se proyecta: 1. Puerto y astillero. 2. Posible planta siderúrgica. 3. Zona industrial. 4. Terminal de carga y pilares del Ferrocarril. 5. Estación de carga del Ferrocarril. 6. Estación de pasajeros. 7. Habitación obrera. 8. Habitación turística de montaña. 9. Habitación turística de frente al mar. 10. Poblados existentes. 11. Zona de gresetas. 12. Zona agrícola. 13. Nuevo aeropuerto.

Map of the Projected plan of the industrial port of Puerto Marqués in “Planificación de Acapulco. Ideas Fundamentales,” *Arquitectura México*. Tome X, No 46, 1954

Unintentionally, urban planners had dealt the final blow to the entire port. They began to dismantle the old one in the Santa Lucía Bay, while projecting a new one that never came to fruition in the Bahía del Marqués [see both images 11 and 12 above] They cleared the entire area of its old features—P.M.S.S.C. houses, piers, custom house, docks—and left ample ground for a city to emerge and take over in the main bay of Acapulco. But it soon became evident that the tourist economy would monopolize all economic activities while leaving no opportunity for the commercial port to reemerge, a long-awaited prospect that was quickly turning into a fantasy. The area where the old commercial port used to be was completely destroyed. The small docks,

warehouses, and harbor of the Pacific Mail Steamship Company were all torn down. The Hotel Club de Pesca filled this evacuated space; an architectural feat which would then be demolished a few decades later. The JFMM built the Federal Palace on the remains of an old warehouse; the Club de Yates took over the remaining piers. The last docks were repurposed and would now receive only passengers from boats and yachts. The Acapulco Custom House, a breeding ground for black markets, rebellions, and foreign collusion throughout the nineteenth century would all disappear unlamented, razed to the ground along with its warehouses. The Hotel Colonial was built in its place, and so on and so forth until urban planners dismantled everything.<sup>464</sup>

The commercial port, having been moved around—built, destroyed, and rebuilt for four hundred years—finally ceased to exist. It disappeared in a stroke at the hands of urban planners seeking to relieve the port from congestion, traffic, and the ugliness of industrial areas. Functionalism at its best, and yet naïve plans were floated around to industrialize the region. In the urban imagination of Acapulco's boosters, the region could still be industrialized. Some were outright implausible while others responded to different economic interests in the region that would have perhaps made more sense in the 1920s. Other plans were ambitious, bordering on the naïve. But the general plan was to industrialize Acapulco's hinterland. In fact, there were plans to build a fundidora between the coastal stretch of land Laguna de Tres Palos and Acapulco's hinterland. But such plans did not prosper under the exclusionary rules of the game in a monopolistic tourist economy. Instead it was decided to set the ground for the development of agricultural lands in the surrounding regions Laguna de Tres Palos, most of them wetlands and plains, as well as in those vast coastal lands west of the Santa Lucía Bay, Pie de la Cuesta, Barra de Coyuca and the lagoon by the same name. They would all be turned into agricultural and fishing regions that would supply the port with diverse goods. Communities of ejidatarios, fishermen, and

---

<sup>464</sup> De la Peña, *Guerrero económico*, Volume I, pp. 512-14.

workers of the service and transport industry would be settled there. Some stretches of beach in these areas would be repurposed for residential and tourist area, but the great bulk of the region would be dedicated to agriculture and fishing.

Many of Acapulco's boosters were deeply involved in Acapulco's regional expansion. Ramón Beteta, Alemán's Minister of Economy, together with the entrepreneur and real estate developer, Wolfgang Schoenborn, designed several farms in the surrounding regions and subdivided them into lots of nearly eight thousand square meters.<sup>465</sup> Acapulco's urban demand was too large for the meager supply of an underdeveloped surrounding region. Their plans thus responded to the growing scarcity of goods and crops in Acapulco's nearby regions. But they also contributed to earlier attempts by entrepreneurs to spread their interests far into Acapulco's hinterland. Carlos Barnard kept expanding his business further east of the bay, past Pie de la Cuesta, and into the Costa Grande, all the way up to Zihuatanejo. He had invested in the shark fishing industry in the early 1940s and had begun to establish close relationships with the Comisario Ejidal from whom he had "obtained consent" to expropriate 350 hectares of land. Barnard had also bought many other lands there, telling Beteta that it would be a good idea to expand further "para mejorar esa preciosa región, la cual sería una lástima ver sin progreso alguno durante muchísimos años si no se hace algo bien planeado." He further noted the urgency of carrying out such business ventures, "es ahora tiempo oportuno para todo esto ya que el verdadero interés por Zihuatanejo se despertará cuando la carretera se termine."<sup>466</sup> He was after all right, the expansion of Acapulco's model of tourism began in its most immediate sphere of influence, and places like Zihuatanejo became dependent on Acapulco's growing economy and urban market.

---

<sup>465</sup> Ramón Beteta to Wolfgang Schoenborn, September 23, 1952. AHCM, Archivo Particular Ramón Beteta, Bajas Documentales (En proceso de ordenación), Box 88, File 1109.

<sup>466</sup> Carlos Barnard to Ramón Beteta, Acapulco, Gro., November 6, 1946. AHCM, Archivo Particular Ramón Beteta, Bajas Documentales (En proceso de ordenación), Caja 5, Exp, 57.

Yet agriculture and fishing were not enough to diversify and expand the port and the city's economic activities along the coast. To industrialize the region, according to the Regional Planning Commission, a railway line was indispensable. Its construction would put an end to decades of hopeless Porfirian expectations that plans to connect the territory between Mezcala and Acapulco would ever become materialized; railroads were then projected to arrive near the Laguna de Tres Palos.

Acapulco's demand for labor and several goods and services from its growing urban market spurred an economic revival in its hinterland, in the State of Guerrero, and along the important commercial route between Mexico City and Acapulco that the roads had revived. The road between Mexico City and Acapulco, due to a growing traffic that connected Mexico's heartland and coastal markets, had created a circuit that came full circle with sea, air, and land routes connecting the port. These routes created commercial corridors that thrived and further contributed to Acapulco's boom. An alliance of rising businessmen in the transport industry, advertisers, and local boosters were an important aspect behind this new dynamic market. But this will be explored in the next chapters.

Nonetheless, in the midst of this mood of eagerness and anticipation, many observers began to voice their concerns.<sup>467</sup> Even the Alemanista Alejandro Gómez Maganda, governor of Guerrero from 1951 to 1954, an iconic political figure of alemanismo in Acapulco, pompously rebuked many promoters of tourism, reminding them in his memoirs that “nunca he considerado que la tal ‘Industria sin Chimeneas’ deba ser fundamental objetivo de ningún país, pues tiene mucho de aleatorio por conmociones internacionales imprevisibles... los pueblos que confían su política económica a tal renglón de arbitrios, siempre apuntan la edad de su decadencia... de

---

<sup>467</sup> Sexta entrevista al arquitecto Mario Pani PHO 11/4-6, p. 10.

apoltronamiento, avidez especulativa y de cierta sicosis de tercerías imaginables.”<sup>468</sup> Though he welcomed tourism as a means to assist development, especially for the exchange of cultures and the rebalancing of payments, he nevertheless warned his readers of the dangers of an emerging idle class in Mexico.

Even as late as the mid 1950s, when it was Acapulco’s heyday and optimistic views were in full swing and tourism was seen positively, spurring unprecedented growth and development, even then, many political actors and boosters would still see the dangers of relying too much on a single economic activity. All along, tourism was interpreted as an auxiliary form of development for the port. It was perceived as part of a transitory stage before Acapulco attained the powerful motors of real economic progress: mining, commerce, and industry. Moisés de la Peña and Gómez Maganda, for instance, belonged to this group of dissident voices who forewarned developers of the dangers of tourism if it did not take off together with other industries.

Acapulco’s Municipal Presidency voiced similar concerns. Some memoranda attacked the JFMM, deeming it a complete failure, demanding the federal government to hand back the control of the port to local authorities. Other more measured voices like the engineer and director of public works for Acapulco’s Municipal presidency presented a list of well-thought out recommendations, recognizing the causes of a growing urban crisis and offering a list of solutions to solve the crisis. These included the reorganization of the JFMM to make it more efficient and responsive; to update the Plano Regulador and clarify some grey areas; to foster the fishing industry and a local market that could supply Acapulco with cheaper goods from the sea; to bring in local private capital to provide more basic services, complementing the work carried out by the JFMM and letting the local government and the private sector to shoulder part of the costs; to solve the water crisis; to build more houses for workers, among many other suggestions. This was, perhaps, one of the most

---

<sup>468</sup> Gómez Maganda. *Acapulco en mi vida*, p. 209.

coherent and comprehensive plans floating around the time; the list of suggestions was sent to Mexico's President, who received the local official and heard his demands. Most were incorporated into the new studies carried out by the JFMM. There was a significant change between Alemán and Ruiz Cortines. The latter increasingly heard the demands of politicians, engineers, and boosters in Guerrero who increasingly called for a holistic development of Acapulco that included Guerrero's coasts and the adjacent coastal regions in neighboring states.<sup>469</sup>

## II

### **The Maritime Foreland and the Making of a Boomtown**

#### *Acapulco's Vanishing Pacific Littoral*

As aforementioned, when the Plano Regulador of Acapulco emerged in 1945, it became a model in itself, influenced by modernism and shoreline planning. Both forms of planning had been continuously evolving since the 1920s, so it would be pointless to argue that Contreras's modernist plan drew its inspiration from a single urban model at a single moment in time. Equally pointless would be to argue that Acapulco was derivative of European and American models, as other scholars have noted. Rather, Acapulco's Plano Regulador was a mixture of universal models on urban and beach redevelopment, later integrated into a comprehensive plan and circulated within the traffic of ideas on urban planning, architecture, consumption, and tourism that flowed back and forth within widening tourism circuits among many resorts and ports in the 1940s and 1950s. Such local models and manifestations were the reflection of a universal transference of planning techniques and ideas responding to technological changes in water transportation. For deindustrialization and containerization had rendered obsolete many old harbors that for centuries had been functioning as industrial or trading ports. Many old ports turned to repurpose and

---

<sup>469</sup> Engineer Armando Alducín Sisniega, Director Municipal de Obras Públicas, to Adolfo Ruiz Cortines, Srio. Particular del Presidente de la República Enrique Rodríguez Cano, Acapulco, Gro, April 30, 1954 in AGN, Fondo Presidentes, ARC 111/4061 Engineer Armando A. Alduncín Sisniega to Srio.

resurrect their rotten piers and harbors as well as their worn-down waterfronts. As coastal cities borrowed from one another, the traffic of ideas and models of shoreline planning fed into a widespread reinterpretation of the role of obsolete port cities and their new relationship to the sea and shore.

### ***Acapulco's Model of Tourism and Development on the Mexican Pacific Coast.***

Old towns and ports like Mazatlán and San Blas were suffering a similar fate to that of Acapulco's, and their commercial decline was set on an irreversible path with the spread of container ships for commercial purposes in the 1950s. Old bays and piers could no longer house containers twice their size, and modern terminals were often built far away from the traditional but increasingly obsolete harbors. Competition from other ports and commercial terminals grew; as a result, many towns and their old harbors and piers along Mexico's Pacific littoral were repurposed and redeveloped into tourist resorts.

Mexico's heartland supplanted the Pacific coast as Acapulco's economic mainstay. By the late 1950s, the maritime geography and economic environment that had kept Acapulco afloat for most of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was fast becoming a historical map on the North American Pacific. Its last remnants were redrawn by boosters and the spread of beach tourism—a model spearheaded by Los Angeles, San Diego, and Acapulco—to many future urban clusters on California and Mexico's Pacific Coast. This interconnected space of consumer markets along the Pacific coast facilitated Acapulco's transition from a quaint resort dependent on a small circuit created between this broader Pacific region, California, and Mexico City to a boomtown of mass tourism actively creating international consumer markets in Mexico and the United States. It became the system of Acapulco as an international mass tourist resort. This system was further replicated by Pani. He created new Planos Reguladores in declining seaports, like Mazatlán and

Guaymas, which were in the process of being overhauled by public works and infrastructure spurred by the JFMM, and which were also projected to be linked with the Ferrocarril del Pacífico built in 1950. In the projections of many urban planners and boosters, the littoral space of Mexico's Pacific would eventually connect border towns and seaports through highways and rail lines that would stretch as far as California and the West Coast. Therefore, the Pacific littoral became a gold mine for investment and a lot of "future" was projected onto the coast.

With Acapulco in mind, boosters, contemplating the prospect of finding uninhabited bays or a desolate stretch of coastal land upon which to impress their dreams and ambitions, became the driving force behind the rush to Mexico's Pacific Coast. Feverish travels by boat and plane of businessmen and bankers formed new tourist cities. This goes on to show how far Acapulco, as a model of urban growth, had travelled and impressed itself on the mind of boosters. Moreover, water-sport tourism, fishing, regattas, and navigation repurposed old passenger routes between California and Mexico's Pacific Coast. Mexican and American boosters in the tourist industry began to circulate along these old routes. Mario Pani recalls how he would take his boat and travel together with a series of friends, businessmen, and his family between San Diego, Los Angeles, and Acapulco. His boat allowed him to explore and "get to know the Pacific coast." As they moored their way to California, passing many uninhabited coasts, Pani described how they "discovered" many bays of Jalisco "que nadie conocía porque no había carretera ni tren ni nada; lo que es Chamela, Tenacatita, Barra de Navidad, todo eso que estaba aislado, llegando hasta Puerto Vallarta. A Puerto Vallarta llegamos algunas veces, también estaba totalmente aislado; algunas de esas bahías estaban más o menos habitadas, pero había otras que no lo estaban."<sup>470</sup>

---

<sup>470</sup> Séptima entrevista al arquitecto Mario Pani August 8, 1990 Archivo de la Palabra del Instituto de Investigaciones Dr. José Ma. Luis Mora, PHO 11/4-7, pp. 5-8.

The coast began to be gradually colonized by boosters from different diverse groups and classes, similar to what had happened in Acapulco. Carlos Tello Díaz's monograph on Careyes and Cuixmala details the profound shaping of Jalisco's Pacific coast through a series of colonizing waves that in the 1950s and 1960s brought a medley of *colonos*, national and foreign businessmen, peasants, lumberjacks, architects, artists, and generals who bought property and began to colonize these forgotten coasts. It all started in the 1950s in Mexico, a time when there was an active campaign to colonize the country's coasts, a process which followed a similar organic transformation of the city of Acapulco as a result of diverse migratory flows creating a powerful cluster of interests in 1930s and 1940s. But the campaign to colonize the coast, one of President Adolfo Ruiz Cortines's most assiduously advertised projects, was bombastically announced as "la marcha hacia el mar" by the characterless president. The project consisted on transforming ports, promoting the fishing industry, and the general colonization of coastal lands, which provoked a wave of deforestation of Mexico's tropical dry forests running parallel to the Pacific littoral. Tello Díaz argues how colonization created a powerful group of vested interests in Jalisco that culminated with the construction of the 1972 coastal highway. It was then that two driving forces, in cooperation but at times in violent clashes, began to shape Mexico's Pacific Coast: the tourism industry and scientific, environmental, and conservation campaigns.<sup>471</sup>

In this way, boosterism eventually took the form of scientific and geographical expeditions. Mario Pani acquired a plane and a boat and, together with businessmen from Mexico and the United States, began projecting their ventures and plans onto Mexico's borders and barren coasts:

Recorriendo esa costa, vino la idea de que la costa podría utilizarse turísticamente de manera importante. Esto coincidió con el Programa Nacional Fronterizo. Yo estaba muy interesado en crear una serie de marinas, entre San Diego y Acapulco, que fueran puntos de recalada de grupos de yates ...eso vino a ser el origen de un pequeño pueblo y una zona

---

<sup>471</sup> Carlos Tello Díaz, *Los señores de la costa: Historias de poder en Careyes y Cuixmala* (Mexico City: Penguin Random House Grupo Editorial México, 2014).

turística en cada uno de esos puntos. Entonces se trataba de encontrar bahías que tuvieran esas condiciones, para no hacer puertos artificiales costosísimos... Y se hicieron esas marinas. En esas épocas había en los condados del Sur de California 300 a 400 mil yates, y si nosotros lográramos que viniera el 10 porciento, tendríamos 50 mil yates en México. Bueno, era una cosa espléndida. La idea era que hiciéramos un lugar donde tuvieran todos los abastecimientos, que hubiera fraccionamientos, hicieran casas, hoteles

Pani's group eventually found 14 bays similar to Acapulco's, and together with Pepe Carral of Bank of America and various Mexican governors, with whom they had several meetings, they organized a tour in San Francisco and LA, organizing conventions with American tourism boosters and bankers from California. Bahía Concepción, Bahía de San Quintín and Los Cabos. They made studies and great plans and "presented them in San Diego, Sacramento, Los Angeles, and San Francisco. At some points they started making plans with Howard Hughes associates from Hughes Air Western Line, but there seemed to be a fallout within his associates which prompted them to cancel any plans with Pani's associates. They eventually built a golf course instead.

From the 1950s onwards, when Acapulco began to expand, a debate emerged in which two different projects of the city were pitted against each other: urban growth versus beautification/conservation. The debate emerged as tourist boosters, scientists, and conservationists increased their presence along the Pacific littoral. Alongside boosterism, scientific expeditions returned to Mexico's Pacific Coast in the form of hydrographic and biologic investigations that had already started with the Allan Hancock Pacific Expeditions in the 1930s that explored Guerrero and Jalisco's coast. In the 1950s, tourism business explorations joined forces with scientific expeditions as was the case of Donald D. Brand who wrote an interesting *Coastal Study of Southwest Mexico* at the University of Texas, Austin in 1957. The project was funded by the Geography Department but also supported by Francisco Villagrán Prado who served as director of the Dirección General de Turismo. Donald Brand had written his work on the

development of Spanish colonial Pacific ports in his hydrographic surveys.<sup>472</sup> But this time he wanted to explore the modern Pacific coast, especially the vast littoral of Guerrero, Michoacán, and Jalisco. Remote and unexplored coastlands, in the work produced by these expeditions, were reinterpreted in terms of their beauty, with a special emphasis on the nature of beaches, boulders, jagged cliffs, bays, inlets; the aesthetic aspects of seabords were considered as natural geographic advantages that could attract further exploration and investment. This, impulse, however, created a deindustrialized Mexican coast which led to many failed attempts to revive commercial ports in growing tourist cities.

### III

#### **Acapulco of Old and the Making of a Boomtown**

*MERCHANTS, "MAGICIANS OF MONEY," AND THE NEW PROFESSIONALS*

Merchants from old Acapulco reappeared in the late 1950s, upsetting the order of things that had emerged during the postwar years. It was the splinter group of nineteenth-century merchant families in Acapulco, once a landed class, who began to exploit the fundamental contradictions of the legal and financial framework that was created in Acapulco in the 1940s. Urban development in this new order had been based on the formation of private capital through the redevelopment of federal lands as a means of financing infrastructural projects that were meant to spur further public spending, buttress the service sector, and attract more private investment to the city and the tourist economy. All along, the Junta Federal de Mejoras Materiales in Acapulco had been in charge of this action plan. Yet merchants, after having waited patiently, weathering the storm of land expropriations in the 1930s and 1940s, decided this time around to challenge the

---

<sup>472</sup> Maruata, in Michoacán, for instance, was carefully described in terms of beaches and seaboard aesthetics. Donald D. Brand, *Coastal Study of Southwest Mexico*, (Austin, 1957), Donald D. Brand, *Coastal Study of Southwest Mexico*. (Austin: Dept. of Geography, University of Texas, 1957-58), pp. 9-11; Donald D. Brand, "The Development of Pacific Coast Ports during the Spanish Colonial Period in Mexico," in *Estudios antropológicos publicados en homenaje al Doctor Manuel Gamio*, (México, 1956) pp. 577-591.

legal and financial base of this edifice. They introduced a series of carefully thought *amparos* or writs, carefully pushed forth carefully crafted legal challenges, pushed and challenged, persistently and consistently, until the entire new order that had emerged in the 1940s entered a serious crisis in the early 1960s, in no time imploding and collapsing. But the original wave makers who had set off the storm that brought about the collapse of the JFMM's finances, ended up being dragged down along with the remnants of this old merchant class. Ultimately, the new order became the old, and the older one disappeared altogether, never to return again. In its place, big capital and big business surged quickly forward from this implosion. These new "magicians of money" took over the direction of the city's direction and development.

The JFMM's entire operating budget and financial structure collapsed under legal challenges from merchants and landowners. It was a turning point that led to the deep restructuring of the Junta's finances and the emergence of private investors in Acapulco. I will focus on a legal controversy between the Junta and property owners from *fraccionamientos* and then, more importantly, on a group of merchants over the lands of El Jardín.

As previously analyzed in chapter seven, the Junta in Acapulco was not a self-sufficient board. Its revenues were not drawn from import-export taxes like those towns on the U.S.-Mexico border—Nuevo Laredo, Matamoros, Nogales, and Mexicali—or like those important port-cities like Veracruz, Coatzacoalcos, and Tampico. Instead, Acapulco belonged to the category of cities that had to initially rely on federal resources to carry out public works. Most cities in this category were port towns in decline with rising tourist cities, all of which were located on the Pacific littoral: Acapulco, Guaymas, Puerto Vallarta, and Mazatlán. Their source of import-tax revenue was meager or nonexistent, hence they all relied completely on federal subsidies to help meet huge demands for public services in booming tourist industries.

But federal funds and subsidies quickly began to dry up, and most of these Juntas began to operate on paltry budgets, pressed by mounting debts, and operating under a financial plan that was proving in the long run to be insufficient for boomtowns like Acapulco. Facing such budgetary challenges, the JFMM, had to resort to other financial means, and between the 1940s and 1960s a distinctive pattern began to take shape in the city's finances. As soon as the Junta was forced to stop relying on federal funds, it ceased to act as an administrative board for public works and began to operate instead as a state-owned company. It began to amass its own financial patrimony from two main sources of revenue: the first was drawn from a series of informal taxes, called "cooperaciones," levied on the population who benefitted from the public works, the second from the selling of redeveloped federal lands to private owners. The Junta ultimately became almost a state-owned real estate company.

Boosters, federal officials, politicians, and the Junta's board continued to operate in the 1950s under *ad hoc* forms of finance that the JFMM had been using since the 1940s. These two sources of finance kept oiling the Junta's operations in the 1950s. Yet the legal underpinnings that Alemán's administration had established in the 1940s did not specify whether the Juntas had the capacity to raise capital and build their own financial patrimony, or if their purpose was to solely administer and channel federal resources, to earmark and assign federal subsidies to public works, while managing contracts with construction companies to carry out those works in Acapulco.

The Junta became vulnerable to legal challenges, partly because of the haphazard evolution of both systems of finance, the cooperaciones and the selling of redeveloped federal lands. Shaky legal underpinnings, ambiguous statutes: it all complicated the board's finances. In no time, this model of urban development in Acapulco would enter a serious legal and financial crisis in the late 1950s. It would ultimately result in the refinancing of urban development in the tourist city.

The first crisis came from the cooperaciones. The archives of the Junta from the 1940s through the 1960s are flooded with slips of paper: pink, green, and yellow notices of late payments, followed by more warnings, official newspaper notices, and more notices which inevitably ended up becoming court orders, subpoenas, warrants, summons and all different kinds of legal measures used by the Junta to collect outstanding informal taxes levied on the middle to upper class neighborhoods and fraccionamientos in the city. But one can only imagine most of these tiny slips sitting for months on the doorway of summer houses and beach mansions left unoccupied for long periods of time. These slips would sit there for months before their residents from the U.S. or Mexico City returned only to barely notice them at their doorstep.

The *amparo* and legal controversy initiated by Braulio Arvide and his wife is a case in point. Arvide, an engineer and public servant, possessed several accounts linked to his property in the exclusive Fraccionamiento Las Playas. They completely disregarded the Junta's notices that appeared in several newspapers *La Verdad* and the Diario Oficial of the State of Guerrero along with a collection of colorful slips that appear in their file. The Departamento de Cooperación from the JFMM kept sending these slips: notifications had been sent in 1955 for two accounts \$1,584.00 and \$ 1,474.20; followed by another string of notifications \$ 6,946.00 and 6,511.05; then in 1958 \$ 6,996.00; \$6,511.00; \$ 8,697.83 and \$ 1,584.00 and \$1,969.32. It became a deluge of debts as the city began to overhaul the water distribution system in Las Playas and build a Hydraulic System in Cayacos. The Arvides reacted with an *amparo* questioning the legal basis of the Ley 58 de Cooperación de la Ciudad y Puerto de Acapulco published in April 2 1952 Periódico Oficial del Estado de Guerrero. Their main argument was that they had not been duly noticed and that the Departamento de Cooperación had been overstepping federal and local faculties turning the entire cooperaciones into a confusing system. The Supreme Court Justice admitted the *amparo* and initiated a complicated legal resolution until the Junta eventually won. But the fundamental

problem of collecting revenues for expensive public works remained. One of Acapulco's mayors would lament later that there were no tourist taxes or city sales taxes and that his city government did not have the power to levy such taxes on Acapulco's affluent transient population.<sup>473</sup>

The second and more serious crisis was provoked by Acapulco's old landed merchants class. Unwittingly, they challenged an entire order exclusively based on amassing capital through the redevelopment of old lands, most of which used to belong to ejidos and merchants, then based on selling redeveloped land as private property to growing markets in Mexico City. These markets were busy with fiduciaries for foreigners and national bidders who sought to rent or buy summer and beach houses in Acapulco.

Ejidatarios had been the main challengers of Acapulco's new order. But the JFMM had managed to weather the storm of discontent over the expropriation of ejidal lands and the displacement of large groups of ejidatarios in Acapulco. Writs or *amparos* protecting ejidatarios in the late 1940s and early 1950s quickly appeared after the Alemanista expropriations of ejidal lands, but most if not all these legal challenges had failed to prosper. Ultimately, social protest was subdued through a mixture of repression, negotiation, and reparation; and the end result was a situation temporarily settled in favor of boosters and the JFMM.

Everyone, however, had completely forgotten about an even older Acapulco. Most ejidatarios, after all, were relatively new actors whose ejidal lands had been formed in the upheavals of Cárdenas's expropriations of small haciendas and old merchant plots of land. Yet

---

<sup>473</sup> Federico Uribe Jasso, Secretario General de la JFMM-Acapulco to the SCJN, 13 Dec, 1958 AGN, Secretaría del Patrimonio, JFMM-Acapulco Box 6, Exp. 13 y 14, Amparo 2737/59, Tribunal Fiscal de la Federación, Braulio Arvide and Juventina Aldeco de Arvide, Dec 13, 1958. Cuentas números 936 and 937. The announcement of the distribution of water system in the Fraccionamiento Las Playas and the cooperaciones published in *La Verdad* and el Diario Oficial de Guerrero 15 and 19 September 1954. They eventually won, see the case in exp 14, amparo no 2694-58 Saturnino de Aguero Aguirre to Arq. Alberto Le Duc M Presidente de la Junta federal de Mejoras Materiales, Palacio federal Acapulco 10 June 1959; The mayor was martin Heredia Merckley, see "Sea of Sorrows Besets Fun City of Acapulco." *Los Angeles Times (1923-Current File)*, 2 October, 1967.

Acapulco of old had completely changed by the late 1950s, and merchants had completely faded out of focus, completely ignored by boosters and federal officials. They were all lumped together into the ambiguous category of “locals” or “acapulqueños,” and for this reason no one paid attention anymore to this distinctive social group of merchants which had shaded into the rest of Acapulco’s resident population. This group in, composed of both Mexicans and foreigners, used to be internally stratified in the nineteenth century and early twentieth, when they formed a social order with clear distinctions among their members. Their opposing political and economic agendas had led them to violent clashes in the 1920s. Yet the wave of land grabbers and parvenus, full of dollars and political clout, had completely changed everything: they founded their business in the tourism industry, eventually displacing Acapulco’s local elite. Merchants eventually turned into small hoteliers, managers, shopkeepers, and artisans. Socioeconomically speaking, by the late 1950s, merchants, retailers, artisans, and stevedores (Acapulco’s erstwhile local elite) had been compressed into a single class of small business owners living under duress in the old center of the port; displaced to the margins of Acapulco’s big business and politics. They had become indistinguishable in the eyes of federal boosters and a rising coterie of national and international businessmen in the port.

The Fernández brothers reappeared in this situation. They represented an old world that seemed to have long since vanished. The Spanish-Mexican merchants had been languishing in obscurity for a couple of decades. Having belonged to the relatively powerful group of small-time merchants and retailers whose business was in the port’s main trading firms, they had all suffered a fate as ill-starred as that of the thousands of ejidatarios and early rural migrants who lost their small plots of land and ejidos in the mid 1940s. As explored in Chapter 6, most merchants had lost their property long before ejidatarios: some like the Escuderos, already going through mounting financial pressures, fell victim to many parvenus like Almazán and Azcárraga and other powerful

veterans of the Revolution who snatched their property in the 1930s. To make matters worse, by the 1930s, any attempt to retrieve their lands was stymied by Cárdenas's agrarian reforms and land expropriation in favor of many ejidatarios. The Escuderos, as the previous chapter shows were one of the great losers of the Revolution. Their property and the family were completely erased from the map. Others, like the Uruñuela families had been crippled by the 1929 crash and had quickly lost their hacienda to the expropriation of Cárdenas's agrarian reforms; and still others, like some members of the Alzuyetas also withered away in court cases and merchant tribunals as they saw their fortunes collapsing. Most of these Spanish merchant families went bankrupt in the 1930s, especially after the 1929 crash, and vanished from the port. After the Revolution, economic depression and agrarian reform had dealt a final blow to Acapulco's merchant class.

Another group like the Fernández brothers, who would reappear to challenge the Junta's finances, had persevered under duress the last three decades, surviving the transition of Acapulco from port to resort to coastal city. After going bankrupt in the 1940s, when their investment in textile industries for a wartime economy failed, they founded small businesses and hotels and joined forces with their old adversaries, artisans and small shopkeepers, whose business were also constantly under threat by the construction of new roads and infrastructural developments carried out by the JFMM in the 1940s. The Link, Muñúzuriz, Fernández, and Sutter families already had some experience in running small hotels that had catered many of the steamship passengers. In the 1950s and 1960s, they became part of the hotel industry that catered the less affluent tourists. Other like the Sutters joined municipal politics and became part of the local political elite, becoming completely overpowered by federal politicians and agencies and by Guerrero's politicians serving in national politics. But all of these actors, even though they still played an important role in local affairs, had been completely forgotten, overlooked by major developers and Acapulco's new political and economic elite.

Unaware of this social group in Acapulco, businessmen and officials in the JFMM kept building new *fraccionamientos*, selling redeveloped land (cheaply bought in the form of meager compensations to ejidatarios) and building beach-house complexes at high property market values to middle-class professionals and newcomers from Mexico City and Guadalajara, but also to Americans, from many corners of the United States, in the form of rents and fiduciaries which gave the property title to Mexican national owners, but in reality through the fiduciary was owned by foreigners. Industrialists, engineers, architects, businessmen, and their families kept buying property from the JFMM and enjoying the privilege of owning a beach house in Acapulco.

El Jardín was one of vast extensions of land that contained several *fraccionamientos*, now inhabited by dozens of private property owners. One of these *fraccionamientos* was called “Balcones al Mar.” A close look into some of the list of buyers and owners of plots of land and houses reveals not only the network of interests created by the JFMM, but also the social composition of Mexico’s the post-revolutionary bourgeoisie—or at least a splinter group—who profited from the Junta’s real estate development in Acapulco. It also shows how high the stakes were. Many owners of the tracts of beachfront property and plots of land on cliffs, some of which had already been developed into houses, were part of the network of the powerful ex-president of the Junta Federal de Mejoras Materiales, Melchor Perusquía. A member of his family Ernesto Perusquía owned some property there. Industrialists had also bought some tracts of land, like David Vargas Basauri, secretary and member of the new council of El Consejo Nacional de Concesionarios Ford, Lincoln and Mercury, A. C, of which Melchor Perusquía was the treasurer.<sup>474</sup> Many companies had bought property too, some as different as the Editorial Grijalbo, the Fraccionadors y Constructora Costa Brava, or the Embotelladora de Acapulco. The local elite

---

<sup>474</sup> *El Automóvil Mexicano*, v 11, 1958, p.40. Integrantes del Nuevo Consejo Nacional de Concesionarios Ford, Lincoln y Mercury, A. C, para el presente periodo, quedó integrado en la siguiente forma: Presidente, señor Pablo Bush, Jr.; Vicepresidente, señor Juan Osorio López; Secretario, señor David Vargas Basauri; Tesorero, señor Melchor Perusquía, Jr.

of Guerrero and Acapulco who had been able to marry or join forces with the rising post-revolutionary bourgeoisie had also invested in the fraccionamiento, “Balcones al Mar.” Colonel Enrique Pasta Tagliabue (who was honorary consul of Italy in Acapulco and who had married Carmen Muñúzuri de Pasta, a member of the Spanish merchants in Acapulco.<sup>475</sup> Rufo Figueroa, from the powerful Figueroa family of northern Guerrero, originally maderistas who were now investing the bus industry of Guerrero and the south of Mexico; the architect Jorge Alducín Sisniega Secretary of Public Works in Acapulco. The amount of investment varied significantly: from Humberto San Millán, a member of the successful Spanish merchant families in Acapulco, who paid around 8,000 pesos for one plot of land to Soledad “Cholita” González de Ayala González, the powerful woman from San Pedro Coahuila and well-respected ex-secretaria particular of Alvaro Obregón and then Calles, who bought ten tracts of land for nearly 700,000 pesos. She had allegedly transcribed Madero’s *La sucesión presidencial* in 1910, later becoming a close friend of the Calles family by marrying Doctor Abraham Ayala González, Secretario de Salubridad and personal doctor of Calles. This was a section of the revolutionary “aristocracy” par excellence, a group with its iconic figures and cherished heroes and protégés like “Cholita” González de Ayala González, who had now bought 10 tracts of land for over half a million pesos.<sup>476</sup>

The stakes in El Jardín were indeed very high. It involved many high-rolling and symbolically important investors like this *fraccionamiento* “Balcones al Mar” among many in El Jardín. Though this vast extension of land was by no means the most affluent area of Acapulco

---

<sup>475</sup> DOF, 06/08/1964. Decreto que concede permiso al C. Enrique Pasta Tagliabue, para desempeñar el cargo de Agente Consular de la Embajada Italiana en Acapulco, Gro.

<sup>476</sup> AGN, Secretaría del Patrimonio, JFMM-Acapulco, Box 6, Exp. 75 Amparo en Revisión Num. 4819/48- Hermanos Fernández y Cía (“El Jardín”), list of property holders and the amount they paid for each lot, see “Fraccionamiento Balcones al Mar;” “Soledad González: una mujer en el torbellino de la revolución,” <http://www.wikimexico.com/articulo/soledad-gonzalez-una-mujer-en-el-torbellino-de-la-revolucion>, Consulted 12 April 2018.

compared to Las Playas or Pichilingue, it was one of those areas owned by the JFMM and not by private land companies. These lands were also one of the most important for the Junta and one of the greatest sources of revenue for the JFMM. The value of land of El Jardín altogether amounted to \$115, million pesos, while the entire patrimony of the Junta consisted of \$160, 409, 852.72 in a mixture of cooperaciones and land ownership.<sup>477</sup>

The complexity of the situation was overwhelming for the Junta. Initial legal and financial conditions (a shaky framework for property rights and capital) in the context of large amounts of private investment and capital flowing through the city, added to the volatility of Acapulco's tourist economy after the shock of the Cuban Revolution— it was all too much for the Junta Federal to handle singlehandedly. Any action as small as it may have been, like exhorting a legal authority to act through an *amparo*, had the potential to reverberate across the finances of the entire city, with amplifying effects leading to unforeseen directions for urban growth in Acapulco.

This insignificant action that turned the JFMM upside down, hence the direction of urban development in Acapulco, came from the hapless descendants of the Spanish Fernandez brothers. One of them was still alive, and most likely he was fully aware that it was a futile, if not hopeless, mission to try to save their old property and retrieve their lands of Hacienda Ejido Viejo (where El Jardín was being developed into all of these *fraccionamiento*), let alone to recover their old powerful status within the port's society. Any attempt to question the legal basis of Acapulco's development went beyond their capacity, influence, diminished political clout, and new status as small business owners in the port. The Fernández brothers, aware of their new place within the

---

<sup>477</sup> AGN, Secretaría del Patrimonio, JFMM-Acapulco, Box 6, Exp. 75 Amparo en Revisión Num. 4819/48- Hermanos Fernández y Cía (“El Jardín”) “la parte preponderante en valor del activo de la JFMM está integrada por derechos de cooperación al cobro y terrenos con un valor conjunto de \$201, 061,12.77. Año 1960. Arquitecto Alberto le Duc, Presidente de la JFMM al Secretario del Patrimonio Nacional, Acapulco, Guerrero, 19 de mayo de 1960, Para mayo de 1958 “se observa una sólida posición financiera, cuyo patrimonio neto asciende en el momento citado a la suma de \$160, 409, 852.72 que es una cifra de consideración tratándose de una entidad del gobierno federal. La relación de activo a pasivo es de 2.35 “y representa una proporción excelente inclusive en empresas comerciales. Sin embargo, la parte preponderante en valor del activo de la JFMM está integrada por derechos de cooperación al cobro y terrenos con un valor conjunto de \$201, 061,12.77.”

port, on the margins of Acapulco's boom, perhaps sought some small reparation to invest in their small business. They timidly introduced a legal dispute against the JFMM, and crafted an *amparo* against Cárdenas's expropriation in 1937, declaring that they were still the legitimate owners of those lands.

In their request for *amparo*, the Fernández brothers argued that there had been a violation of their constitutional guarantees: the right to a hearing and due process. They also questioned the legality of the entire process since, they argued, their right to legally contest the expropriation had not been guaranteed. Additionally, they questioned the very legal basis of the expropriation, arguing that public utility had not been the real reason driving the expropriation in the first place. The legal challenge was completely unexpected. So obscure were the Fernandez brothers that the Junta federal had to craft a full investigation into their firm and the extinct company in order to understand where the legal challenge was coming from.<sup>478</sup>

The legal action, seemingly inconsequential and risking to get lost together with the hundreds of *amparos* that had been ignored over the years, nevertheless, reverberated in unexpected ways. Small-time merchants and old property owners found two unlikely allies. Mexico's Supreme Court and a political and social movement emanated from Acapulco's municipal presidency, which eventually brought the JFMM to heel. As a result, the federal agency had to weather a legal storm over its property and finances that threatened to wreck havoc in the tourist city, erasing the trail of public works based on the creation and development of *fraccionamientos*, a process that had kept going now for nearly two decades. The unexpected storm created by the Fernández family would eventually settle in the early 1960s, completely

---

<sup>478</sup> AGN, Secretaría del Patrimonio, JFMM-Acapulco, Exp. 75 Amparo en Revisión Num. 4819/48- Hermanos Fernández y Cía (“El Jardín”). “en su demanda de amparo alegaron la violación de las garantías constitucionales de audiencia, procesalidad y legalidad porque, afirmaron, no se les dio oportunidad de hacer valer su derecho a obtener la reversión de los terrenos de que se trata.”

transforming the *modus operandi* of the Junta and changing the direction of development of the city.

The Supreme Court admitted the *amparo* and ruled in favor of the Fernández brothers, declared void the expropriation decree of El Jardín, and forced the Junta Federal to review not only the entire process of expropriation but also its funding program. One of the “new professionals,” the architect Alberto le Duc, noted to the Secretario del Patrimonio that “subsiste la necesidad de disponer de esas tierras...en los ingresos normales de esta Junta no le permiten realizar con la premura que las necesidades del puerto de Acapulco exigen, las obras de urbanización, mejoramiento y embellecimiento del puerto, que demandan una inversión anual superior a veinte millones de pesos como promedio.”<sup>479</sup> The situation was critical, since the redeveloped plots in the ejido, “valuado en 115 millones de pesos que constituyen... base fundamental de su patrimonio y, por ende, de su crédito.” Moreover, many powerful property holders, like the Perusquía family or González de Aayala González, had been left suspended in the air as complaints and suits began to come in. Meanwhile, squatters began invading some undeveloped lands in the ejido. The situation was indeed critical and, by the day, spiralling out of control.

It is then that a team of lawyers stepped in and a commission led by the lawyer José López Portillo was created in the late 1950s. The lawyer put it bluntly:<sup>480</sup>

Se considera indispensable resolver el problema. Dos son las posibles soluciones: 1<sup>a</sup> Instaurar el procedimiento administrativo ordenado por la Corte, y, dentro de él, como es posible, resolver favorablemente a los interesados legítimos de la federación; 2<sup>a</sup> Transar con la compañía quejosa. (“Aún cuando este último camino es el más rápido y el que en forma específica beneficiaría más a la situación financiera de la Junta, pues le permitiría operar su patrimonio, debe destacarse que el precedente que pudiera sentarse sería de incalculable trascendencia respecto de otros bienes que estén o pudieran estar en condiciones equivalentes. Por esta razón se recomienda atacar el problema en su fondo y resolverlo de una vez por todas

---

<sup>479</sup> AGN, Secretaría del Patrimonio, JFMM-Acapulco, Box, 6, exp. 75, Arquitecto Alberto le Duc, President of the JFMM to Secretario del Patrimonio Nacional, Acapulco, Guerrero, 19 May 1960.

<sup>480</sup> AGN, Secretaría del Patrimonio, JFMM-Acapulco, box 6, Exp. 75 Amparo en Revisión Num. 4819/48- Hermanos Fernández y Cía (“El Jardín”) Memorandum Sobre la necesidad de regularizar la situación de los terrenos expropiados al Ejido El Jardín, in Acapulco, Gro., como una de las Bases Fundamentales de la Consolidación de la Situación Financiera de la JFMM de Acapulco, México, abril 1959, por la Comisión José López Portillo

They decided headlong to solve the case—and they lost. The legal argument against their case was too powerful and had the full backing of the Supreme Court. The agrarian code, the court ruled, did not authorize expropriations of ejidal lands for carrying out financial plans in order to shoulder the costs of public works at ports improvements in tourist areas. But more importantly, the JFMM had no capacity to constitute its own patrimony as established in the 1948 decree. Ultimately, El Jardín became part of the Banco Nacional Hipotecario, Urbano y de Obras Públicas; a fideicomiso was created and many other lands were taken away from the Junta Federal. Dozens of property owners were abandoned to their own fate and land invasions spread on those lands. It was a severe blow to the Junta's finances from which it took time to recover.<sup>481</sup>

Acapulco's merchants had appeared unexpectedly, turning a simple *amparo* into a federal legal storm that would only be settled until the late 1960s. By setting off recurrent legal disputes, they completely redefined the JFMM's federal plan of public finance. Henceforth, it became impossible for the Junta Federal to redevelop lands and sell them to private bidders in order to accumulate capital and give financial liquidity and structure to infrastructure development, public works, and Acapulco Plano Regulador. The case of the ejido El Jardín and the *amparo* promoted by the Spanish merchants is particularly telling since it not only reflects the unexpected consequences of old land conflicts generated in the region by agrarian reformers, ejidatarios, land developers, merchants, and rural migrants from the 1920s to the 1960s, as explored in-depth in the

---

<sup>481</sup> Caja 6 JFMM, Box 6, Image 10. Eventually, the Junta lost the case and El Jardín became part of the Banco Nacional Hipotecario, Urbano y de Obras Públicas Resolución Presidencial No 1235, 10 de octubre 1960, publicado en el DOF el 17 de octubre de 1960. (memorandum imagen 18); also box 17, exp. 80/3370 Ver Caja 17, exp. 80/3370 en especial el memorándum que describe el proyecto de consolidación del pasivo de la JFMM que se presenta a la Comisión de Inversiones de la Nacional Financiera, S.A. y del Banco Nacional Hipotecario, Urbano y de Obras Públicas. Para mayo de 1958 “se observa una sólida posición financiera, cuyo patrimonio neto asciende en el momento citado a la suma de \$160, 409, 852.72 que es una cifra de consideración tratándose de una entidad del gobierno federal. La relación de activo a pasivo es de 2.35 “y representa una proporción excelente inclusive en empresas comerciales. Sin embargo, la parte preponderante en valor del activo de la JFMM está integrada por derechos de cooperación al cobro y terrenos con un valor conjunto de \$201, 061,12.77 que no representa posibilidad inmediata para cubrir el pasivo exigible, que, por otra parte, es realmente reducido en relación con el monto de las propiedades, como puede observarse en el cuadro siguiente. A. Pasivo exigible \$21, 694, 597.44. B. Pasivo con vencimiento no mayor de un año (Banco Nacional Hipotecario y Nacional Financiera).

previous and following chapters, but most importantly, it also reveals that the JFMM's financial plan was actively stirring this already conflictive situation and, unintentionally, bringing old actors to the surface who, in their last attempt to save their lost status, completely redefined the direction and financial structure of the city.

The Junta Federal, having stumbled upon old Acapulco, *amparos*, and merchants unexpectedly lost the legal battle and entered a deep financial crisis in the early 1960s. The crisis opened the door to new professionals, architects, engineers, and lawyers, like Alberto Le Duc and José López Portillo, who took over the affairs of the JFMM and began to design a new urban, legal, and financial plan as the next section will explore. But the crisis also opened the door to big capital and big business, to “magicians of money” like Carlos Trouyet who began to lend huge amounts of money to the Junta Federal. The Casa Trouyet S.A., in 1957 and 1958, lent the total sum of \$ 4,200,000.00 in installments of six to seven hundred thousand pesos every six months. The money was destined to repaving the Avenida Costera Miguel Alemán and the construction of the Gran Via Tropical, the latter one connecting the Península de las Playas. Trouyet was in the process of expanding his hotel business in Acapulco and lending money to the Junta Federal would naturally bring benefits to his business. The Junta, however, given the financial crisis failed to repay Trouyet, prompting the government to step in and pay more than half of the total sum on behalf of the Junta; “por el acuerdo del señor presidente de la república se autoriza una ampliación por 2,500,000 a la JFMM Acapulco para cubrir los adeudos amparados por pagarés de la Casa Trouyet”<sup>482</sup>

Inadvertently, the crisis opened a window of opportunity for the involvement of moguls, fiduciaries, big banks, airlines, transnational hotel companies, and tycoons and veritable

---

<sup>482</sup> AGN, Secretaría del Patrimonio, JFMM-Acapulco, Box 15, Exp 71 “Casa Trouyet, S.A.” Créditos, 1958; see letters Raúl Salinas Lozano to Antonio Carrillo Flores Secretaría de Hacienda y Crédito Público, 12 July, 1958; and President of the Junta Federal de Mejoras Materiales Acapulco to Secretario de Hacienda y Crédito Publico Antonio Carrillo Flores, 5 March 1958.

“magicians of money” like Carlos Trouyet, Emilio Azcárraga Milmo, Conrad Hilton, Howard Hughes, J. Paul Getty who brought enormous flows of private capital into the city, some like Trouyet into the JFMM’s coffers, others solely into land development companies and hotel business, and into the city in general. This influx of capital, over time, created tensions and conflicts that lurked menacingly at the fringes of Acapulco’s urban development until ejidatarios, generals, merchants, and the municipality in the early 1960s clashed directly with big business, hotel chains, and fraccionadoras. The legal storm set off by merchants was spun further by the wave of municipal expropriations carried out by Jorge Joseph Piedra against many rich landowners and fraccionadoras, many of them powerful politicians from the Alemán and Ávila Camacho years, whose property had encroached on the lands of the green agricultural belts in Puerto Marqués created by the Regional Planning Commission in the 1951.<sup>483</sup>

What were the consequences of this financial, political, and legal crisis in the late 1950s and early 1960s? Acapulco of old resurfaced when merchants interfered with the design of the modernist tourist city, resulting in a legal battle that opened the door wide open to big business, new professionals, and private capital holders who invested and channeled unprecedented amounts into the city. Amidst a rush to the coast spurred by mass tourism, they ultimately turned Acapulco into a boomtown at the edge of the Pacific. Old-time boosters would eventually be displaced; old Acapulco and merchants would disappear along the way; this time, never to return again.

#### IV

#### **The Boomtown and the Rush to the Coast**

*Air Travel, Global Tourism Markets, and the Cuban Revolution, 1955-c.1970*

---

<sup>483</sup> Among them was the widow of Ávila Camacho, Antonio Ortiz Mena, and Antonio Carrillo Flores, see notes and newspaper clipping in AGN, Secretaría del Patrimonio, JFMM-Acapulco, box 15, exp 74, Plano Regulador, “David contra Goliat. Joseph-Influyentes. La expropiación de los terrenos de Puerto Marqués enciende pasiones entre poseedores y desposeídos,” *La Tribuna*, 7 July 1960.

Revolution struck Cuba. Fulgencio Batista, unable to contain the unfolding insurrection, was quickly deposed in 1959 by Fidel Castro as his revolutionary forces quickly marched in on the capital. As a result, la Havana was abruptly closed off to the world of American tourism. Within a few years, massive flows of visitors, capital, bankers, hoteliers, investors all fled the Caribbean country as Castro's Revolution became radicalized and brought the Cold War closer to Latin America as never before since the beginning of the global conflict. Revolution quickly gave way to brinkmanship in the Caribbean, sending, in quick short-circuits, unpredictable jolts across the entire order of international tourism circuits, particularly those that had wired North America, the Caribbean, and the Pacific Coast in the first half of the twentieth century.

The series of local and global shocks combined to deeply transform Acapulco: the local shock, the previously explored financial, legal, and political crisis in Acapulco; and the global shock, the revolution in air travel and the 1958 Cuban Revolution that profoundly shaped global tourism markets. As a result, mass tourism and big business and capital began to transform the city profoundly. Moreover, the onset of the Jet Age and the 1955 the road to Mexico City was significantly improved, bringing Acapulco as closer as never before to massive markets in North America and Mexico's heartland.

In the world of postwar North American tourism, no other story is more illustrative of the far-reaching transformations set off by the Cuban Revolution than the story of Colonel Frank Brandstetter. Born, allegedly, to Austrian-Hungarian nobility in 1912, he soon migrated to the United States, beginning to work at the age of sixteen at different immigrant factory jobs, then in restaurants and hotels, until he enlisted in the army in 1940. According to his biographers, "his background, knowledge of customs, traditions and fluency with Hungarian, Romanian, Austrian, Czech and German languages made him a perfect choice for an intelligence career." He was someone who eventually became "Our Man in Acapulco." Before then, however, he forged his

military career in the European front during the Second World War. As a civilian, once the war had ended and returned home, Brandstetter was lured into the business world of tourism in the Caribbean, serving as president of the Continental Restaurants Corporation (1951-1955) and as a hotel executive at the Sans Souci Hotel in Jamaica (1955-1957), then as general hotel manager at the recently built Havana Hilton (1958-1959). There, at the Hilton, he had just begun to get into the rhythm of things as manager of such a popular hotel in Havana when, only eight months later, the Caribbean country was jolted out of its lethargy by popular insurrection. The Hilton kept running, business as usual, even as revolutionary forces closed in on Havana. Threatened and cornered in the capital, the dictator began to lash out, sparking off retaliatory impulses and rumors that American buildings would be singled out and targeted by angry crowds seeking to destroy iconic American symbols, like the Hilton Hotel; symbols representing what Victoria de Grazia referred to as the American “Market Empire,” an empire whose actions had been translated into a mixture of gunboats, consumption, advertisement, and dollar diplomacy in the Caribbean.

Batista’s dictatorship crumbled down and in the ensuing chaos, when Castro’s forces took Havana, a frantic scene quickly unfolded inside the Hilton’s main dining hall as Brandstetter tried to negotiate the evacuation of large groups of American visitors, those who were still stranded in Havana, and revolutionary forces who marched into the city and into the recently inaugurated hotel. Eventually, the massive dining hall became, unwittingly, the set of one of the many scenes of the Cuban Revolution, famous for their surreal nature. The Hilton was occupied by the scruffy revolutionary forces sharing the plush dining hall and lobby with hundreds of American visitors who all of sudden had turned into evacuees. Eventually, following hasty negotiations with the American Embassy, Colonel Brandstetter abandoned the hotel with hundreds of evacuees, hastily

fleeing Havana while revolutionary forces sallied forth and took the rest of the capital and the country.<sup>484</sup>

Brandstetter would land soon in Acapulco, becoming an influential businessman and hotelier. The series of restructurings from small hotel to new international hotel chains is illuminated by Brandstetter who reveals this transformation in his biography and papers, when he became manager of Las Brisas and weaved an extended network of national and international elites both living and sojourning in the port. Once settled in Acapulco, Bandstetter, having been recommended by Conrad Hilton to manage the hotel in Acapulco, would soon meet Carlos Trouyet and his vast network of national and international bankers and powerbrokers. Juan March Ordinas was one of them. Originally from Spain, March, who fully supported the military rebellion against the Republic in 1936, had become a highly influential businessmen and banker since Franco's Nationalist victory in 1939. Soon he married into the wealth of a family from San Francisco, an act of communion with high business which opened the door to the financial and banking world of the United States, where he met Amadeo Peter Giannini, the founder of the Bank of America. Using the resources of this vast wealth, March quickly developed a series of bungalows until the hillsides and boulder-strewn slopes connecting Puerto Marqués to the Bay of Santa Lucía were

---

<sup>484</sup> The account is based on his biography Rodney P. Carlisle and Dominic J. Monetta, *Brandy, Our Man in Acapulco: The Life and Times of Colonel Frank M. Brandstetter* (University of North Texas Press, 1999), which is based on sources from Frank M. Brandstetter Papers, University of North Texas Special Collections. I intend to carry out research in these special collections. For information on the collection, see "Collection of materials relating to Frank M. Brandstetter, including documents from his military career and from his time as a hotelier. Orders, printed material, literary productions, maps, and photographic material relating to Colonel Frank M. Brandstetter's activities as an officer in the United States Army during World War II in Europe with the Field Interrogation Department (1943-1944) and with General Matthew B. Ridgway's staff (1944-1945). Also included are Brandstetter's correspondence, financial documents, printed material, literary productions, scrapbooks, and photographs relating to his activities as President of Continental Restaurants Corporation (1951-1955) and as a hotel manager/executive at the Sans Souci Hotel in Jamaica (1955-1957), the Havana Hilton (1958-1959), the Las Brisas Hilton and the Acapulco Hilton (1959-1963), and the Las Brisas Hotel (1964-1976). Brandstetter's activities as general manager of Seagrams de Mexico (1976-1977) and director of Diplomatic and International Account Sales with Seagrams Overseas Sales Company (1978-1979) are detailed in printed material, literary productions, scrapbooks, and photographic material. Also included are scrapbooks, maps, and photographs of Brandstetter's travels in Africa, Europe, Mexico, China, and Russia (1960s-1990s)."

See, <http://findingaids.library.unt.edu/?p=collections/findingaid&id=82#.WT721BPyvwc>.

joined by many small cottages. The director of Pemex had bought one of these cottages, private getaways, owned by an influential group, which soon became infamous for their publicity as the press began to trace their whereabouts, calling them “Ali Baba and his Forty Thieves.” Mired in debt and corruption scandals, the colony soon became insolvent and was bought by Carlos Trouyet who hired Brandstetter to manage the place, modernize it and turn into a hotel. Brandstetter, seasoned in the hotel and tourism business, turned the Las Brisas hotel from a few undeveloped bungalows into Las Brisas Hilton. In the words of Brandstetter’s biographer: “[Brandstetter] soon was able to take the first construction steps that would change Las Brisas from its status as an obscure group of *casitas* for the girlfriends of ‘Ali Baba’s Forty Thieves’ to the number one resort hotel” in the world major resort towns at the time. With this resounding success in his pocket, Brandstetter became the manager of Acapulco Hilton (1959-1963) and the Las Brisas Hotel (1964-1976).<sup>485</sup>

The unpredictable shock of the Cuban Revolution had redirected, chaotically, thousands of tourists to Acapulco, creating a full circuit of movement between Acapulco— and Mexico’s increasingly developed Pacific littoral— and the massive urban markets in the Mexican heartland as well as those in the Caribbean and the United States. The result was a veritable rush to the coast. [See Figure 6 below] Tourism flows grew drastically in the 1960s: while in 1954 the number of tourists arriving in the port was 92, 694, by 1960, the number had jumped to 458, 200. But by 1972 the number had skyrocketed to 1.5 million tourists flowing into a city whose number of inhabitants was also growing, although not nearly as fast as its transient population. During these decades it is possible to see a professionalization, a deliberate effort to hone the skills to analyze data. There were different ways to measure tourism flows: occupancy and counts from: different entry points. There were also American and Mexican statistics. Yet there is a black box in the information. The

---

<sup>485</sup> Monetta, Brandy, Our Man in Acapulco, pp.163-178.

rush to the coast probably came in larger waves since most of the official numbers tracing tourist flows into Acapulco do not include summer houses or rentals of villas, bungalows, and apartments, a type of transient occupancy that blurred the line between the permanent and temporary populations in the city. Hence the number of people visiting the port was even larger, but it is hard to know.<sup>486</sup>

**Figure 6: Tourism Growth in Acapulco and Mexico, 1958-1971**

Year	International Arrivals	Tourism receipts (millions of US Dollars)	Acapulco	International tourist	National Tourists	Percentage International	Percentage National
1958	697,000	134					
1959	746,000	145					
1960	761,000	139	308,200	139,900	168,300	45.39	54.61
1961	803,000	142	329,400	153,300	176,100	46.54	53.46
1962	941,000	161	332,400	153,300	179,100	46.12	53.88
1963	1,055,000	190	355,800	193,800	162,000	54.47	45.53
1964	1,210,000	215	458,200	227,900	230,300	49.74	50.26
1965	1,350,000	245	465,600	241,400	224,400	51.85	48.15
1966	1,499,000	268	578,300	339,700	238,600	58.74	41.26
1967	1,629,000	292	695,300	367,200	328,100	52.82	47.19
1968	1,879,000	337	782,400	406,500	375,900	51.96	48.04
1969	2,065,000	373	880,200	466,200	375,900	52.97	48.04
1970	2,250,000	415	993,800	526,800	467,000	53.01	46.99
1971			1,135,500	605,800	527,700	53.45	46.55

SOURCE: Michael Clancy. *Exporting Paradise: Tourism and Development in Mexico*. (New York: Pergamon, 2001). 44-5 [ SECTUR, *Estadísticas básicas de la actividad turística* (Mexico: SECTUR-Bancomer, 1992: 59, 100); IMF (Various Issues) Quoted from same source] INFRATUR, Banco de México, Booz Allen and Hamilton de México, S.A. de C. V. and Development Research Associates, México, 1972. Roger Joseph Bergeret Muñoz, Alejandro Quintero León, Mónica Corazón Gordillo Escalante, “Complexity of Acapulco: Evolution as a Tourist Destination,” *Journal of Intercultural Management* Vol. 9, No. 3, September 2017, pp. 5–28.

<sup>486</sup> Juan Manuel Ramírez Saiz, *Turismo y medio ambiente: el caso de Acapulco* (México, D.F.: Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana. Teoría y Análisis, 1986), pp. 491-3; Erdmann Gormsen and Rüdiger Kreth, *El turismo como factor de desarrollo regional en México: informe preliminar sobre un programa de investigación* (Mainz, República Federal de Alemania: Geographisches Institut der Johannes Gutenberg Universität, 1977), p. 38; INFRATUR, 5 and 7. Ernesto Valenzuela Valdivieso and Atlántida Coll-Hurtado, “La construcción y evolución del espacio turístico de Acapulco (Méjico),” *Anales de Geografía de la Universidad Complutense* 30, no. 1 (July 2, 2010): 163–90,

Set against this unprecedented boom, the direction of the Plano Regulador changed in the year of 1960 and a cast of engineers and architects took over, wresting the power from old boosters and spearheading an aggressive attempt to incorporate the wave of migrants and tourists into the urban economy. They updated the plan in 1960 and quickened the process of professionalization of the tourist industry. This new generation of actors began to revolve around the Asociación de Ingenieros y Arquitectos de Acapulco and the Asociación de Hoteleros de Acapulco, which had links to their federal counterparts. Enrique Cervantes, Alberto Le Duc, Miguel Ricoy, and Manuel Orvañanos Maza, who continued the work initiated by Pani and Contreras, and Melchor Perusquía. Miguel Alemán served as the main articulator of these two groups.

The institutions of tourism were also changing. Boosters like Antonio Bermúdez began to reinvest in border towns and created PRONAF (Programa Nacional Fronterizo) and Antonio Enriquez Savignac, director of the Banco de México, began to invest in new developments along the coast that would be closely linked to the border. He described how “tourism to Mexico had been growing consistently and successfully to various destinations, especially to our Pacific Coast without any of the usual government planning, fiscal incentives or loans.” That is when Savignac and Bermúdez organized two federal agencies (INFRATUR and FOGATUR) that would later in 1974 become the FONATUR. Similar to what Pani had done almost two decades ago, Savignac and Bermúdez would travel back and forth along the Pacific coast and select sites for development; Ixtapa, Los Cabos, Huatulco, and Loreto emerged (Cancún would be the other site that was developed outside the Pacific).<sup>487</sup>

For Acapulco, the late 1950s and 1960s became the point of no return. If there ever was a point at which boosters could have saved the port to diversify Acapulco’s urban and economic

---

<sup>487</sup> For more information on this development see, Evan R Ward, “Finding Mexico’s Great Show Window,” in Alexis. McCrossen, *Land of Necessity: Consumer Culture in the United States-Mexico Borderlands* (Durham [N.C.]: Duke University Press, 2009). p. 207.

base, it would have certainly been before the Cuban Revolution and the Jet Age, when in the late 1940s and 1950s Moises de la Peña and other actors had persistently forewarned tourism developers of the dangers of creating an economy that was becoming overwhelmingly dependent on tourism. The Cuban Revolution was the tipping point; henceforward the port quickly rose as a boomtown of tourism that traded in services, moving in wild swings and unpredictable leaps that saw the city, along with its *imaginario*, in cycles, booming and busting. In the end, Acapulco found itself irreversibly tied to its “image economy” and to “los vaivenes e inestabilidad que son propios de todo centro turistico,” as de la Pena had eloquently put it in the 1940s.

This in turn attracted new airlines, all coinciding with an air revolution, the commercial use of Jet airplanes, that established direct routes between Acapulco and multiple points of departure in North America. In 1957, Aeronaves de México successfully concluded negotiations with the United States to operate commercial flights within North America: Mexico City–New York and Acapulco–Los Angeles routes were inaugurated. What started off timidly in 1934 with the construction of an airstrip and the landing of the first commercial flight in Acapulco, flights multiplied in 1957 with direct flights Mexico City-New York, Los Angeles-Acapulco, and especially after the Cuban Revolution. Then in 1954, the first airport was created in Acapulco in Plan de los Amates, with both the architect Carlos Lazo and Mario Pani deeply involved in their construction. Considered at the time one of the best airports in Mexico, the Acapulco airport was built as a response to the booming traffic between the United States and Acapulco.<sup>488</sup>

United Airlines, Aeronaves de México, and American airlines began to invest in the port; cruise ships began to dock at the port like the cruise line P&O Orient Liner, which began to make regular Pacific voyages, further developing tourist markets on the West Coast of North America

---

<sup>488</sup> Martha León, *Puertos del aire: historia, estadística y geografía de los aeropuertos y la aviación en México* (México, D.F.: Sector Comunicaciones y Transportes: Aeropuertos y Servicios Auxiliares, 1997). Pp.82-4

and the rest of the Pacific. Acapulco's markets stretched to the farthest of corners, even becoming a direct challenge and competitor to Waikiki's tourism markets in Hawaii. "With 102,000 inhabitants and 102 high-rise hotels catering tourists," noted a Hawaiian daily, "Acapulco's accommodations dwarf those of Waikiki. And this doesn't count guest houses, apartments, bungalows, and motels."<sup>489</sup>

**Figure 7: Hotel Development in Acapulco, 1960-1971**  
**(Number of rooms per hotel category: I being the most expensive, V, the least)**

Year	I	II	III	IV	V	Total
1960	312	1,426	964	1,032	960	4,694
1961	315	1,426	968	1,184	1,076	4,969
1962	544	1,476	1,040	1,286	1,128	5,474
1963	640	1,491	1,125	1,370	1,189	5,825
1964	806	1,559	1,145	1,479	1,257	6,246
1965	806	1,569	1,234	1,566	1,336	6,511
1966	810	1,622	1,336	1,660	1,442	6,870
1967	1,181	1,643	1,615	1,842	1,554	7,464
1968	1,623	1,741	2,082	2,051	1,803	8,858
1969	1,828	1,812	2,228	2,144	1,860	9,667
1970	3,828	2,062	2,291	2,212	1,860	10,253
1971	3,805	2,136	2,351	2,227	1,860	12,379

SOURCE: Original source from INFRATUR, but the table was extracted from Francisco A. Gomezjara, *Bonapartismo y lucha campesina en la Costa Grande de Guerrero* (México, D.F.: Editorial Posada, 1979), p. 253.

Historian Paulina Martínez Figueroa has traced the deep restructurings and professionalization of the hotel industry in Mexico from the 1930s to the 1960s. She argues that with the onset of mass tourism, there was a shift from small hotels and inns to an explosion of chain hotels in the late 1960s and 1970s. This shift also was most evident in the formation of technical associations of engineers, architects, and tourism officials. Acapulco experienced this deep transformation of the hotel industry. The number of rooms in more affordable hotels for middle to low income sectors exploded in the 1960s [See Figure 7 above] But from the late 1960s

<sup>489</sup> William H. Miller, *P & O Orient Liners of the 1950s and 1960s* (Amberley Publishing Limited, 2014); John F. Fox, "Acapulco Real Challenge to Hawaii as Tourist Spa," *The Honolulu Advertiser*, 17 October, 1968.

onwards, the number of rooms in luxurious hotels for high-income visitors took off, most likely as a result of the development of large hotel chains during this period. Some scholars argue that “la consolidación de Acapulco como un importante destino de playa en el ámbito turístico, produjo cambios significativos tanto en la organización espacial del área turística como del control y manejo de algunos sectores de la actividad por parte de empresas especializadas.”<sup>490</sup>

The city, having turned to mass tourism as a source of revenue, began to cater to tourists coming from all walks of life and socioeconomic backgrounds, creating in turn a booming hotel industry that began to sprawl along the east side of the bay.<sup>491</sup> Until the late 1950’s, very few developments were seen east of the Fort of San Diego which had served as a bull ring, a city jail, and as army barracks during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, but then turned into a museum in the late 1940s. East of the bay, only Icacos and Hornos, since the 1930s, had been partially developed. But everything changed in the 1960’s, when a series of factors led to explosive urban, demographic, and economic growth: public works and the massive and continuous investment of the JFMM into Acapulco, the construction of the Costera, and the construction of a new airport southeast of the bay, near the Laguna Tres Palos and the onset of jet air service from the United States, all amounted to a sprawl of hotels. The Hotel Presidente and the Acapulco Hilton opened then near what is now Playa Condesa, New high-rise luxury hotels sprang up east of Parque Papagayo, where the Hotel Papagayo and former airport used to be, built on the lands of what used to be Almazan’s bungalows, which in turn had been built on the former lands of Irene Reguera,

---

<sup>490</sup> Ernesto Valenzuela Valdivieso and Atlántida Coll-Hurtado, “La construcción y evolución del espacio turístico de Acapulco (Méjico),” *Anales de Geografía de la Universidad Complutense* 30, no. 1 (July 2, 2010): 163–90.

<sup>491</sup> The hotel industry went through a series of restructurings from small hotel to new international chains. For an excellent work on this topic see, Paulina Martínez Figueroa, “Hoteles de la Ciudad de México: cultura, empresa y sociedad en un espacio moderno (1936-1968)” P.h.D diss (El Colegio de Méjico, 2015). See for other types of tourism the examples of federal bureaucrats AGN, Fondo Presidentes, ARC 1 Hotel Pensions de Acapulco para funcionarios federales. 548.1/290. For more on the development of the hotel industry see Sackett, “Fun in Acapulco?” and Gomezjara, *Bonapartismo y lucha campesina*, 253; for prices and lists of hotels in the 1940s see Moisés de la Pena, *Guerrero económico v. II*, 563-574.

and so on and so forth. Layer upon layer of transformations, Acapulco's bayside was changing beyond recognition.

## Conclusion

From here on, the last few remaining traces of a trading port and its merchant society collapsed and disappeared, never to return again. By then, no one harbored any illusion that the old port would return. Rather, with full force, the city of Acapulco and the system it created boomed. But the movement, rhythm, and behavior of this tourist system became highly unpredictable. In wild swings and unexpected leaps, the city and its markets grew and advanced erratically along the coast and into the hinterland. Carlos Contreras's urban plans, increasingly seen as obsolete by then, made less sense as capital flows and big transnational business rushed in and spurred massive urban growth, now sprawling with no shape or form as enormous hotel constructions and land invasions took over the direction of growth.

Once the port town had completely vanished, the city of Acapulco began to grow rapidly as air travel, new forms of communication, roads to the interior, and huge postwar urban markets in North America dissolved Acapulco's old coastal geography on the Pacific. Up until the late 1940s, this coastal geography—a coastal world initially created by the California Gold Rush and the transisthmian passage in Panama—had served, for nearly a century, as a lifeline to Acapulco in its long nineteenth-century transition from a transoceanic port to a coaling station and then to a port of call based on coasting trade. The geography of old maritime connections had tied Mexico's Pacific littoral and California tightly together with Central America and the North American West. But such maritime connections were becoming more and more tenuous as tourism and consumption markets were tied to the Mexican Heartland and Southern California. Hinging on these massive markets, coastal towns began to tap into Mexico City and Los Angeles and attract

visitors by taking advantage of new air routes, a frequent jet service, revamped roads, advertisement campaigns, creating new circuits of travel which transformed this littoral space. Since the 1920s, an emerging pattern of dwindling passenger traffic, was reinforced by the 1940s and 1950s with the expansion of highway networks within Mexico and between Mexico and the United States. The International Pacific Coastal Highway was completed in 1957. Increasing numbers of bus services and airlines made it cheaper, easier, and quicker to reach Mexico's Pacific ports by air and land than by water. But this was a global trend that made geographical proximity, by water, less important in the development of coastal cities as passenger air traffic came to replace water for non-commercial traffic.

Parenthetically, there is an entire side of the story which I have briefly touched upon, but that is crucial to the urban development of Acapulco. A new mosaic of property rights, created by the affluent sector of Mexico's post-revolutionary society, tenuously begins to appear when we recall the vignette of the Fernández brothers and the widow of Maximino Ávila Camacho as well as the stories of Irene Reguera, "Cholita" González de Ayala González and the rest of the ill-fated group of affluent property holders, old and new, who thrived and then lost in Acapulco's vortex of urban change. It is an underexplored dimension in the history of Acapulco's urban development, and of Mexico's in general, for that matter. Perhaps the most salient connection, regarding the shifting sands of property rights in this socioeconomic milieu, is that of Acapulco's residential area of Península Las Playas and El Pedregal in Mexico City, which I will briefly touch on in the last chapter to explore, however, a slightly different dimension: the cultural and architectural connections between these two residential areas. But an in-depth exploration of the nature of property regimes, taking as a case study these two areas, would certainly throw light on a largely underexplored yet crucial aspect of urban development in post-revolutionary Mexico. In sum, part of the story of legal disputes, land conflicts, litigations, and property displacements that emerged

from urban development in Acapulco inevitably involves this sector of society. Too many scholars have solely focused on the land disputes between ejidatarios and the popular sectors of the city as well as on their disputes with the more affluent sectors of Mexico's post-revolutionary bourgeoisie. But the changing nature of property rights, all of those breaks, disputes, continuities, and legal shifts within the economic institutions of this sector have been largely overlooked.

Despite continuing litigations, violent land conflicts, political rivalries, and legal disputes, the city kept fusing the imagination of rural migrants and tourists alike, of businessmen and urban planners, architects and politicians, speculators and engineers, writers, novelists, and advertisers, all of whom tied the city to the popular imagination of the enormous consumer markets of Mexico, the Caribbean, California and the rest of the United States.

Meanwhile, Acapulco's population kept growing. The city lured not only planners, boosters, and tourists but thousands of migrants, the focus of next chapter. In fact, Pani recalls how his group of architects, engineers, and regional planners presented their project on Acapulco's regional planning to President Adolfo Ruiz Cortines, who had been simultaneously listening to other local plans offering solutions to the lack of basic services to a growing population. When the president finished reading his plan, he calmly pointed Pani to a glaring omission: "Arquitecto, a ustedes se le olvidaron los pobres." It was then, Pani recalled, that there was "nothing to be done in Acapulco:" he noted remorsefully that in addition to creating a tourist city, with enormous advantages for economic growth, boosters could have also developed "an industrial zone and a splendid port, where the Nao de China [used to] arrive." Instead, the port was built in Lázaro Cárdenas and railroads never arrived; the city began to sprawl, "ahora ese Anfiteatro está lleno de paracaidistas. Han tenido que cambiarlos hacia el otro lado. Hicieron la Ciudad Renacimiento, sin

industria y sin nada. Ahora están haciendo el nuevo Acapulco. De manera que fue una lástima,” Pani noted nostalgically.<sup>492</sup>

Labor market pooling turned the growing city into a boomtown. The floating population of tourists soared in seasonal waves as visitors increasingly demanded more and more services. At the same time, infrastructural development continued to thrive along with the real estate business, and thousands of rural migrants, attracted by economic opportunities, kept arriving in Acapulco to work in the growing service sectors of the city. As a result, Acapulco experienced an unprecedented demographic boom that saw the mushrooming of squatter settlements leading to many land invasions. *Dependientistas* at the time called the city an “enclave economy;” a sprawling coastal town with an unsustainable economy, surrounded by a region that, as a result of age-old extractive institutions created by foreign capital, had ultimately failed to develop in tandem with the city.

This has been the dominant narrative so far, though it only tells part of the story. The nature of this boomtown is more complicated. Worth exploring are some fundamental contradictions in a city which would triple its population overnight with waves of seasonal tourism and migration. Acapulco represents the dilemmas of mass modern-day entrepôts. The city kept growing. But its tourist economy was also serving as a welfare city to its workers. It received a huge wave of migrants fleeing from many impoverished rural areas. A trickle that then turned into a wave of migration as political violence engulfed Guerrero; the result of a weakly integrated system of stunted cities with a booming rural demography. To keep growing, however, Acapulco needed the

---

<sup>492</sup> Sexta entrevista al arquitecto Mario Pani por Graciela de Garay, August 8, 1990 Archivo de la Palabra del Instituto de Investigaciones Dr. Jose Ma. Luis Mora, PHO 11/4-6, p. 11. Pani recalled this in the 1990s when the Zona Diamante and Ciudad Renacimiento in Acapulco had been created since the 1980s but forcefully developed in the 90s. “Entonces no había nada que hacer en Acapulco” “Se hizo el Puerto en Lázaro Cárdenas, en la desembocadura del Balsas, con unas dificultades tremendas porque ahí se azolva constantemente; el ferrocarril hubo que hacerlo como se pudiera, y lo turístico se acabó, cuando que acá hubiéramos podido hacer una cosa turística, con ventajas enormes, y además la zona industrial y un espléndido puerto, el puerto donde venía la Nao de China. Es decir, tendríamos toda la Cuenca del Pacífico donde estaba la ciudad más cercana a México. Se acabó...”

service industry of a sprawling city that ironically sold itself as a paradisiac escape from the ugliness of urban life. This and many other aspects of the history of Acapulco, as a coastal boomtown, will be the subject explored in the next two chapters.

## CHAPTER 9

### The Boomtown and the Informal City *Migration, the Working Poor, and Services in Acapulco, c.1940-1970*

The Santa Lucía Bay burst forth into a large and populous city; a melee of natural and built landscapes — “la uña blanca y vegetal de Acapulco incrustada en el dedo de alcohol y cemento y dólares,” noted Carlos Fuentes in his literary description of the small but growing city in the late 1950s.<sup>493</sup> This story focuses on the rise of an informal city of tourism on the hillsides of a bay. One must bear in mind that informality and the informal city was not new in Acapulco. The old port city and the coaling station had thrived on the backs of an underclass of poor migrants without rights, fishermen, vendors, and service workers who eked out their livelihoods from steamship traffic, outside the legal confines of the port’s political economy. During its existence as a seaport, the shore and the beach in Acapulco were perceived as the most dangerous and unhealthy areas. Yet they still served as shelter and home for this forgotten group. The bay’s hillsides, by contrast, served as home for wealthier residents and as shelter for merchants, passengers, visitors, and seafarers escaping the suffocating conditions on the beach.

However, the informal city that grew out of tourism was without any doubt new, and deep transformations flowed from this new form of informality. As a tourist city, Acapulco’s beach housed in different ways the poorest sectors of society and progressively became a site of leisure, transforming this older world of informality. The razing of palm huts in Puerto Marqués and the appearance of palm vendors on the beach is the clearest example. The bay’s hillsides, then, began serving as shelter for hundreds of migrants and poor service workers who slowly tied their lives, their work, and their homes to the rest of the city. The bay was ultimately transformed into a

---

<sup>493</sup> Carlos Fuentes, *La región más transparente* (México, D.F: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1973), p 332.

populous boomtown, and the informal city into one of Acapulco's essential features for the city and its economy.

The transformation of informality, from port to resort, was profound. It had all begun when the bay itself, when its natural features were ascribed more recreational and aesthetic roles related to water-gazing and non-commercial activities at the shore. The commercial port had disappeared completely, never to return again; henceforth, the bay was redefined by its geography of service industries. Acapulco's population, social geography, housing stock, economic structure, and service provision changed quickly, becoming a populous coastal city, unequal and spatially segregated, like far too many other cities in the Americas, seared by socioeconomic, topographic, and racial divides like Rio de Janeiro, Chicago, Detroit, New Orleans, Cartagena or Kingston; all of them cities that boomed and struggled, in a postwar era of affluence, to socialize and incorporate multiple races and migrants into their booming urban economies. This evident inequality has led many observers to characterize the "other face" of Acapulco in sensational terms, presenting the informal city as an underworld where the working and migrant poor languished in cooption, inaction, ignorance, and endless marginality. A most prominent writer of this story was Francisco Gómezjara, a Marxist sociologist who in the late 1970s carried out an in-depth, five-year study of Acapulco and the Costa Grande, Guerrero. The migrant poor, he reminded his readers of Acapulco's deepening inequality,<sup>494</sup>

[the migrant poor and the displaced] Trabajan en el Acapulco turístico, pero viven en el Acapulco misero y sofocante de las barriadas. Su vida es un tobogán continuo del cielo a la tierra, de la opulencia ajena sostenida por la más sofisticada tecnología al submundo del hambre y la ignorancia enmascarada por la sutil propaganda de la sociedad de consumo.

This narrative of the 1970s, informed by critical works of tourism as a form of development, most of them coming from dependency theory and Marxist studies, was then

---

<sup>494</sup> Francisco A. Gómezjara, *Bonapartismo y lucha campesina en la Costa Grande de Guerrero* (México, D.F.: Editorial Posada, 1979), p. 207.

reinforced by bestseller journalist books, like Ricardo Garibay's: "Madrigueras y solanas de mármol. Tugurios y estanques de cursilería millonaria...Acapulco la mugre y la luz encantadora."<sup>495</sup> Many American and Mexican scholars have nowadays rehashed this narrative, though in subtler ways; and yet, as Brodwyen Fischer notes in a critical essay pointing out an enduring "intellectual vacuum" regarding studies of shantytowns: many scholars have far too easily left the informal city to be "defined only by their most dramatic links to contemporary crises." Stories like Mike Davis's *Planet of Slums* reveal an "ongoing appeal of apocalyptic visions of shantytown life," and if we continue to reinforce these narratives, she conclusively asserts, "informal cities are unlikely to emerge any time soon from their state of perpetual conceptual emergency."<sup>496</sup>

In this chapter, I veer from such sensationalist and "apocalyptic visions," and present a more nuanced picture of the transformation of the informal city in Acapulco. As we continue to piece together the stories of service workers and the migrant poor in Acapulco, one cannot but notice an informal city of tourism tenuously beginning to appear, spreading out its ties to the rest of the city. This is a picture, constituting the heart of the argument, that takes into account the vibrant, dynamic nature of an informal tourist city, whose residents, by moving constantly, transformed the bay and tied the rest of Acapulco to their own urban spaces, work, services, and lives. Acapulco's boomtown, I show in this chapter, cannot be explained without the transformation and expansion of an informal economy at the heart of the tourist city, a city that came to be wholly dependent on the dynamic and vibrant world often referred to as the "other" Acapulco, poor and marginalized.

---

<sup>495</sup> Garibay, *Acapulco*, p. 8.

<sup>496</sup> Brodwyen Fischer, "A Century in the Present Tense: Crisis, Politics, and the Intellectual History of Brazil's Informal Cities" in Brodwyen Fischer, Bryan McCann, and Javier Auyero, *Cities from Scratch: Poverty and Informality in Urban Latin America* (Duke University Press, 2014), p. 50.

How and why did a small resort town turn into a teeming coastal city? In this chapter I adopt an urban and geographic approach to the tourism industry, an approach that takes into account the highly mobile nature of its actors, all the more to explain why a small town grew into a large city. But to understand this transition, a set of questions needs to be explored first. How did the informal city function, its cultures of association, political organization, and family networks, and what was its function within the rest of Acapulco? How did residents of the informal city and the economy move through Acapulco and its varied urban spaces? By moving through these spaces, how were the ties and connections between the city (its informal economy) and the rest of Acapulco established? How were different urban and regional spaces, the port, the resort, the waterfront, the hinterland, and the city in general connected to the informal city? What was the relationship between the residents of the informal city and the rest of the city?

Tourism is normally characterized as a low-wage service industry. For the most part, tourism drew from pools of low-skilled workers living in a region, disconnected and economically depressed, in the midst of Mexico's demographic boom, had access to an unlimited supply of cheap labor. As urban growth expanded in Acapulco, a localized economy was created and a thick network of services in the tourism industry, the hotel, restaurant, and construction industries, but also all different kinds of more precarious domestic and service work in houses, markets, beaches, and streets that began to draw from labor pools in regions farther and farther away from its immediate location, drawing from regions in ever widening concentric circles.

As will become evident from the following vignettes in the analysis, between the 1930s and the 1970s, Acapulco drew from labor pools in widening concentric circles: first, the city drew from its immediate surroundings, then from its hinterland, in the Costa Chica and the Costa Grande. First came copra growers from the coastal lowlands and fishermen from Tambuco who moved closer to the city of Acapulco. They began to split their working hours, moving back and

forth between fishing villages, coconut fields and small hotels, bars, restaurants, and many of the summer houses recently built by the affluent post-revolutionary bourgeoisie. Soon thereafter the city drew from pools deep in the *sierra* of Atoyac and Coyuca, then farther in the remotest of regions in Michoacán, Oaxaca, and the Mexican heartland. There came the landless, muleteers and stevedores; families of small merchants from Petatlán, cattle ranchers and *jornaleros* from Ometepec and San Luis Acatlán in the Costa Chica, then coffee growers from the remote highlands of Atoyac; then from the same region, the displaced from the political violence set off by counterinsurgency campaigns and guerrillas in the late 1960s and 1970s. Then small families of traders and merchants from Puebla, Morelos, and Michoacán; then many lone migrants and entire families from Mexico City and other large urban cores in the country, then northern migrants began to pour in from many remote corners of Mexico.

From this eddy of migrants, the central actors of our story emerge. They became, for the most part, the working poor of Acapulco's tourism industry. By following their movement through the city, the story becomes one of deep urban change and constant spatial mobility, with few opportunities for social mobility, and displacement. Exploring the hundreds of life stories of service workers and the migrant poor, who dwelled in the informal city and moved constantly through the bay, show how this very movement propelled Acapulco's urban transition from a small resort town to a teeming boomtown on Mexico's Pacific coast. "Atiborrado, incesante, acezante humanidad en una nuez," thus described Ricardo Garibay, a widely-read journalist in the 1970s, who pastiched Fuentes's style in a bestselling story of Acapulco written at a time when the city had grown into a sprawling boomtown: "Acapulco. Iridiscente hervidero... ver brillar esa torva geografía voraz en la palma de la mano, maravillosa geografía. Echársela en la bolsa y andar oyendo su mar y sus voceríos."<sup>497</sup> The moment we begin to listen carefully to the city's "voceríos,"

---

<sup>497</sup> Ricardo Garibay, *Acapulco*, (Mexico: Editorial Grijalbo, 1979), pp. 7-8.

the lives and struggles of service workers and the migrant poor, we begin to see Acapulco's city surging forth, sprawling with all of its stark urban contrasts thrown into sharp relief by the very orography of the bay.

In this story, there is a pronounced spatial shift in Acapulco. The town on its east side spread to the entire bay, and turned into a city, as ever-growing numbers of people, service workers, and migrants began populating, settling, and circulating through its crescent-shaped landscape. There lies in this story a vortex of migration in Acapulco followed by a spatial displacement of people from the densely populated tenements in the old neighborhoods of the port-town, east of the bay, to the short-lived planned workers's city that was created in the 1940s, with a series of *colonias proletarias* strategically built near the tourist city, to the more haphazard explosion of land invasions that left squatter settlements strewn over the hillsides of the bay's amphitheater.

## I The Prelude to the Informal City *Old Acapulco and Mexico's Demographic Boom*

Run-down *barrios históricos* made up most of Acapulco's old town. Their state of disrepair, past and present alike, were described in a local newspaper article that shaded these barrios into a timeless historical description of Acapulco's drastic urban transformation. The flashback, with the accompanying story of Acapulco in its transition from a commercial seaport to a tourist city, was run by the local newspaper *La Verdad* in the late 1940s, when Acapulco was on the cusp of drastic transformations:<sup>498</sup>

Acapulco, después de los días de esplendor, tuvo su ocaso durante el período del México independiente. Barracas miserables y calles intransitables que eran verdaderos muladares caracterizaron con su miseria y su incuria al puerto, haciendo rudo contraste todo ello con la limpieza del cielo y del mar... Sin marina, sin rutas regulares de navegación, Acapulco tenía que languidecer. Sin embargo, las condiciones contemporáneas han venido a despertarlo y a

---

<sup>498</sup> *La Verdad*, 8 February 1949.

darle un nuevo sentido vital. El turismo, o sea el prurito de movimiento que como una supervivencia de los ancestros nómadas caracteriza al hombre de hoy, redescubrió la bahía maravillosa, regalo para los ojos y sedante para el espíritu y el cuerpo. Y surgió la carretera moderna...Acapulco iniciaba una nueva vida. Una bahía— de las más hermosas del mundo— constituye el milagro Acapulqueño. Toda gira en torno de ella, como un sol que hace moverse en su derredor múltiples planetas y satélites.

And so it did. Everything continued to revolve around the bay but continued so in a different way and with a different sense of purpose. The bay had been “rediscovered” in Acapulco— more aptly, the bay had been repurposed and redefined culturally, socially, and economically— when boosters began to reevaluate Acapulco’s natural advantages. Wilderness was there, “en espera de que el hombre las utilice para su mejoramiento. Este ha sido el caso de Acapulco, por sus majestuosas bellezas naturales. Apenas ahora, desde hace muy breve tiempo, el hombre se preocupa por aunar su ingenio y su técnica a las impetuosas fuerzas naturales creadoras de un tesoro casi virgen.” “Casi virgen”— the existence of an untouched wilderness is to a certain point true. There is no such thing as “first nature” causes explaining the emergence of a city; instead, Acapulco’s main natural advantage— the Santa Lucía Bay, namely—was transformed as a result of changing practices that were incorporated into the port from its being a point of transit. The natural bay went from a sheltered cove, like a “mountain lake,” moving passengers and trading goods to a beautiful bay trading services and moving tourists. Henceforward, from this simple change sparked off by the reinterpretation of the bay’s purpose, a city began to grow, and everything around the bay stopped revolving around commerce and the ocean and began to move instead around distant markets and the Mexican heartland. “De las entrañas azules del mar,” continued the hyperbolic description of Acapulco’s transformation, “surge la riqueza materializada en los modernísimos y suntuosos hoteles que han escalado los cerros, que son atalayas del paisaje.”<sup>499</sup> Goods, services, buildings, and people clumped together along its bay, giving rise to a

---

<sup>499</sup> *La Verdad*, 8 February 1949.

boomtown at the edge the Pacific Coast, but a populous boomtown with no remaining traditional connections to the sea.

The only remaining part of the town, the old barrios and the fort of San Diego stood as witnesses to this drastic urban transformation. But it remained an eyesore for those who sought the aesthetics of an untouched wilderness. The “barracas miserables” and “calles intransitables” of the old town remained amidst an urban and natural landscape that had changed the shape and purpose of Acapulco drastically.

The old core of the town had also changed, albeit slowly, and many of the cronistas began to trace these transformations when these old barrios were changed beyond recognition. Rubén H. Luz, Rosendo Pintos, and Alejandro Gómez Maganda have preserved descriptions of the different barrios of the port’s urban core and how they have changed over time. One of them concluded that,

500

El centro de la Ciudad de Acapulco ha sufrido transformaciones enormes: callejones convertidos en calles; mercados derrumbados para ampliar calles o plazas; plazas vendidas; casas de adobe y tejas tiradas para dar paso a nuevas construcciones de concreto y para amplitud de espacios; negociaciones cerradas...cambios de propietarios; muelles desaparecidos; oficinas públicas destruidas. Todo este continuo movimiento dio nacimiento a una nueva estructura física que incluso los viejos acapulqueños poco recuerdan

Most of the neighborhoods had been settled in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The Barrio de La Pocita, for instance, was formed in 1917. But there were older ones like Petaquillas that grew on the hillsides of the Fort of San Diego, and some cronistas date its foundation as far back as the seventeenth century. Another very old settlement in the city was the Barrio del Meson de “La Lima” or simply Barrio La Lima. Even though it was a small settlement at the outskirts of the old town, it still became part of the “Barrios históricos” de Acapulco as

---

<sup>500</sup> Alejandro Martínez Carbajal. *Acapulco. Barrios históricos*, Volume I (Acapulco, México: Talleres Gráficos, Comisión Editorial Municipal H. Ayuntamiento de Acapulco, 1993), p. 1.

declared by the State of Guerrero in the 1940s.<sup>501</sup> La Lima was barely a neighborhood in the strict sense of an urban Spanish grid. The origins of the barrio, according to some of Acapulco's *cronistas*, dates back to the eighteenth century when a shrine dedicated to the Virgin of Lima was built on the site. There, when Acapulco served as an old transpacific port, the "Mesón de la Lima" was built and began to lodge merchants and visitors arriving from faraway places; over time, inns, lodges, and guest houses began to prop up and the area was slowly settled by different residents. The old barrio, situated north of the Fort of San Diego, was spatially formed by small winding alleys. It splayed out like a spider on what back then was considered the outskirts of the old town of Acapulco; a very small neighborhood, "este barrio fue uno de los más chicos pero muy notable y bullanguero," notes one of the *cronistas*. Every year there was a celebration commemorating the canonization of the virgin of this neighborhood which was reinvented into a *barrio histórico* in the 1940s.<sup>502</sup> Many of these old neighborhoods in Acapulco would end up being deeply transformed by Mexico's mid-century demographic boom.

### ***Mexico's Demographic Boom in Acapulco***

Mexico roughly tripled its population from 25 million inhabitants in 1950 to 81 million by 1990. During the golden years of this demographic boom, the annual rate of population growth reached high levels with 3.08% during the years of 1950 and 1960; then peaked with the highest rate in the history of Mexico with 3.40% between 1960 and 1970. In 1950, 84 settlements were considered cities in Mexico; they exceeded the urban threshold of 15,000 inhabitants established

---

<sup>501</sup> For an extensive spatial depiction of old barrios, of merchant families as well as the locations of their houses of practically everyone in old Acapulco see chapters two and three of the memoirs of 1950s ex-governor Alejandro Gómez Maganda, *Acapulco en mi vida y en el tiempo* (México: Libro Mex Editores, 1960), pp. 49-82.

<sup>502</sup> Rubén H. Luz, *Recuerdos de Acapulco* (Mexico, D.F.: Ediciones Monroy Padilla, 1973), pp.155-6.

by the national census—Acapulco, by then, was already included in the count. But by 1970 there were nearly 174 cities in the country.<sup>503</sup>

Rural to urban migration began as a trickle in the 1940s but grew between 1950 and 1970 into a tidal current of almost 4.5 million rural migrants settling in urban localities, and particularly in Mexico City, by then, turning into a densely populated metropolis. As migration from the countryside poured into cities, provoking the expansion of more precarious settlements, yet another demographic shift was underway. New demographic studies have demonstrated that, while the well-known story of rural to urban migration, and to a lesser degree, urban to urban migration, is important, it only tells one side of the story. There is a more silent but equally important movement taking place in Mexico during this period: rural to rural migration. It resulted in a population boom that stayed and circulated within the countryside in the form of population dispersal. Historians Renato González Mello and Ariel Rodríguez Kuri have demonstrated how there was a demographic boom in the countryside that tended towards a population dispersal particularly during the 1960s and 1970s.

Acapulco was inevitably affected by all these dynamics of Mexico's mid-century demographic explosion. Rapid rural to urban migration was driven primarily by three factors in Acapulco: quickly synthesized as the rise of the tourist city, the rise of a welfare city, and a cycle of demographic compression and then dispersal in Acapulco's hinterland; two of which—the first two—were largely pull factors, while the latter one was mainly a push factor. Yet the push-pull dichotomy shaded into one another once networks of migrants and families had been established between Acapulco and many communities in faraway places in the Mexican South Pacific Coast and in Mexico at large. Once settlements of internal migrants were established, for instance, social

---

<sup>503</sup> Ariel Rodríguez Kuri and Renato González Mello, "El fracaso del éxito 1970-1985," *Nueva historia general de México*, Mexico City: Colegio de México, 2010), 699–746.

networks and the “hub and spoke” model of migration were activated between Acapulco and many localities. The “hubs” (veteran and more experienced immigrants) would guide the “spokes” (new immigrants) and served as sources of financial support and political, economic, and social integration.<sup>504</sup> Like any other form of migration, these networks were mainly formed by families and extended groups of acquaintances.

The first factor, a pulling factor, of rural to urban migration was initially driven by the rise of a tourist city. Nearby cheap labor pool of unskilled workers meant that the city’s labor force and population really took off under Miguel Alemán’s administration (1946-1952), when the city’s service sector and the construction industry began to grow. Economic activities became highly concentrated in a single location and a cluster of services and began to compete for and demand large numbers of workers.

At first, Acapulco began to attract large numbers of migrants from nearby areas, attracting larger and larger flows as the port was overhauled into a resort from the mid-1940s onwards. In 1900, for instance, there were 4,932 inhabitants living permanently in Acapulco. One must bear in mind that Acapulco’s population had oscillated between 3,000 inhabitants and 6,000 throughout the nineteenth century. The population slightly increased to 6,529 in 1930, then to 9,993 in 1940. Vendors, stevedores, muleteers, handicraft workers, small time merchants, among many informal service workers, of all sorts, many of whom composed a large sector of the population in Acapulco. These workers had been catering, for decades, to many large groups of visitors flowing into Acapulco either through steamships or cars. Since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, service workers had been descending into the port, like a trickle from many surrounding areas, only to return home once they had finished their business in Acapulco. But from the 1940s, this trickle was thickened by a

---

<sup>504</sup> Vilna Bashi Treitler. *Survival of the Knitted: Immigrant Social Networks in a Stratified World*. (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2007).

wave of migrants who not only poured into the port but stayed. By 1950, the population had grown to 28,512. This group of migrants in Acapulco is illuminated by the most standard economic explanation of rural to urban migration, a movement driven primarily by Acapulco's construction boom and the growth of services in the restaurant, leisure, and hotel industries.

The second factor, however, is less evident and I have also synthesized it as a pulling factor. Large numbers of migrants were drawn by the benefits of a rising "welfare city" in Acapulco. Acapulco, after all, was a city created by Mexico's mid-century welfare state.<sup>505</sup> In this way, rural to urban migration was partly driven by diverse expectations of and demands for welfare, protection, and shelter that the city itself offered to all of these migrants; a welfare city which still offered, no matter how deficiently, a better quality of life for many migrants escaping suffocating conditions in rural areas or larger cities. These demands came from people who had fallen through the cracks of formal economic and political structures in cities, towns, and forgotten rural regions in Guerrero and other parts of Mexico. Most of these migrants arrived in Acapulco and stayed permanently.

The third factor, the dispersal of a growing rural population in Guerrero, of which a sliver eventually began to migrate to Acapulco was driven by the expansion of new frontiers of colonization deep in the *sierra* of Atoyac and Coyuca de Benítez where commodities, relatively new to the region like coffee, boomed in tandem with the logging industry and timber, and the copra trade in the lowlands. New regions were colonized as the rural economy and commodities fluctuated in cycles of compression and decompression in the Costa Grande, Costa Chica, and La

---

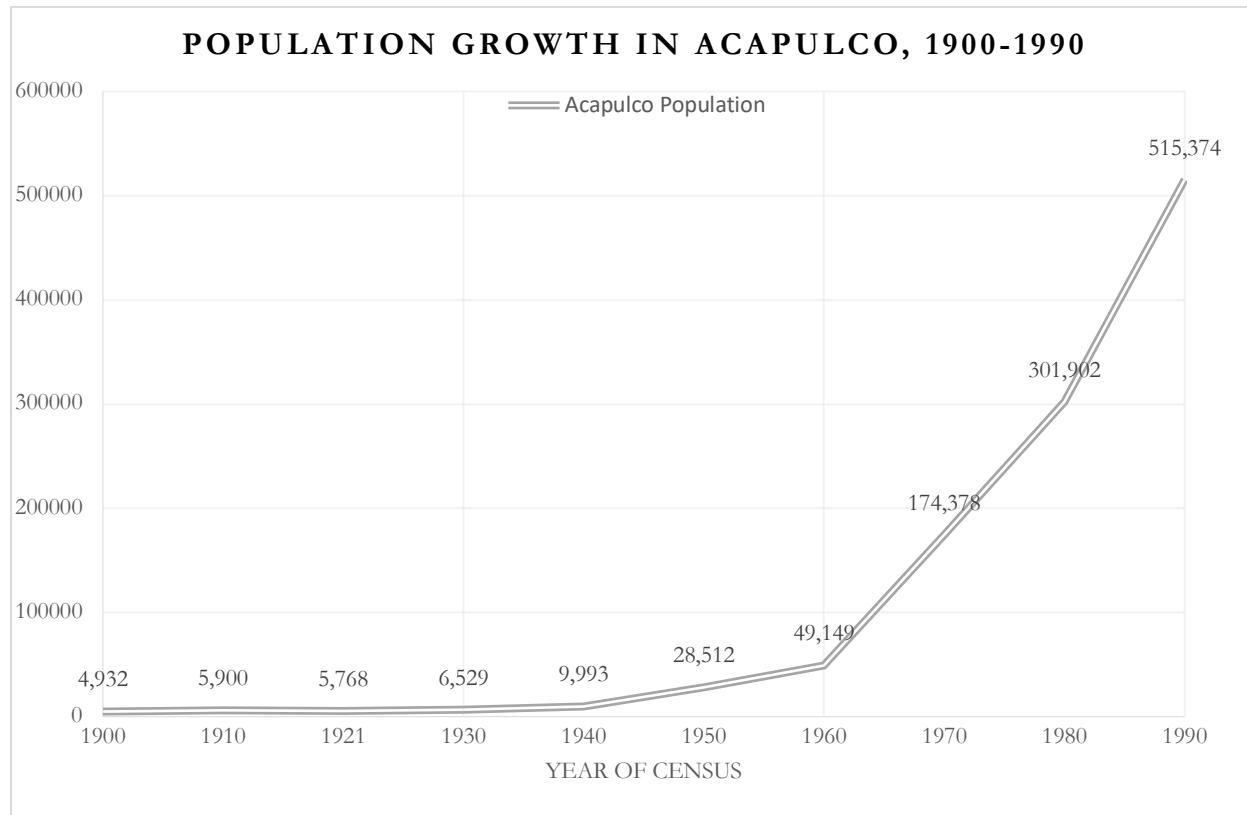
<sup>505</sup> Niels Albertsen, "Welfare and the City," *Nordic Journal of Architectural Research/Nordisk Arkitekturforskning*, no. 2 (2004).

"The concept of welfare relates to a wide diversity of issues such as the quantity, quality and distribution of material goods and services, the (re)distribution of income, protection against poverty, the security of employment and wealth, the provision of health care, education and culture, the provision of security and shelter, the guarantee of a certain equality of opportunities." As for political participation, many service workers living in the informal city also received the support of participated in Mexico's corporate structures like the CNOP, the Confederación Nacional de Organizaciones Populares in the PRI or local associations.

Montaña regions. When conflicts erupted in these regions, thousands of rural migrants fled from violent conflicts and cycles of demographic and economic compression. They moved to Acapulco and stayed in the city to receive welfare goods some form of basic service provision and protection.

These three factors of migration to the port contributed significantly to Acapulco's population explosion. The effects of migration and population growth struck Acapulco in the early 1950s with the acceleration of the tourist industry during the postwar era. The population grew from 28,512 in 1950 to 49,149 in 1960 but by 1970 the city skyrocketed to 174,378 inhabitants. [See Figure 8 below]<sup>506</sup>

**Figure 8: Population Growth in Acapulco, 1900-1990**



<sup>506</sup> Luis Unikel *et al.*, "Factores de rechazo en la migración rural en México," *Demografía y economía*, Vol. 7, No. 1 (1973), 24. Extensive projects were carried out by the Centro de Estudios Económicos y Demográficos (CEED) at the Colegio de México which began to explore the problem of urbanization and rural migration to the cities since the 1960s. The most reliable statistical evidence of those years is normally drawn from the CEED; For population growth in Acapulco see Alba T. Estrada Castañón, *El movimiento anticaballerista: Guerrero 1960* (Mexico: Fomento Universitas-UAG, 2001), 41-2.

Indeed, this is a boomtown in the making, and this is reflected by the numbers that measure how the size and nature of the population changed in Acapulco. Chilpancingo, compared to Acapulco, also had a similar population figure in the 1930s but by the 1970s Guerrero's Capital City did not exceed more than 40,000. What made all of Acapulco's urban ailments so distinctive—over urbanization, high cost of living, lack of housing and basic service provision—was not the sudden prosperity of a small port town that attracted thousands of migrants, like any other rapidly growing city in Mexico at the time, but rather the ebb and flow of people in a place that could double or even triple its population, overnight, with seasonal streams of visitors demanding housing, resources, low costs, services, and orderly urbanization.

Moisés de la Peña made a strong argument for this exceptional case of urban growth that mixed high levels of migration with a soaring temporary population:<sup>507</sup>

Ciertamente aun no está preparado Acapulco para tales avalanchas, y hasta el agua y la luz faltan, en estos casos más que de ordinario, y si normalmente es necesario llevar de la altiplanicie la mayoría de los artículos de consumo, porque la población ha crecido más de prisa que la producción regional de satisfactores, no es de extrañar... que Acapulco no pueda dejar satisfecha a una población flotante que de la noche a la mañana y sólo por ocho días, duplica a la normal con que cuenta la localidad ¿Qué haría la Ciudad de México si un buen día llegaran dos millones de turistas exigiendo comodidades, orden y baratura?

Acapulco's huge temporary population of seasonal visitors, becoming a visible problem, had not only shifted to the spotlight, but so had the moral economy of its permanent (and growing) population. A sort of "moral economy" was floated around in the local press *la economía popular* to try to bring attention to problems like tenant marginality, poor fishing villages, an exorbitantly high cost of living, lack of basic services, land dispossession, and high rents.

---

<sup>507</sup> Moisés de la Peña, *Guerrero económico*, II, pp. 566-7.

### ***Old Acapulco and the Emergence of Tenements and the Urban Poor***

“La Bahía de Acapulco, una de las primeras bahías del mundo,” jotted down a satirical writer as he copied the descriptions of a tourist campaign promoting Acapulco in the 1930s: “puerto rodeado de grandes bellezas...la gran atracción del mar (propaganda turística).” To which the satirist quickly replied “¿Y el pueblo? Un miserable pueblo de pescadores. Un hacinamiento de chozas donde viven amontonados y careciendo de lo más indispensable, hombres y mujeres desarapados y niños hambrientos.”<sup>508</sup> The satirist, Juan Ramón Campuzano, wrote in the press and supported the interests of many traditional political groups in the seaport: many agrarian groups, small merchants, fishermen, leagues of “alijadores” (stevedores), muleteers, and many other workers in the transport industry who were holding fast onto a vanishing port of call and its fishing and agricultural economy. They eventually formed a league in 1935 called the Liga Regional Obreros y Campesinos de Ambas Costas “Juan R. Escudero,” which pushed forcefully for public works and agrarian and labor reform in the port under Lázaro Cárdenas’s presidency.

But as the port of call was completely swept aside; many of these groups defended by Campuzano were displaced by new migrants or absorbed by different services in the tourism industry. They all ended up living either in small huts, small *rancherías*, and fishing villages on the outskirts of Acapulco, or on the old town of the seaport west of the bay. Taking a brief excursion into the 1920s and 1930s, there was a strong presence of labor organization in Acapulco, like in Veracruz and Tampico, though to a lesser extent. These decades saw a convergence of renter strikes, popular mobilizations, and radical workers movements in the 1920s and 1930s. Herón Proal, an anarchist leader of tenant protesters in Veracruz during the national renter strikes in Mexico, has become a classic example of this convergence of radicalism, syndicalism, and

---

<sup>508</sup> Juan R. Campuzano, *Acapulco, belleza trágica y otros paisajes* (México: L.E.A.R, 1937).

tenant effervescence during the aftermath of the Mexican Revolution. In Acapulco, The Partido Obrero de Acapulco became the spearhead of tenant protest, stevedore associations, and agrarian movements. In many port cities, tenants in the early decades of the twentieth century had “challenged the older, laissez-faire attitudes that market forces could successfully resolve housing problems,” as Andrew Wood and James Baer conclude; these popular movements “had changed the role of state officials by making them arbiters in tenant and landlord relations as well as consumer issues more generally.”<sup>509</sup> This made the mediation of officials in tenant-landlord relations highly volatile and unpredictable.

The problem worsened when Acapulco experienced accelerated urbanization as a result of heightened public investment in infrastructure and public works. The issues of high rents, land speculation, and lack of basic services quickly turned tenant protests into an explosive and uncontrollable drive for land acquisitions in semi urban areas.

The expropriations of ejidos in the mid 1940s and the expansion of land developing companies into the agricultural belt of ejidos, fisheries, maze and coconut fields as well as fruit orchards in the 1950s triggered the movement of large groups of people, from the outskirts of Acapulco, to the poorer neighborhoods in the old urban core of Acapulco. Several were ejidatarios and their families, owners of small plots of land, peasants, coconut growers, and fishermen from many locations east and west of the bay, and most ended up migrating to the old town, which accelerated the pauperization of the urban core of Acapulco.

The sprouting of tenements produced a shift in public concerns for all of the down-and-out migrants who had been displaced from greater Acapulco and who had ended settling in the old barrios from greater Acapulco. The local press began to highlight the conditions of duress under

---

<sup>509</sup> Andrew Wood and James Baer. “Strength in Numbers: Urban Rent Strikers and Political Transformations in the Americas, 1904-1925,” *Journal of Urban History*, vol. 32, no. 6 (September, 2006): 862-884, p. 879.

which tenants and *inquilinos* were living in the old core of the city. In the 1940s, reporters from local newspapers would often visit these old *barrios*, describing the changing urban landscape near the old urban core of Acapulco. “The life conditions that prevail in such population clusters are indeed depressing, threatening, and appalling,” read one of the articles entitled “El otro Acapulco” by *El Trópico*; “a tour around the old *barrios* of Acapulco (...) and then around the *colonias* of Progreso, Aguas Blancas, and Hogar Moderno, among others, is heartbreaking.”<sup>510</sup>

Reporters from the local newspaper *La Verdad* managed to worm their way through the alleys of old Acapulco and into one of the *vecindades* of the Barrio la Lima. There the reporters found “un ambiente de contrastes:” next to the landlord’s house, a small and modest but clean and spacious house, there was a *vecindad* full of “cuartuchos sucios y malolientes, basura por todos lados, excusados repulsivos que emanan una miasma que marea y asfixia, baños desaseados, resecos y oscuros, como cuevas” “voraces arrendatarios de pocilgas” In one of the *vecindades* there were “cuatro servicios sanitarios para treinta viviendas habitadas por 150 personas” and there were three other *vecindades* with as many tenants, and as few shared bathrooms and latrines among them. They would turn off the water at 10 am and then reestablish the service around 4pm for an hour, until 5. In another vecindad of the Barrio La Lima “tremenda promiscuidad, terrible inmundicia. Solo una hora diaria se permite a los inquilinos el uso del agua en este asqueroso lugar de miseria indescriptible.”<sup>511</sup> The people interviewed by the reporter mentioned they were afraid of those “focos infecciosos” since they could get sick very easily.

A resident in one of the *vecindades* of the Barrio La Lima was Melquiades Ibares. Originally a shark fisherman, Ibares had left Acapulco to drift away in fishing activities in Baja California, leaving his wife and his sons in charge of the plot of land in Icacos. But upon returning,

---

<sup>510</sup> “El otro Acapulco,” *El Trópico*, 8 January 1958.

<sup>511</sup> *La Verdad*, 8 January 1949.

only a few years later, Ibares found an empty beachfront crisscrossed by a wired fence; his wife, sons, and hut were nowhere to be seen. He quickly went to look for the comisario ejidal who told him that the ejido had been expropriated; that at the assembly ejidal members had decided to receive a compensation; and that his share had been given to some acquaintance but not to his family who was summarily expelled from their parcel of land. His wife became an informal vendor and, with a food stand at the old market, had moved to the old town of Acapulco. The rest of his sons, barring two, had left Acapulco; and those who remained, one of them had polio and the other had aspirations to become a boxer. As soon as he found out, he moved to the Barrio la Lima with his wife and rebuilt his small hut where his plot of land used to be. But he was then moved around, expelled, harassed, and jailed a couple of times, an experience similar to those of hundreds of fishermen, ejidatarios, and peasants on the eastern side of the bay.<sup>512</sup>

Land problems really became explosive in those fertile areas in “greater” Acapulco along the coast and on the hillsides of the bay’s hinterland. Icacos, Cumbres de Llano Largo, Granjas del Marqués, Revolcadero, La Sabana—the agricultural crescent stretching from Pie de la Cuesta west of the bay to Barra Vieja east of the bay—seethed with social conflicts in the 1950s as the tourism economy expanded aggressively. There, many economic activities—tourism, land development, agriculture, copra production, and fishing—all overlapped and competed with each other in the 1940s and 1950s, a situation that resembled the port’s transitioning economy in the 1920s and 1930s, suggesting that development of the tourist economy was advancing unevenly through different areas in Acapulco. In most of these recently-developed places there was still a fierce competition over which form of land use, economic activity, and urban function would prevail in Acapulco.

---

<sup>512</sup> Gomezjara, *Bonapartismo*, p. 202; Portillo *Mis tiempos*, pp. 245-257.

Such fierce land conflicts in the outskirts of Acapulco were provoking an exodus of small communities of peasants, farmers, and fishermen who moved to the city and became tenants in the old town of Acapulco. Melquiades Ibares was dragged into an all-out confrontation among ejidatarios, generals, land grabbers, speculators, and *fraccionadoras*. Initially, generals and other lower-rank members of the army and their families barged in on communities in Cumbres de Llano Largo, an ejido that, unlike its neighboring counterparts in Icacos, El Marqués, and El Revolcadero, had not been included in the list of ejidos to be expropriated in the 1940s. In 1950, armed forces from the *fraccionadora* Aburto SA of a powerful general and brother of the future governor of Guerrero, Caballero Aburto, in collusion with many powerful boosters who occupied these lands near Las Brisas. Cumbres de Llano Largo was violently dispossessed, the *ejidal* leader murdered, and a military colony of summer houses established for members of the army and their families who quickly moved to “Loma Zacatosa.” They provoked the exodus of many of the 144 inhabitants of Cumbres de Llano Largo who moved to another site and built their thatched houses and *solares*. But the *fraccionadora* and the army kept hounding them and after several threats they were forced to leave after their houses and documents were burnt down. Once more, they moved and resettled in a stretch of shacks that spread precariously along the small road that would later become the scenic highway. Many communities from neighboring areas who had been expelled also joined them in this new settlement. Yet the army and the *fraccionadora* did not stop. The scenic road began to be projected and armed officials arrived in the mid 1950s to remove their shacks, this time setting off a large exodus of families to the city: “nos dispersamos hacia donde pudimos; unos nos hicimos plomeros, otros carpinteros, albañiles, choferes, pero pactamos que no abandonaríamos la lucha.”<sup>513</sup>

---

<sup>513</sup> Gomezjara, Bonapartismo y lucha en la Costa Grande, pp. 199-204.

Ibares, having moved to the Barrio la Lima in old Acapulco, lived precariously in one of the tenements there, but sold coconuts and continued to defend his plot of land. He would now and then go fishing when he returned to his small hut on the outskirts. Eventually, he became well respected within the families and tenants in the *old barrios* and was often seen as someone who fiercely defended ejidatarios and the *economía popular* from voracious land-grubbers and generals in the port. It was a matter of time before he clashed with the team of lawyers hired by the generals, *fraccionadoras*, and boosters to wrest control of these lands from the hands of fishermen, ejidatarios, and peasants in Icacos and Cumbres de Llano Largo. One of the young lawyers from Mexico City, representing the *fraccionadora*, took a trip to Acapulco to threaten and pressure Ibares to give up his land and his fight. If Ibares retained these lands and then sold them, he could make a fortune out of them, which is what eventually happened. The young lawyer recalls having ventured for the first time, in 1958, into the old barrio of La Lima to pay a visit to Ibares:

conocí los entretelones de Acapulco, lo que queda atrás de la Costera, de los hoteles y de las casas de lujo. Primero, el mercado viejo, después incendiado, en donde me dieron las señas de la casa donde Ibares vivía, allá por el barrio de La Lima, al que llegué por muchos vericuetos malolientes, entonces sin servicios cual ninguno. Entre vigas que como puentes permitían pasar de un barranco a otro, cruzando por patios y salones ajenos, de una a otra casa, llegué adonde Melquiades Ibares reposaba en una hamaca y me miraba, en medio de sus familiares, con ojos torvos.<sup>514</sup>

The lawyer introduced himself as José López Portillo. Ibares slowly got off the hammock with a stumble and stood up, pistol in hand; a confusing scene unfolded “en el que Melquiades me amenazaba con su pistola y yo a él con mi portafolios.” The lawyer was chased out of the tenement; allegedly saved by the subtle mediation of Ibares’s wife. Ibares was jailed once again. Because of this confrontation, the lawyer abandoned his profession soon thereafter, reviling the entire affair. Naturally, in his memoirs, López Portillo spun the story of this encounter in such a way as to turn

---

<sup>514</sup> José López Portillo *Mis tiempos: biografía y testimonio político*, Volume 1 (Mexico: Fernández, 1988), pp. 254-257.

this patent action of injustice into a turning point in his career.: “lo que me desagradó y causó malestar, fue el fondo del asunto, pues en un enfrentamiento directo patrocinaba yo a dos ricos, muy ricos, que tenían formalizados todos sus derechos, contra un pobre, muy pobre, que no tenía más título que su historia...” But his evaluation of the story does make an interesting point: it was a matter of property rights in which a lawyer was mediating between an asymmetrical relationship of rights, between the wealth and “poverty of rights” of the generals and the fisherman, to borrow Brodwyn Fischer’s term. López Portillo’s clients, according to the lawyer, were two rich generals, most likely Gilberto Limón or Caballero Aburto; “el derecho formal estaba del lado de mis clientes, que ni siquiera eran responsables directos de la situación en la que se hallaba Melquiades.” But it was the property rights regime in Acapulco, and many other cities, what had gone terribly wrong: “era toda una estructura de operaciones maquinadas, bien formalizadas, que están en el trasfondo de la propiedad urbana del puerto” [que ha] “crecido sobre ejidos y comunidades...ante el desorden, la ambición, la irregularidad y los abusos de todos.” When López Portillo became minister of economy, he kindly restituted Melquiades “poverty of rights” and granted him 20 million pesos when the property in Icacos was sold and turned into a waterpark, money which he then used to buy a large house in the same Barrio La Lima. He gave López Portillo a beautiful and comfortable silver chair for when he became president. Soon, however, Melquiades was harassed, ostracized by other residents; two of his sons were kidnapped, one of them, the boxer, at some point killed. Melquiades, “amargado, murió en una borrachera.”<sup>515</sup> The Barrio La Lima and his residents, as the vignette of Melquiades shows, continued changing along with dozens of old seaport barrios. They suffered the deepest of transformations as the populous boomtown emerged and transformed them beyond recognition. The city would ultimately wipe them off from a rapidly changing urban map.

---

<sup>515</sup> Portillo *Mis tiempos*, pp. 254-257.

In the process, many popular associations were created to counteract this transformation. Their goal was twofold: defend the *economía popular* of tenements and residents in the old town, on the one hand, and to promote public works while preserving some of the urban features of the old seaport. The names of the associations reflect their mission: the Comité de Lucha contra la Carestía de la Vida and the Comité de Defensa del Patrimonio Municipal de Acapulco. Housing and service provision were gradually politicized in Acapulco, envisioned as basic rights by the local press, grassroots movements, and public officials. They became the goal and mission of these associations, even though at time combating these problems proved to be an uphill battle. Solving them, more often than not, required the intervention of planners and boosters who offered solutions by emphasizing the creation of a worker's city. These associations would eventually be quickly displaced and seldom participated in the creation of a planned city for Acapulco's inhabitants and worker's force. What these associations achieved, however, was to place the huge problem of marginality, crammed housing conditions, high rents, and lack of basic services at the center of the local public debate.

## II

### **The Informal City and its Ties to Booming Acapulco**

*The Expansion, Transformation, and Fraying of an Urban Space*

In no time, the planned city failed to catch up with a growing population. Multiple social demands would soon turn into a question of land acquisition to provide better and cheaper housing. The problem of tenant marginality in the old traditional *barrios*, west of the bay, would abruptly shift to a problem of squatter illegality in the planned city and then into one of newly and irregularly settled hills on the bay.

### *The Planned Ciudad Obrera and the Rise of the Informal City, 1946-1958*

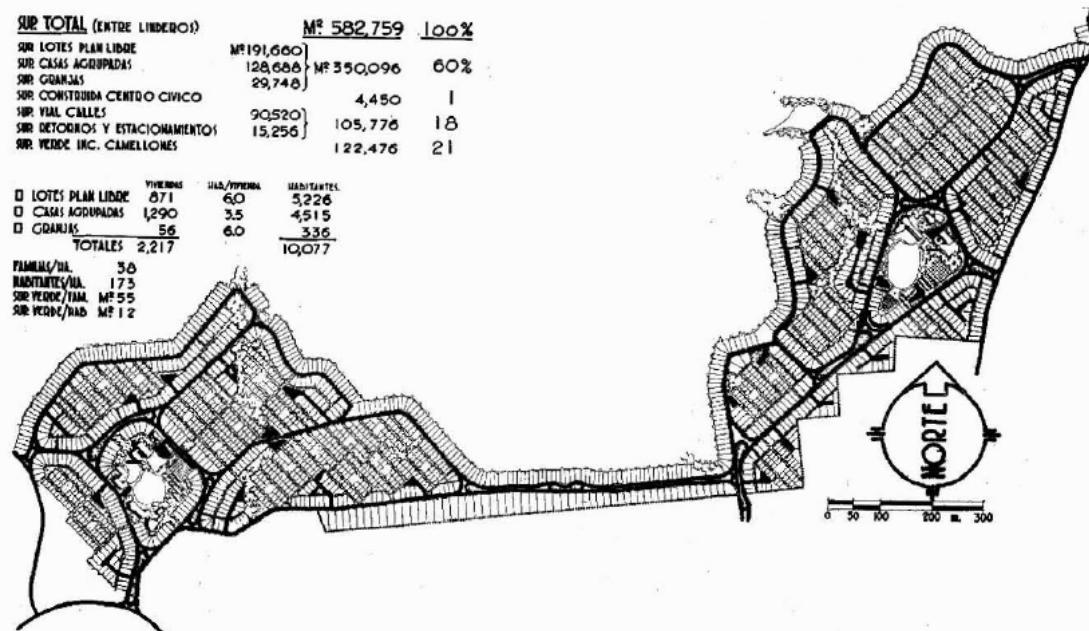
Out of the planned world of Acapulco grew the informal, unplanned city of tourism. As larger and larger numbers of migrants kept pouring in, both the planned and the unplanned cities, began to shade into one another in the midst of an exploding boomtown on the Pacific coast. One of the planned neighborhoods for service workers, La Colonia Progreso, “pasará de ser colonia a ser barrio y parte de la ciudad,” an observer noted in the local newspaper *La Verdad* in 1949; [Progreso] “tendrá sus calles mejor trazadas que en el mismo Acapulco.”<sup>516</sup> Indeed, many of the projected neighborhoods, Progreso, Hogar Moderno, Aguas Blancas, and Miguel Alemán had a more symmetrical grid than the winding and teeming “barrios históricos” in the old town that had grown around the fueling port. [See Image 13 below] But *barrios históricos, tugurios, colonias proletarias*, and *colonias obreras* began to meld as the planned city fell behind a rapidly changing urban map deeply being transformed by waves of internal migration. “El Puerto crece constantemente,” further noted the local newspaper when describing, in a somewhat hopeful tone, the planning and creation of new *colonias* under the matrix of the Plano Regulador in 1949, “y este crecimiento propio de la ciudad se dirige hacia el oriente, así es que el sector popular va a quedar formando parte de la ciudad.”<sup>517</sup>

---

<sup>516</sup> *La Verdad*, September 16, 1949.

<sup>517</sup> *La Verdad*, September 16, 1949.

**Image 13: Map of the Projected Colonia Obrera in the Ejido Santa Cruz, 1954**



Map of the projected Colonia Obrera in the Ejido Santa Cruz  
“Planificación de Acapulco. Ideas Fundamentales,” *Arquitectura México*. Tome X, No 46, 1954.

Two *colonias* were initially formed alongside the tourist city: the first was built as part of the planned city; scored on Acapulco’s hillsides in the late 1940s, the Colonia Progreso, was lined-up next to the tourist city, an orderly grid that accommodated the *colonia obrera*; the other, in the late 1950s, belonging to the unplanned city, La Laja. As an informal economy of tourism emerged in Acapulco, both La Progreso and La Laja began to tie the planned and unplanned cities in ever more complex ways.

#### *The Creation of Colonia Progreso, 1940s*

Large groups of people flocked to the ejido El Progreso and briskly settled on its peripheries, turning into *avecinados* during the 1940s. Many of them, migrants from nearby

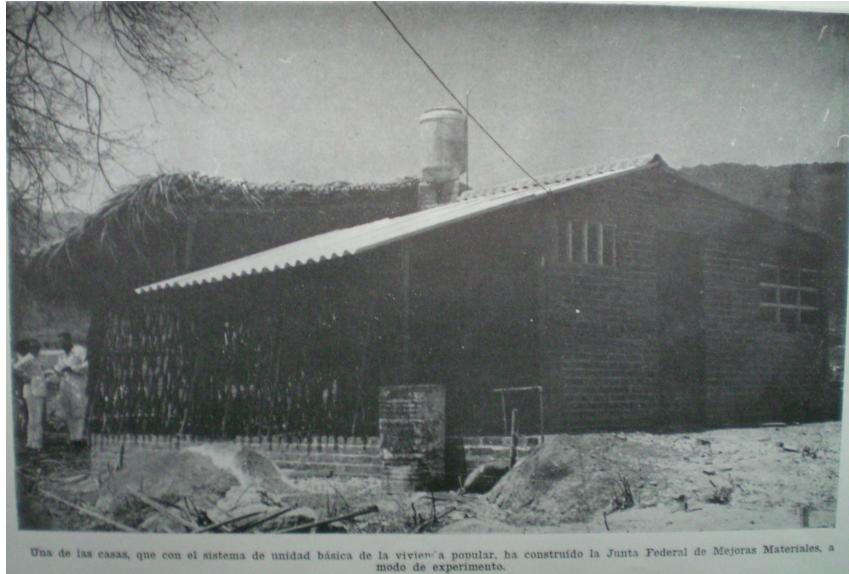
regions, had recently arrived in the port, attracted by new opportunities in Acapulco. Without cutting their ties to rural regions, they eventually joined Acapulco's economy; a rising service sector strung by family networks that were firmly tied to the rural economy of Guerrero's jagged highlands and coastal lowlands. As migrants settled on the periphery of the ejido, protests from many ejidatarios quickly ensued.

Ejidatarios saw in turn how their lands and lives were falling through the cracks of a peripheral area increasingly becoming suburbanized as the coastal city kept rising with an influx of rural migrants. Some ejidatarios of El Progreso had received compensation, but then again, other associations and agrarian leagues had been left behind, without any compensation, and were now in the late 1940s protesting against the JFMM, the *bête noire* of Acapulco's popular sectors, namely colonos and ejidatarios. One of the agrarian associations tied to El Progreso sent a letter to President Alemán protesting the actions of both squatters and the JFMM: how the former kept invading their lands while the latter, through the advancing eagerness of surveying engineers, kept relentlessly destroying their crops and orchards. Ejidatarios were on the losing side of the conflict, amparos and legal council from the CNC notwithstanding. The engineers sent by the JFMM were surveying the land to establish the limits of what would become the Ciudad Obrera, an integral part of Carlos Contreras' Plano Regulador, the projection of a modernist city which, unlike that of Brasilia's, did not forget to include housing for its workers in its plans. [See image 14 below] Interestingly, a Ciudad Obrera composed of "colonias proletarias" was far from the social reality of a growing service sector in Acapulco's society. El Progreso, noted a newspaper playfully, will turn into "un modern fraccionamiento de pobres, con comodidades de rico."<sup>518</sup>

---

<sup>518</sup> Luis Ramírez de Arellano, President of the Comunidad Agraria El Progreso to President Miguel Alemán and the Liga Central de Comunidades Agrarias de la República, Jan 8, 1949. AGN, MAV, 404.1/1188, 27-9; *La Verdad*, October 12, 1949

**Image 14: A Model of a *Casa Obrera* in Acapulco's Planned City of a *Colonia Proletaria*, circa 1955**



Una de las casas, que con el sistema de unidad básica de la vivienda popular, ha construido la Junta Federal de Mejoras Materiales, a modo de experimento.

A house in unspecified location in one of the new “colonias proletarias” Miguel Alemán, Aguas Blancas or Progreso, ARC, 111/4061 Sur No 1 “Panorama de Acapulco,” 1955 (?).

The situation quickly turned more complicated during the first months of 1948. Federal officials, together with their peers in Acapulco’s municipality, began implementing Contreras’ plan. Engineers and officials of the JFMM began to survey the land. But as procedures kept moving forward, business as usual, all of a sudden, three hundred tenement dwellers appeared. As if out of nowhere, they settled on the lands of El Progreso and began clearing the lands of the ejido to mark small plots for their houses, thus stretching an already delicate situation among agrarian associations, rural migrants, settled on the peripheries of the ejido, and officials of the JFMM. By the next day, five hundred appeared, then a thousand only a week after.

Historian Andrew Sackett carried out a series of illuminating interviews of the founding members of the first. Standing out among these interviews is Nicolás Román Benítez.<sup>519</sup> Román Benítez was a teacher and migrant from Iguala Guerrero. He closely collaborated with the newspaper *La Verdad* and eventually founded the Unión de Colonos de Colonia Progreso. Román

<sup>519</sup> Andrew Jonathan Sackett, “The Making of Acapulco: People, Land and the State in the Development of the Mexican Riviera, 1927-1973” (Yale University, 2009).

Benítez who would later tell Sackett that the press supported their activities. Their movement was closely followed by journalists like Ignacio de la Hoya and Alfredo López Cisneros, both reporters from *La Verdad* and sympathetic to the colonos' cause. They began to tell people that they were giving away land. Moreover, word of mouth spread quickly through the Costa Grande by networks of families tied to rural migrants who had recently arrived in the port. Three thousand people would eventually occupy the lands of El Progreso. Then, in what became a predictable dynamic of social conflict, the Junta, formed by members drawn from local and federal agencies, would issue an order of arrest to the Municipal Police, which would then proceed and arrest the leader. Román Benítez, in this case, was arrested, followed by a swirl of colonos who escorted their arrested leader all the way to jail, encircling it, exerting pressure on local authorities. Local authorities, in turn, too worried the arrest would create an embarrassing raucous moment for them, would release their leader, only to be arrested a few months later, setting off the story of repetitive cycles of negotiation and conflict all over again. This, in the case of the Colonia Progreso, would result in the eventual subdivision of land into small plots, the building of houses, and the regularization of titles; lack of basic services and abuse from local police would then become the new flashpoints in the conflict. the phenomenon of *paracaidismo* in Mexico.<sup>520</sup>

### ***The invasion of La Laja and the Emergence of Informality***

The late 1950s saw the eruption of social unrest and the advent of land wars on the hillsides of Acapulco's amphitheater. There were crucial ties between the local press and the organization of tenement movements that eventually spilled over onto land invasions. Alba Estrada Castañón argues that the end result, the invasion of lands in the "Barranca de la Laja," had its origins in a process that started when the director of the newspaper *La Verdad*, Ignacio de la Hoya, along with

---

<sup>520</sup> *Paracaidismo* (literally 'parachutism') referred to the problem of illegal, urban land invasions. *Paracaidistas* meant urban squatters for administrative officials who defined the problem, at first, in negative terms, but gradually started neutralizing its connotations.

his editor-in-chief, Pedro Huerta Castillo, kicked off a campaign that culminated with the foundation of the Unión Inquilinaria de Acapulco, a tenant union led by Isidoro Vergara who would then be displaced by López Cisneros when he became the undisputable leader of the colonos. *La Verdad* eventually ended up involved in the organization of tenants, searching for lands to settle, at first legally. But this generated a strong reaction from several forces in the port. Reporters of *La Verdad* soon clashed with Fraccionadoras and police forces in January of 1958. Alfredo López Cisneros was arrested, and many other reporters were harassed.<sup>521</sup>

One the eve of land invasions, in the summer of 1957 the Unión Inquilinaria de Acapulco gained a forceful voice in an assembly organized by *La Verdad* (future squatter leaders served as reporters for the newspaper at the time) and grassroots movements like the Comité de Lucha contra la Carestía de la Vida and the Comité de Defensa del Patrimonio Municipal de Acapulco. Moreover, the successful founding of the Colonia Progreso the previous decade, after an occupation of empty lands by several squatters, made plausible the invasion of new areas. The abrupt strategic shift in 1957 took place with this precedent in mind; it intensified tenant protests, making it easier for movements to take more radical steps in the late 1950s.

There was an abrupt strategic shift in 1957 that took place with this precedent in mind; it intensified tenant protests, making it easier for movements to take more radical steps in the late 1950s. After a heated discussion at the assembly it was finally resolved that due to high rents, the lack of running water and electricity, and the general insalubrious conditions inside crowded barrios, the best solution would be to envisage new alternatives to escape the suffocating situation of tenants in in Acapulco's old barrios.<sup>522</sup> Moreover, the successful founding of the Colonia

---

<sup>521</sup> For examples of the local press, specifically, *La Verdad* clashing with the Fraccionadora Mozimba and several economic associations organized around the tourism industry over the organization of workers and colonos see, AGN, Fondo Presidentes ARC, 542.1/1214 January 1958; *El movimiento anticaballerista: Guerrero 1960: crónica de un conflicto* (Universidad Autónoma de Guerrero, 2001), pp. 53-55.

<sup>522</sup> Enrique Díaz Clavel, *El Rey Lopitos*, (Acapulco, Mex: Comisión Editorial Municipal, 1997), 8-11.

Progreso the previous decade, its foundation placed on a fast track when several squatters occupied empty lands, made plausible the invasion of new areas that would eventually bring urban planners, services and regularization. The occupation and founding of Colonia Progreso had been indeed a harbinger of the first wave of uncontrolled land invasions (1957-1961) coinciding with the “civic revolt.” Moreover, Acapulco’s tenant protesters belonged to the same generation of future *paracaidistas* who carried out land invasions.

A certain political awakening gradually took hold of many of the service workers as they moved through Acapulco’s economy. Small vignettes of migrants and squatter leaders, when pieced together, begin to reveal how, many service workers had already been circulating through Acapulco’s geography of service industries, moving from one precarious job to the other, back and forth between the informal and formal cities, long since before they decided to launch land invasions.

Alfredo López Cisneros, for instance, came from a peasant family in Ometepec and arrived in Acapulco in the mid-1940s. Naturally, a thick cocoon of myths surrounds the life of “Rey Lopitos” as he came to be known. While working as a waiter and later as a reporter for *La Verdad*, López Cisneros managed to organize a large group of families in a number of assemblies that led to the invasion of the Barranca de La Laja in 1958. From then onwards he consolidated and expanded the movement of *colonos* amassing substantial power under semiautonomous settlements that expanded to almost thirty different associations of *colonias populares*. In the late 1950s López Cisneros confronted Guerrero’s authorities; as a militant of the popular sector of the PRI, he constantly harassed his party peers, municipal presidents, and police officials. Throughout the 1950s and 1960s he launched intermittent attacks against the Chief of the Judicial Police, while simultaneously forging alliances with the army and the Preventative Police. Under the cloak of La Laja’s semiautonomy, members of this weak security corporation aided the leader’s union by

deserting and joining the shadow policing groups that protected squatters and vigilantes alike. In the later stages of his high political career he became the *Síndico Procurador* of Acapulco in 1965,<sup>523</sup> cementing a dense network of informal political alliances that certainly outmatched the power of the short-lived municipal presidents of such a strategic port.

Unfortunately, no sociological studies of the urban poor and the organization of squatter settlements were carried out during those years in Acapulco. Yet the trajectories of rural migrants and tenants-turned-squatters can be partially recovered through different sources. It is possible to learn about the occupation of some squatters thanks to the DFS interviews of several defectors who had been shoe shiners, carpenters, builders, street vendors, and other low skilled workers in the burgeoning hotel and construction industry. There is, for instance, an interview with a tailor and other defectors who complained about López Cisneros's imposition of *cuotas* in the settlements.<sup>524</sup> Moreover, groups of women, market vendors, and schoolteachers were part of the invasion's frontlines joining leaders from rural areas.

Other vignettes of rural migrants appear in reports focusing on their respective judicial cases. This was the case of Ezequiel García Galeana who had been a day laborer in Tierra Blanca, San Luis Acatlán in the Costa Chica and migrated to Acapulco in 1947. There he worked in the maintenance of a lot of land belonging to a *fraccionamiento*. Soon he began to have problems with

---

<sup>523</sup> He acquired the title of *Síndico Procurador* in 1965. A rough translation might be City Attorney, but he never handled any legal matters in the port other than those pertaining to land invasions. Other documents refer to his political status as the *Regidor de Hacienda del Ayuntamiento de Acapulco* or *Síndico Municipal*, which are equally ambiguous and perhaps overlapping political titles. Indeed, analyzing the consequences of the ambiguity of these titles in the *ayuntamiento* is more revealing for the nature of the Mexican political system than an exercise making clear sense of what the concrete *functions were (if any) of the Síndico Procurador*.

<sup>524</sup> See "Comunismo en el Edo. De Guerrero" AGN, DFS Alfredo López Cisneros, Public Version, 100-10-3-958 H-1-6, L-1 (February 1958). At this stage, Mexican intelligence reports are plagued by Cold War paranoia. For intelligence analysts, *Paracaidismo* equaled communism in the mid and late 1950s. It is worth noting how, in the course of a few months, the tone and analytical nature of reports became more refined, nuanced, and informed as *paracaidismo* began to be coterminous with the analytical boundaries of marginality and the urban poor. This clearly signaled a learning process taking place in intelligence bureaucracies. The analysis of *colonias populares*, however, suffered an abrupt reversal in tone, lapsing back to more dangerous, informed, and paranoid reports, with the first events in 1967 which marked the beginning of the "dirty war" in Guerrero.

a neighboring landowner and to protect himself Galeana decided to join the increasingly suburbanized *ejido* of La Garita and become member of the National Peasant Confederation (CNC-Conferación Nacional Campesina), and the PRI. Parenthetically, this also gives us a glimpse of the role of *ejidatarios* and CNC members in the suburbanization of their own lands. Meanwhile in 1954 he began to organize fortnightly assemblies in houses where they would discuss how to manage bureaucratic processes when dealing with “authorities from the center.” He formed a union of *colonos*, received a number of payments for bureaucratic expenses, and finally invaded the Barranca de los Limones. To avoid many orders of arrest, the partisan use of ambiguous documents, and pending judicial processes, Galeana sought protection in López Cisneros’ unions and in patrons from the local PRI.<sup>525</sup>

The invasion of the Barranca de La Laja in 1958 was the final outcome of this abrupt transformation in the political consciousness of tenants.<sup>526</sup> The Unión Inquilinaria de Acapulco had requested the lands of the Barranca de La Laja, but its owner, Manuel Suárez, had refused, showing his land titles allegedly bought from the descendants of Ignacio Comonfort who in turn had bought those lands when he served as customs administrator. The associations and the reporters and journalists from *La Verdad* and many associations reject Suárez’s arguments and start to mobilize. Unlike the Colonia Progreso ten years before, what made the invasion of La Laja so explosive was its sheer size, added to the fact that at the time of the invasion those lands were already being disputed among many landholders, including the family of Manuel Suárez, urban squatters, and *ejidatarios*. In early January of 1958, one of the squatters told a journalist that 300

---

<sup>525</sup> Investigación practicada acerca de los antecedentes y actividades del Sr. Ezequiel García Galeana. Agent Eliseo Reina Castro to DFS Director Manuel Rangel Escamilla, AGN, DFS Alfredo López Cisneros, Public Version, 100-10-20-61, H-69-72 (5 Jan, 1961), 24.

<sup>526</sup> For an interesting discussion of the myths and different accounts surrounding the foundation of La Laja and the series of events that preceded the invasion see Andrew J. Sackett’s, “The Making of Acapulco: People, Land and the State in the Development of the Mexican Riviera, 1927-1973” (PhD diss., Yale University, 2009) 166-198. Unfortunately, he had no access to DFS records, but he imaginatively weaved local accounts like that of Díaz Clavel, local newspaper reports, and, most importantly, a series of useful interviews he carried out in Acapulco with residents. This aspect of Sackett’s work has been completely forgotten in the literature on tourism in Mexico and Acapulco.

tenements led by López Cisneros invaded those lands, taking with them construction materials, their clothes and house utensils; they had no intention to leave. Within two months of the first invasion, there were around 5,000 colonos already settled from which many other leaders emerged and began to invade other lands and neighborhoods.<sup>527</sup>

### ***The Consolidation of the Informal City Popular Politics, Land Wars, and Guerrero's 'Revuelta Cívica,' 1957-1961***

Social movements stirred Acapulco and other cities and towns in Guerrero in the late 1950s. On the city's surface, abrupt reconfigurations set off endless political crises, ill-fated municipal governments, and popular protests; underneath were the deep rumblings of a city and its changing population, urban space, and economic structure.

Then there was Governor Caballero Aburto (1957-1961). He was one of those resounding disasters in the political world of the late 1950s; he centralized power, disorderly, in Guerrero and promoted aggressive fiscal modernization. He provoked brutal competition among local and federal *camarillas* tied to Guerrero, thus making his tenure highly unstable, rocking him violently as he clung desperately to the governorship. Then there was his family and his political enemies. He filled each and every government position with a never-ending source of family members and loyal patrons who crowded out his governorship. Even though such informal relations were certainly tolerated, at times even encouraged by many local governments in Mexico, what eventually made the entire situation unsustainable in Guerrero was the rise of a new *camarilla* impinging on another, on competing political networks at the regional and federal levels. The governor's rising political group eventually clashed with Acapulco's former municipal president, Donato Miranda Fonseca, who was to become the influential Secretary of the President's office

---

<sup>527</sup> Gomezjara, *Bonapartismo*, pp. 210-17. For other leaders see, for instance, Antonio Diosdado Mendoza, Ramiro Diosdado, Anacleto Lagunas Ocampo; Colonia El Jardín leader. AGN, DFS-ALC, Versión Pública ALC, pp. 201, 216.

during López Mateos administration (1958-1964). Miranda Fonseca would launch intermittent political attacks against Caballero Aburto and the incoming Municipal President of Acapulco, Jorge Joseph Piedra, who in turn opposed both Caballero Aburto and Miranda Fonseca, eventually provoking an all-out confrontation among the Municipal President of Acapulco, the Governor of Guerrero, and the powerful Secretary of the President's Office. The story of Caballero Aburto, moreover, unfolded at a particular juncture in time in the late 1950s when state centralization precipitated the demise of powerful, longstanding fiefdoms like that of Gonzalo N. Santos in San Luis Potosí. Guerreros's, however, was an ill-fated attempt at consolidating a fiefdom.

In Acapulco, the flailing governor, to gain some firm footing, would cast up into the air vast political nets, of family members, clients, and patrons, only to be dragged around by the force of his own hurl. His dragnet seemed to soar higher and higher, in wider circles, until every social movement became entangled, trapped, and affected by his staggering moves. During the winter of 1960 the capital's press, most notably the *Diario de México*, attacked the Caballero family for alleged nepotism and official graft, drafting a list of 37 family members controlling key areas in the government of Guerrero, including the general's brother who was in charge of collecting taxes and rent payments in Acapulco as the lists of defaulting tenants and outstanding rents in Acapulco grew by the day in the pages of Guerrero's *Periódico Oficial*. But they promoted aggressive land invasions by *fraccionadoras* in the outskirts of the tourist city.<sup>528</sup>

Rivalries between entrepreneurs and the Aburto's family also came to a head. The businessman and great speculator, Manuel Suárez, barged in on the Zacatosa housing complex for military members and violently expelled military families with peasants, gunmen, and colonos. The multiple land invasion prompted the army to send a letter of complaint to the president.<sup>529</sup>

---

<sup>528</sup> José C. Gutiérrez Galindo, *Y el pueblo se puso de pie. La verdad sobre el caso Guerrero* (México: Editorial Logos, 1961) 113-121.

<sup>529</sup> AGN, Fondo Presidentes, ARC, 1 404.11/936, Captain Gonzalo Retana Guevara, President of the Fraccionamiento Acapulco de la Industria Militar febrero 29 1956 to President Adolfo Ruiz Cortines;

Melquiades Ibares, moreover, returned to invade these lands, once more, with another group of colonos and landless actors in the 1950s. The situation in Acapulco was spiraling out of control under Aburto's governorship.

The governor was in no time engulfed by a wave of popular mobilization; a multiclass alliance of teachers, workers, and students, called the Asociación Cívica Guerrerense, who swept unstoppable across Guerrero, followed by a receding backwash of political violence, then a higher tide of popular mobilization. In Acapulco, under the direction of the local press and a popular coalition in the city, these social movements formed the backbone of urban popular mobilization unfolding in tandem with Guerrero's institutional crisis between 1960 and 1961.<sup>530</sup> This tumultuous period in Acapulco and Guerrero was called the *revuelta cívica* (1958-1961) that ended with the invocation of the National Senate's faculty to dissolve local state powers, leading to the fall of Governor Raúl Caballero Aburto in 1961.

The informal city in Acapulco became consolidated in this chaotic context. Government officials and family members spun a vicious cycle of informal land policies from which Caballero Aburto's nascent *camarilla* could profit. While the governor's brother failed to put a cap on landlords' speculation in rent fees, which in turn spurred grassroots movements and tenant protests, Caballero Aburto turned a blind eye to land invasions against difficult landowners like Manuel Suárez in Acapulco. Meanwhile, the port's municipal president, Jorge Joseph Piedra, who also represented a political elite of local families in Acapulco of American descent, worked to broaden his popular base by incorporating new *colonias* and encouraging migrants to occupy new lands.

Popular politics strengthened the role of service workers in making the rising informal city indispensable, politically and economically speaking, from the tourist city in Acapulco. At this particular juncture land wars politicized the migrant poor and service workers in Acapulco;

---

<sup>530</sup> Estrada Castañón, El movimiento anticaballerista, 41-43.

squatter settlements, became firmly entrenchment. Two years after the invasion of La Laja in 1958, the creation of a temporary political vacuum in Guerrero, owing much to the fierce competition among political factions at the municipal and national levels, allowed for the emergence of popular mobilization, and the intensification of urban land wars in Acapulco. During the “civic revolt” López Cisneros harnessed heterogeneous movements and managed to carve a space in the bay’s hillsides.

Jorge Joseph Piedra created the Barrio Regeneración, and according to his political calculations, it would act as a counterbalance to La Laja.<sup>531</sup> But he only ended up politicizing residents in La Laja even more as they temporarily sided with Cabellero Aburto’s political faction to mobilize popular support against yet another bloc of *colonias populares* and squatter settlements backed by Joseph’s *ayuntamiento*. This fierce competition among factions soon led to a spate of land invasions followed by evictions, and new invasions until it became a spiraling cycle. This was the case of the ill-fated occupants of the lands of Puerto Marqués who were trapped in a multiple tug of war of invasions, counter invasions, and evictions between the army, ranchers, squatters, and the alleged owner of the lands, Melchor Perusquía, founder of Ciudad Satélite in Mexico and former president of the influential Junta Federal de Mejoras Materiales.<sup>532</sup> The political scandal generated after the invasion of those lands became one of the reasons for the fall of Jorge Joseph, who also left a political vacuum in Acapulco when he left for Mexico City to defend his permanence in Acapulco. He never returned to office.

Many squatter movements were drawn into the wave of popular protest in Acapulco as López Cisneros and other leaders soon fell to the patronage networks of Caballero Aburto’s extended family. Immersed in a context of social mobilization and land wars, the new residents of

---

<sup>531</sup> Memorandum, AGN, DFS Alfredo López Cisneros, Public Version, 100-10-1-60, L-3 H-280 (Oct 1960).

<sup>532</sup> Emilio Vázquez Garzón. *El ciudadano Jorge Joseph* (México: author’s edition, 1962), 50-55; Gomezjara, *Bonapartismo*, 195-197.

La Laja underwent a learning process that carefully combined radical popular protest with careful negotiations. This effervescence was reflected in the way residents dealt with the police and state officials. In the midst of social unrest, an engineer, allegedly sent by La Laja's landowner to carry out topographic studies, arrived with a large group of armed policemen. They soon found themselves hemmed in by four-hundred women from markets with *machetes* and *varillas*, one of the women telling them that if they came back "they would exit on a stretcher." They came back several times to try and arrest the leaders of La Laja but angry crowds and a series of riots prevented them from doing so. The Judicial and Preventative police forces never entered again after this summer of social unrest.<sup>533</sup>

Residents employed radical tactics like the extensive use of crowds to stop policemen from entering La Laja, thus dissuading the Judicial Police from trying to evict settlers. When, a couple of months after the invasion, a member of the Judicial Police had provocatively entered with a group of armed policemen, eviction order in hand, a gathering angry crowd surrounded and tied two officials to a tree, threatening them with lynching if they remained. Still, such "extralegal" tactics were not enough. The right to own a lot of land was intimately connected with the demand for urban rights and the transcendence of what Brodwyn Fischer has aptly called the barrier of "paper poverty." The multiplication of judicial cases concerning land invaders signaled the importance of documents and citizen status for guaranteeing their permanence in recently invaded lands. There were reports about a contingent from La Laja protesting at a polling station in Chilpancingo after being barred from voting for not having documents and a paper ballot. Officials mentioned that "*la calidad de paracaidistas*" of a large number of people had created problems at the polling station.<sup>534</sup> This led López Cisneros to intervene and mediate between electoral

---

<sup>533</sup> Info. Sobre el Edo. de Guerrero, AGN-DFS, 100-10-1-61, L-8 H-202, 234.

<sup>534</sup> AGN, DFS Alfredo López Cisneros, Public Version, 100-10-1-958 L-1 H-11(July 1958).

representatives and residents from Acapulco. For the “rights-poor,” Fischer argues, “who lacked such legal credentials, demands for documentation only reinforced their status as subcitizens.”<sup>535</sup> Hence the informal acquisition of land was followed by an intensive pursuit of and demand for credentials, badges, among other legal documents, which facilitated the legal distribution of services and provided residents with a powerful shield against a campaign of harassment coming from the police forces and antagonistic local officials during the Civic Revolt. For this reason, *lajeños* celebrated what they saw as a resounding success when a judge in Mexico City issued an *amparo* protecting the leaders of *colonos*.<sup>536</sup> This began a slow formalization of land tenure in these recently invaded areas.

The political vacuum, combined with a revival of demands for municipal autonomy in Guerrero’s political culture, provided residents of the informal city with the opportunity to carve out a political space that anchored them to what was becoming by then a situation of semi autonomy in recently formed settlements. The political polarization of the squatter movement, and its manipulation by competing political factions, was short-lived; however, the tactics of popular protest learnt during that period of social effervescence proved to be a long-lasting headache for administrative officials in charge of weak and volatile patron-client relations. López Cisneros had harnessed the civic revolt to further his interests and those of his movement.

### ***The Informal City and its ties to the Service Sector and the Tourist City***

A series of overarching formal structures of labor existed in the tourism industry: the private (namely, the hotel and food industry) and the public sectors (namely, the local government and the JFMM), and a mixture of both in the transport industry. Connecting both was what modern-day scholars have referred to as an *economía de traspatio*, or a backyard economy of

---

<sup>535</sup> Fischer, *A Poverty of Rights*, 186-195.

<sup>536</sup> Información sobre el Edo. De Guerrero, AGN-DFS, 100-10-1-61, L-8, H-198 (Aug 1961).

service workers who worked in the agricultural economy, especially in the production of copra, fishing and farming, and the cattle ranching, meat industry, and some chains of the hotel food supply, a small belt of economic activities that surrounded the cluster of service industries in Acapulco, but that represented a large proportion of the active working population. Given the seasonal nature of the tourism economy, most workers divided their time between agricultural activities and services.<sup>537</sup>

Many migrants from nearby regions had recently arrived in the port, attracted by new opportunities in Acapulco. Without cutting their ties to rural regions, they eventually joined Acapulco's economy; a rising service sector strung by family networks that were firmly tied to the rural economy of Guerrero's jagged highlands and coastal lowlands. The clearest examples of laborers of this "backyard economy" are the communities of fishermen and coconut growers that have been closely analyzed in sociological, journalistic, economic, and ethnographic accounts by writers as dissimilar as the 1940s economist, Moisés de la Peña, the journalists of the *National Geographic*, Francisco Gómezjara, Ricardo Garibay, and Armando Bartra.

Some, like Gómezjara, have documented the violent displacement of communities of fishermen and coconut growers in Puerto Marqués and Barra Vieja in the late 1960s and, together with Bartra, they have documented how rising tensions within the copra (coconut oil) economy in the surrounding areas of Acapulco eventually led to the emergence of guerrillas in the Costa Grande, especially the armed movement led by the union leader and schoolteacher, Genaro Vázquez Rojas.

Gómezjara had already noticed the *economía de traspatio* in action. In 1972 there were 11,400 thousand people who worked for hotels, restaurants, and bars. But the vast majority of this

---

<sup>537</sup> Rebecca Torres, "The Linkages between Tourism and Agriculture in Mexico," *Annals of Tourism Research*, Vol. 30, No. 3, pp. 546–566, 2003.

group of service workers had a space reserved for “la pesca rudimentaria, la carga y descarga del tráfico marítimo, el manejo de lanchas para la pesca deportiva o los paseos marinos, el trabajo en las obras de construcción y la incipiente industria aceitera.” Many were also involved in the “pequeño comercio ambulante” and the “ínfimos empleos municipales;” “sus condiciones de vida son tan precarias,” he noted, “que se confunden con los que carecen empleo.”<sup>538</sup>

Even within Acapulco’s labor structure, where the boundaries between “formality” and “informality” were tenuous at best, there were still marked gradations of marginality and precarious work and forms of living. At the top were the restaurant and hotel workers, especially those working for the affluent hotels and restaurants, as described by the manager of Las Brisas in a detailed description of a major restructuring in the hotel’s staffing, hiring, and training practices.<sup>539</sup> Then came those who worked for smaller restaurants, hotels, and inns along with construction workers, who went through deep changes when the hotel industry suffered major restructuring, from smaller and individual hotel firms to hotel chain companies. Slightly below came the construction workers, the *lancheros*, the stevedores for cruise ships, market vendors and formal vendors employed by the municipal government or the JFMM; then gardeners, beach and street cleaners composed of families, children, and mostly women in all sorts of domestic services as well as the cleaning activities of beaches and hotels. Then at the bottom, fishermen and informal vendors at markets, streets, and beaches; and at the bottom a growing sector in the censuses that is marked as permanently “desocupados.”

The following stories give life to this labor structure by crafting a series of vignettes of service workers who circulated through the city. The stories have been pieced together from a series of documents, published and unpublished sources, etc. Acapulco, for instance, makes its

---

<sup>538</sup> Gomezjara, Bonapartismo y lucha campesina, p. 234.

<sup>539</sup> AGN-Fondo Presidentes- ARC, Hotel Caribe protesta sobre contrato de trabajo. Empleados Hotel Pacífico ARC 1 432/543; Brady clashed with the Culinary worker’s Union, p. 175.

cameo appearance in Oscar Lewis's 1961 book, *The Children of Sánchez*. One of the siblings in the Sánchez family, the youngest, Martha, takes the reader in a closing-narrative detour. The story branches out of Mexico City with Martha spontaneously migrating to Acapulco, taking the only night bus available at the station with her three children; on the road she meets a boy, fleeing—like her—from an oppressive family situation. Both migrated to Acapulco knowing no one there and hoping to find a job in a hotel or a restaurant. On the bus she ends up meeting the older Baltasar, a butcher from Acapulco, with whom she eventually remakes her life after a violent and suffocating story with her previous partner, Crispín, in Mexico City.

Interregional mobility with very few possibilities for socioeconomic mobility emerges as a marker in the story. Martha, solitary, pragmatic, and luckless, narrates her life in Acapulco in resignation as she remakes her life in Acapulco with Baltasar. Baltasar, together with hundreds of other migrants, was one of those itinerant workers in the service economy who moved constantly in an uncertain pursuit for better opportunities. When Martha met him, Baltasar seemed to be moving from the farthest margins of Acapulco and Guerrero's informal economy to a more stable low-paid job that, geographically speaking, was highly unstable nonetheless. It entailed working intermittently as a truck driver and a butcher. Baltasar had been trucking around Acapulco but had had no fixed place or home to live in; often, he would eat on the road and spend most nights in his truck. "He was adventuring at that time," noted Martha, upon migrating to Acapulco from Mexico City. Thereafter, they decided to immediately move in to his uncle's house with her three girls. Baltasar temporarily settled with her after having drifted from one low-paid job to another.

His had been the life of a lonesome drifter. Born to a family on the move, drifting from one town to the next along the trodden paths of a rising tourism economy between Cuernavaca and Acapulco. As Baltasar moved to many nearby towns and cities with his family, they languished in an informal economy that would everyday sputter itinerant lives, by the thousands, of vendors,

artisans, muleteers and all sorts of migrants in the region who circulated constantly, looking for new opportunities as the regional pole of Acapulco became consolidated and began to spread its influence to many different small towns and cities that began to cater the tourist resort. “Whenever they went, his mother would set up a little food stand in a park, and he and his father would sell newspapers.” He worked from the time he could remember, moving back and forth between Acapulco and many other towns and cities in the region, taking care of his younger siblings, then at age 7 “selling papers, hauling water, catching fish, making sandals, and anything his parents wanted him to do.”<sup>540</sup>

In this life story, suspended in a timeless moment of poverty, as narrated by Martha, Baltasar eventually returned to Acapulco and stayed there; his parents went back to Cuernavaca and left him behind with his aunt. They too would eventually abandon him probably at age 9, when Acapulco’s rising tourism economy demanded a huge amount of meat and crops. The outskirts of Acapulco saw a boom in cattle ranching and food crops in the 1940s. Baltasar was introduced to the tricks of the trade and was apprenticed to a butcher in the mornings, to a baker in the evenings, and together with hundreds of other migrants began to cater a rising city. “He worked all day, washing and drying cow’s intestines and stomachs and carrying the waste to the garbage dump.” At 12 he was eventually orphaned, thrown out of the house where he had been temporarily living. He got a job at the slaughterhouse for fifty *centavos* a day:<sup>541</sup>

They...gave him tripe, which he cleaned and dried and ate when he had no money. He slept on the beach or on hotel steps with other boys. They would catch fish and cook it on the beach and stretch out for the night, covered with newspaper. He would wash his own shirt and pants, spread them out on a hot stone, and bathe in the ocean while they were drying.

---

<sup>540</sup> This whole section is based on Oscar Lewis’s pioneering ethnographical work on a single family in Mexico City. Oscar Lewis, *The Children of Sánchez: Autobiography of a Mexican Family* (New York: Random House; Vintage, 1961), pp. 443-477.

<sup>541</sup> Lewis, *The Children of Sánchez* (1961), pp. 458-60.

“It was a sad life,” Martha remarked. Abandoned and orphaned, Baltasar had no one left to provide for and take care of him. Migration between Mexico City and Acapulco then becomes entangled with the life of Martha and Baltasar as they live temporarily in Acapulco but eventually leave for Mexico City. Roles are inverted: Baltasar, the initial “spoke,” who helps the “hub,” the new migrant, navigate Acapulco ends up himself becoming the “hub” when she takes him back to Mexico City and helps him get a job there and navigate the exploding metropolis. But instead of improving, their story closes, fatefully, in the middle of a downward spiral as both their lives significantly deteriorate once they are back in Mexico City. As Lewis closes the last pages of his ethnography, Martha ends her story reminiscing nostalgically of Acapulco; everything in Mexico City seems to be getting worse for both Martha and Baltasar as their story of narrowing life horizons is drawn, climactically, to a hapless end.<sup>542</sup>

Maybe we should go back to Acapulco. Baltasar could work in the slaughterhouse and give me money and meat again. There he could not depend upon my father. He would know that if he didn’t give me money, we wouldn’t eat. There, after all, his only vice was drinking. He understands his own race of people and native land and would be confident once more. There, at least I won’t have to see all the trouble and suffering and quarreling of my family. This is what makes me ill. Perhaps I will stop having bad dreams about me and the girls being cut up and quartered and Baltasar being shot. Here, when I lie down at night, I feel as though I will not rise any more in the morning. If I live through this next birth, maybe we should go back to Acapulco. I felt more peaceful there.

The ethnography of the Sánchez family that popularized the theory of the “Culture of Poverty” also left its mark in Acapulco. The informal city in the coastal city began to be linked to Mexico’s exploding metropolis in the Valley of Mexico through stories of families migrating back and forth between both cities. In Acapulco, tracing the movement of migrants and service workers through the city shows how new spaces and commercial activities appeared with this very

---

<sup>542</sup> Lewis, *The Children of Sánchez* (1961), 477.

movement. Markets, beaches, the shore, and the waterfront were all shaped and reshaped alongside the changing shape and economic purpose of Acapulco which began to revolve around of the beach and urban markets in a growing tourist city.

During the 1940s, a new market “El Parazal” was built on top of what used to be the Mesón Fernández, a point of convergence in the old core of the city for many muleteers and their horses, artisans, and merchants who were tied to the Spanish Fernández merchant house. Many of them, especially handicraft artisans, merchants, and street vendors, scattered along the main streets of the *old barrios* were relocated to the new facilities created by the Junta federal and Guerrero’s Governor Catalán Calvo (1941-45). The Municipal Market slowly turned into a market primarily for tourism consumption. Simultaneously, Acapulco’s central market and the market of La Progreso were created in the 1960s.<sup>543</sup>

Regulating markets was indeed one of the successful endeavors carried out by the Junta, partly because they accelerated a process of centralization already taking place in Acapulco’s economic activities and marketplaces. Yet the Junta never expected to turn markets into the binding ties between the slum tenements in the *old barrios*, the growing informal city on the hillsides, and the informal vending economy on the beach. It became a huge marketplace, crossing both the formal and the informal cities, that gave protection to service workers and the migrant poor. Hence it comes as no surprise that many groups of women and market vendors participated in the *juntas vecinales* and the associations that began to prop up in the slum tenements in the *old barrios*, eventually joining the land invasion’s frontlines along with journalists, schoolteachers, and leaders from suburbanized rural areas.

---

<sup>543</sup> AGN, DFS Alfredo López Cisneros, Public Version, “Estado de Guerrero” 100-10-1-65 L19, July 7, 1965, p. 177; Anituy Rebollo Aberdi, “Las Calles de Acapulco III,” *El Sur*, 22 August 2013.

The port's forefront became highly coveted as the shoreline was reinvented. Its purpose changed. Workers used to control many beach spaces since they served as important passageways for commerce and navigation. Theirs was an economy which had thrived in the era of steam and coal throughout the nineteenth century. Yet in the 1940s, beaches were transformed and modernized in Acapulco, sparking off intense conflicts. Beaches were transformed from a transit point between the sea and the port to a static space of leisure; with this change, came a deep readjustment of economic activities and social relations. From this change henceforth, the question of who had the right to access the beach, either through work or leisure, was temporarily defined by the state. The Junta Federal strived hopelessly to regulate all kinds of services and activities in a space that had traditionally been shaped by stevedores, informal stands owners, fishermen, boatmen, market vendors, and all kinds of sellers who had been catering to travelers swept into the port's shores by streams of commerce and navigation.

“By regulating commercial activity on the beach,” Sackett argues, “the Junta Federal could control access to the market.”<sup>544</sup> In his studies of Acapulco he traces the stories of vendors in Caletilla and how their stands, having been there for many years, underwent failed processes of formalization as the Junta moved them around, clumsily, from one place to another, until a complex community of vendors at the beach disintegrated.<sup>545</sup>

Interestingly, however, research in the archives has brought to light a more nuanced picture. Beach vendors were highly active in trying to dispute the commercial activities. At some point they presented a collective amparo against the action of the Junta federal de Mejoras Materiales.<sup>546</sup> Most, barring important sectors who were unfortunately displaced, ended up being

---

<sup>544</sup> Andrew Sackett, “Fun in Acapulco?: The Politics of Development on the Mexican Riviera,” in *Holiday in Mexico*, ed. Dina Berger et al. (Duke University Press, 2009), p. 168.

<sup>545</sup> Andrew Jonathan Sackett, “The Making of Acapulco: People, Land and the State in the Development of the Mexican Riviera, 1927-1973” (Ph.D., Yale University, 2009), p. 145.

<sup>546</sup> AGN, JFMM, Box 7, Exp. 102/120, Amparo de vendedores de ambulantes 1968.

employed by the Junta which shows that, not only did the Junta Federal try to regulate commercial activity on the beach, but also employed hundreds of service workers in Acapulco. This aspect has been overlooked by many historians. The Junta was also trying to regulate the labor market and became a huge source of employment for many migrants who were also residents in the informal city. The Junta Federal archives shows the several different trajectories of their employees, when they resigned, how much they earned, if they had holidays, and how they moved around in the city. It also shows that the Junta Federal was in charge of multiplying categories of service jobs: gardeners, “cobradores de sillitas, salvavidas, rastrilladores de playa, encargadas de baños, mozos,” and the list goes on. Most of them circulated from one job to the other, but very few show any kind of socioeconomic mobility. Juan Vielma and Caritino Cisneros, both categorized as “mozos,” are some examples. The latter earned 19 pesos a day and, first, was a gardener, then became a “rastrillador de playa,” moved around from one beach to the other, from Las Playas to Hornos and ending up in Caleta where many hotels like Hotel Caleta demanded beach services to the Junta. Yet he remained an employee of the Junta for many years, which is evidence that some jobs at the Junta were better paid than their less “formal” counterparts.<sup>547</sup>

In sum, the Junta moved around vendors, replaced informal stands, built markets, hired hundreds of workers, provided beach services to tourists and hotels, set up its formal businesses on the beach—it became a jack of all trades, at once, highly demanded and highly reviled by everyone. It tried to regulate the job market and commercial activities at the beach. But like any regulated urban space and marketplace, street vending, beaches, and markets, they all began to

---

<sup>547</sup> I need to revisit this section of the archive, since I only took very few rushed notes three years ago, so the information I have for the moment is incomplete. See AGN, Secretaría del Patrimonio, JFMM-Acapulco, Box 1 (Personal Campos-Gante) and Box 5 (Vargas Villagrano): Files, Caritino Cisneros and Juan Vielma. Both files detail their movement and employment history in the 1960s.

change organically responding less to regulations and plans and more to haphazard social arrangements that became the real motor completely redefining the carefully regulated job market and planned commercial space.

No matter how strenuous the efforts of city officials to regulate commercial activities on the beach, migrant workers would inevitably return to provide their informal services to eager beach goers in Acapulco. The Junta could not keep up with a huge demand for these multiple services, partly because the costs were too high.

In the end, the Junta lost an upward regulatory battle. Beaches began to be populated by informal service workers and visitors from all walks of life, socioeconomic classes, and backgrounds in North America. Barring some exclusive beaches like Caleta and Hornos—the morning and evening beaches respectively—it became “Mexico City on the beach.” By the late 1960s and early 1970s, as the city’s population exploded, these more traditional small-town beach vendors were replaced by thousands of migrants who began catering to mass tourism and its huge demand for multiple cheap services and products on the beach. Vendors were reinterpreted, through the lens of dependency theory, as a mass of unproductive urban poor. They turned into a “lacerating spectacle” in the words of a newspaper article quoted by Gomezjara, the dependentista par excellence who studied the ills of development in Acapulco and the Costa Grande from the 1930s to the 1970s. The newspaper article describes how at the beach:

Apenas instalado el turista frente al mar, comienza el desfile de vendedores: una pobre mujer ofrece ropa de playa y bikinis para nadar; muchos niños, pasta de tamarindo a diferentes precios, que parecen un regalo; otros collares que se fabrican con semillas de plantas silvestres de la región; hombres adultos, que bien podrían trabajar como productores, exhiben caparazones de armadillos como adornos, o bien erizos inflamados que la gente usa como mamparas; mendigos, ciegos o ancianos desvalidos, que imploran una caridad de lo que los bañistas ya no quieren comer... pero lo que más impresiona es un grupo de niños, no mayores de 6 años, que han formado una dizque orquesta a base de latas vacías como instrumentos de percusión o güiros que producen ríspidos sonidos, y otros más, esqueléticos y barrigones, que ofrecen contorsiones de vientre si se les regala un peso...

In the popular imagination of the late 1960s and 1970s, the sight of poor migrants and service workers, meandering back and forth along the beach, became problematic in the eyes of many sectors of society who began to see informality as unproductive. The beach, in the author's somewhat shortsighted perspective, appeared simply as a "lacerating spectacle" where vagrants and idle migrants came disguised as service workers: "en fin, una nutrida población de desocupados que disimulan su vagancia con el disfraz de vendedores de lo que en todo un día apenas les permitirá ganar lo indispensable para mal comer."<sup>548</sup> Yet a lot was overlooked by the author in the detailed description of this informal economy: namely, migrant workers managed to keep working there in the first place, while official authorities turned a blind eye to a growing informal market. By gaining access, many residents of Acapulco's informal city tied their social and political networks to a quintessential urban space, the beach, around which the entire city revolved. Henceforth, as Acapulco began to receive larger numbers of tourists from all socioeconomic levels, all seeking cheaper services on the beach, migrant workers created a marketplace and tethered beach consumption to an informal economy on which the tourist city became progressively dependent to be able to cater mass tourism successfully.

### ***The Informal City, the Creation of colonias populares, and their Links to Welfarism***

The narrative about poverty and informality was changing by the 1960s. Contrasting images of the "Two Acapulcos" were conjured by *National Geographic* in a 1964 issue on the tourist city. Many pictures accompany the text [See Image 15 below]: among them, the picture of a salesgirl napping by her postcard stand. It reads the following caption: "this little entrepreneur dramatizes the extremes of Acapulco life. Wealth flows around her like a bountiful sea, but on her

---

<sup>548</sup> Manuel Andraca Meza, "Lacerante espectáculo," *El Día*, Nov. 6 1975; Gomezjara, *Bonapartismo*, p. 235; "Los marginados de Acapulco", entrevista con José Agustín, "El LV", 78, 15 nov. 1973, p. vi.

island of poverty, pennies count.”<sup>549</sup> Yet the magazine still recognizes that “Acapulco’s present prosperity gives jobs and a better life to its residents,” and that is why many people stayed and decided to build on the *colonias populares* they had funded and partially regularized and which reporters were now visiting.

This latter point is crucial, and back then many observers often brought it up to temper down accounts that, undoubtedly, dramatized the life extremes in Acapulco. One should not forget that the city’s sudden prosperity gave, comparatively, better jobs and a better life to its residents, many of whom had escaped, after all, far more suffocating conditions in the countryside in Guerrero and in many other regions in Mexico. That is why people simply stayed in Acapulco. Not only did they stay but kept migrating to the port. Most stayed, deciding to fight for a place in the city instead of fleeing, looking for better opportunities somewhere else. Over time, this simple but crucial point has been overlooked by historians and other observers who often dramatize the extremes of city life in Acapulco, mostly for sensational purposes. “The Two Faces of Acapulco during the Golden Age,” historian Andrew Sackett called in a clear reference to *National Geographic*’s “The Two Acapulcos,” solely invoking the contrasts. The extremes were there no doubt. Yet new residents decided to stay in Acapulco regardless. Arguing the contrary, that people stayed because of the suffocating conditions of marginality; that people stayed because of a lack of housing and lack of municipal services such as paved streets, running water, or electricity, services that were intermittent at best, completely absent at the worst; arguing that migrants stayed in Acapulco because the cost of living was too high would be to invoke theories of the “culture of poverty,” somewhat masochistically, to justify a sensationalizing evaluation of Acapulco’s marginality when compared to other places in Mexico. A city of contrasts no doubt existed in Acapulco, but a city of contrasts on the international spotlight, which throws a distorted picture

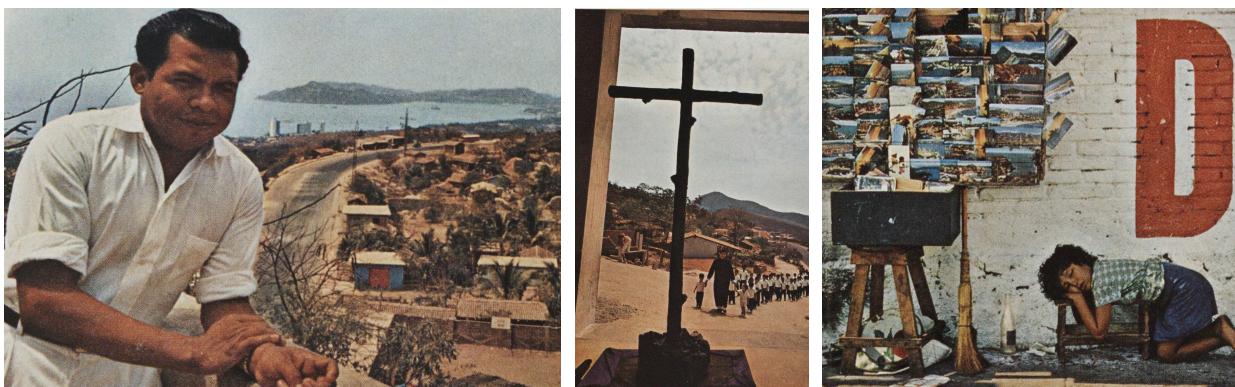
---

<sup>549</sup> James Cerruti, “The Two Acapulcos,” *The National Geographic Magazine*, December 1964, 126(6): 848-878.

the historian should not take at face value. It is then time to approach the city differently by answering a simple question: why did people migrate and stay in Acapulco regardless?

The answer is the informal welfare city in Acapulco. To understand the reasons why people stayed, I will explore what the imprint of welfarism was on this particular city and how it became a unique incentive for new migrants to remain in the informal city and work in the tourism economy. In a certain way, Acapulco had all the trappings of a welfare city. It possessed its internal logic rooted in Acapulco's new economy. It was a logic that responded to subtle changes in a port city trading with consumer services of leisure, tourism, and transportation. But the exigencies of its workforce, located in growing urban belts of marginality on the hillsides and the old town, added an even more complex dimension to the internal logic of this welfare city. No different to other towns that had suddenly become prosperous, Acapulco reflected the struggles of Mexico's welfare state in trying to incorporate a daily stream of rural migrants seeking a better paid job, the provision of services, protection, participation in the economy and political life.

**Image 15: Photographs of Acapulco's Informal City, published in *National Geographic*, December 1964**



Potographs of Thomas Nebbia in James Cerruti, "The Two Acapulcos," *National Geographic*, December 1964, 126(6): 848-878. The first picture (from left to right) shows Alfredo López Cisneros with the settlement of La Laja and the bay behind him. The second shows the Parish Priest Ángel Martínez trailed by line of oprhans on their way to the chapel. Salesgirl besides her postcards next to a wall with massive letters with the name o presidential candidate Gustavo Díaz Ordaz.

The reporters from the *National Geographic* managed to penetrate squatter settlements in La Laja and interview Father Ángel Martínez who served as mediator between the international

reporters and López Cisneros. The parish priest gave them a tour around the settlement, showing them schools, communal kitchens, and his recently created orphanage.

During the tour, Cold War fevers took over the *National Geographic* reporters, and at times it seemed they were solely interested in finding out whether or not communism was a problem in those settlements, asking the parish priest whether Communists were ever a problem there, to which the priest retorted with a short “Never!,” and upon reaching the heart of La Laja and meeting his parishioners and the orphanage he ran, the priest added, “the Communists had tried to come here three years ago, and señor López kept them out.” Leaders of *colonos* and community organizers were somewhat successful in presenting an outward image to the international press, a conservative image of efficient self-government and dexterous mediation between local authorities and poor neighborhoods. By contrast, Morlet Sutter, the Municipal President, was portrayed as a somber politician who smiled once and only when he showed the reporters the final stages of the construction of a municipal jail. When the reporters interviewed López Cisneros he noted: “we are only working people here—it is our rule— no loafers! I have spent six years— many demonstrations, many trips to Mexico City— to win us our right to legal ownership of our land.” Father Ángel Martínez would later explain to reporters that news had just arrived, the government was buying La Laja for six million pesos, saying that people could now hope to buy the land from the government; “and now La Laja will get electricity, drainage, paved streets.” La Laja, by 1964, had turned into a community of 7,500 squatters most of whom were unskilled hotel workers who earned the minimum wage of \$1.75 a day and housemaids who made \$16 to \$24 a month. Interestingly, the magazine noted that some of Acapulco’s citizens looked at this solution in a different light. “They fear it may encourage other squatters to come in from outside, from other Lajas, and aggravate unemployment problems.<sup>550</sup>

---

<sup>550</sup> James Cerruti, “The Two Acapulcos,” *The National Geographic Magazine*, December 1964, 126(6): 848-878.

Associations of colonos mediated the close relationship between the poor urban neighborhoods in Acapulco and the JFMM. Grassroots and local movements in Acapulco eventually gave way in the 1940s and 1950s into a full-blown federal state agency, the Junta Federal de Mejoras Materiales, that formed part of a broader, more centrally-managed “developmentalist” approach to public works and the distribution of basic services which went hand in hand with sweeping social reforms of public instruction and public health, and sometimes public morals. Basic services, for the permanent and temporary populations, were also matters of great concern for everyone. Debates over the scarcity of certain resources would often grip the local written press in cycles that sometimes lasted for weeks.

Water was one of them and perhaps the most important one as its distribution, provision purification, and drainage connected many other issues such as trash generation and collection, public health campaigns, fishing, beach management, and urban development in general. That is why to understand the workings of the welfare city on the poor urban belt of Acapulco, then one has to focus on water, since it’s the basic service that most illuminates all other challenges that both the informal and welfare cities faced.

Recurrent droughts would haunt the port recurrently during dry seasons. This problem was often interpreted from a historical perspective. In an article on Acapulco’s perennial water problems, the observations of travelers and friars who visited the port in the seventeenth century are brought up in 1955 to analyze the mid-twentieth century problem. Italian word traveler Francisco Gemelli Careri and Fray Domingo F. de Navarrete are mentioned. Their insights on water problems in Acapulco brought up:<sup>551</sup>

Si ambos viajeros levantaran la cabeza ¿qué reconocerían de aquel Acapulco de mediados y fines del siglo XVII? Para recrearse ha sido complementada su hermosa naturaleza; su población fija y flotante ha aumentado vertiginosamente. Pero...no han brotado nuevas,

---

<sup>551</sup> ARC, 111/4061 Sur No 1 “El agua, siempre el agua” “Panorama de Acapulco” 1955 (?).

fáciles y cercanas fuentes para calmar su sed./Acapulco ha tenido que ir en busca del agua, pasando sus propios contornos – hoy extendidos y desdibujados a fuerza del crecimiento— y a costos que sólo pueden justificar la necesidad de que siga siendo el más importante centro de turismo de la República Mexicana y uno de los más famosos del mundo. La lucha por el agua sigue adelante.

Providing services to residents in a city that had to cater a temporary population that tripled its permanent population was a serious challenge. The director of public works in Acapulco mentioned how water, its scarcity, drainage, and distribution, was one of the main problems in the port. Together with the JFMM, he attacked water problems from a public health perspective.<sup>552</sup> He noted that the

Saneamiento de las zonas comprendida en los Barrios denominados: La candelaria, la Pinzona, La Adobería...La Lima, Petaquillas...así como las colonias proletarias...Miguel Alemán, Aguas Blancas y progreso que son un verdadero foco de infección en todos sus aspectos, sobre todo el barrio llamado Tambuco por estar próximo a las playas Caleta y casi dentro del corazón de la ciudad.

Then distribution of water was a problem: the “Sistema de aguas potables... actualmente es uno de los más graves problemas,” noted the local official. Some areas had an intermittent service, some others would go on without water for twenty or thirty days, others would never receive any water, and one suspects that many of its residents would spend long journeys carrying it and transporting. It is in this gray area that the city depended completely on the associations of colonos to distribute water to the poorest neighborhoods. In this way the informal city largely contributed to the provision of basic services of an overstretched welfare city. The Unión de Colonos de Acapulco and López Cisneros were often asked to mediate water problems until they ended up in charge of distributing and managing water services in all of Acapulco’s colonias. When López

---

<sup>552</sup> ARC, 111/4061. See Description of the plan by Alducín on the cleaning of the *colonias proletarias* and *populares*. Memorandum from Director Municipal de Obras Públicas Ingeniero Armando Alducín Sisinieg to Secretario de la Presidencia José López Lira, Acapulco, April 20, 1954, 18-24 May, 1954 Image (CIMG6680, ARC 6).

Cisneros became a member of the municipal council, the JFMM delegated the power to distribute water to the leader of colonos and the union that supported him politically.<sup>553</sup>

Trash collection and drainage were another problem. Whenever it rained, rain would rush down the hillsides and the small winding streets of the old barrios and colonias proletarias would turn into flashfloods creating multiple rivers that carried over with them waste-water flows, human generated trash and the debris of urban development. It would all rush down the hillsides and end up being drained into the sea and the shore.

It became paramount to solve the problem of water, its drainage, purification, accessibility, and distribution; a never-never ending problem that called for a comprehensive strategy of aesthetic conservationism, public health, and welfarism. By solving the problem of water in Acapulco, early developers and engineers tried preserve the tourist industry while ensuring the wellbeing of its workforce through public works and public health campaigns.

Rectificación del Sistema de saneamiento comprendido en los servicios del drenaje de aguas pluviales y aguas negras que actualmente en la mayoría de los casos desembocan en las playas destinadas a balnearios, como en las de Caletilla, caleta, Hornitos, Hornos, etc., por lo que prácticamente se encuentran contaminadas, siendo desde luego un grave problema para la salud pública y que el día en que se conozca esta penosa situación no habrá quien vuelva a bañarse en estas hermosas playas.

This would often lead to health campaigns carried out recurrently in the port's poor urban areas. Many nurses would be sent to carry out campaigns to drain cesspools and give out vaccinations [See Image 16 below]. Marginality bred public health concerns and a subtle awareness of the natural environment. In the public imagination, marginality created eyesores in

---

<sup>553</sup> AGN, DFS Alfredo López Cisneros, Public Version, see 100-10-1-L-15, “El Ayuntamiento local comenzará mañana a distribuir agua por medio de pipas a los colonos que habitan en lugares adyacentes como Juan H. Alvarez, Juan R. Escudero, Hogar Moderno, Morelos y Aguas Blancas a petición de la UCA que encabeza ALC de la Colonia La Laja. Posteriormente se tenderán las redes las redes para abastecer de agua potable a estas colonias.” March 5, 1964 pp. 112; 100-10-1-L-24, “Grupos numerosos de persona han venido acudiendo a la JFMM para solicitar la introducción de agua potable a sus colonia pero hasta el momento no lo han logrado, ya que el titular de dicha Junta, Ernesto Serna Villareal, insiste en que sus gestiones las canalicen a través del líder de la UCA, Alfredo LC, Síndico Procurador del ayuntamiento, quien dice es el encargado de llevar acabo esos trabajos en las colonias y barrios de este puerto.” 10 May 1967, p. 301.

Acapulco, and since the bay's aesthetic conservation was paramount to preserving the tourist economy, then preserving the bay's natural beauty was equaled with alleviating poverty in the city. But the contradictions remained and were heightened as the town expanded into a coastal city.

**Image 16: Photograph of “Enfermeras Acapulco,” Acapulco, circa 1950**



“Enfermeras Acapulco,” circa 1950, Courtesy of the Archivo General de la Nación, Collection Hermanos Mayo

As has become evident, Alfredo López Cisneros and the Unión de Colonos de Acapulco had become key actors in the provision and distribution of basic services to the informal city. By 1967 he controlled thirty-five *colonias populares*, as well as many tourist and local businesses. López Cisneros had become a key actor in Acapulco’s informal economy and city, in the local popular sector of the ruling party, and in Guerrero’s politics; but the curse of public service finally caught up with his rising political career. The popular sector included him in the list of candidates for a seat in the National Congress, which sparked a violent reaction. Throughout the summer of 1967 the formation of a popular alliance of peasants, workers, and other *colonos* finally crystallized. This led to a series of mobilizations and popular protests against the union of *colonos*,

to which the *ayuntamiento* responded with yet another wave of demonstrations in support. This polarization created a swarm of rumors of assassinations in the port. Increasingly vocal groups associated to the tourist industry in Acapulco began to oppose the entire *ayuntamiento*, asking the local chamber to remove all of its members. Embarrassing affairs were revived. López Cisneros' criminal records were circulated in the local press, reminding party officials of the candidate's thuggish background. The assassination of the vice-president of the Hotel Owners Association in 1964, and the subsequent arrest of hotel workers, watchmen and bellboys, who lived in Acapulco's *colonias* under the influence of La Laja, was another issue brought up in the public sphere. Local and national *camarillas*, the Chamber of Commerce, the Hotel Owners Association, among others, began to attack what they saw as the complacency of state authorities in allowing the rise of squatter leaders that led to the taking over of the offices of the entire *ayuntamiento*. Fears of the final "paracaidización" of the municipality materialized in the eyes of these sectors of society when the PRI's popular sector sought to designate López Cisneros as candidate for the coming elections of municipal president.

The ultimate limitations of the movement of colonos within the informal city (its increasing personalization, lack of cohesion, heterogeneity, and clientelist dependence) finally splintered under the pressure of a powerful alliance against the *ayuntamiento*. López Cisneros's arbitrary rule and the discretionary distribution of services also fuelled dissent inside recently incorporated *colonias*, particularly in those that fell beyond La Laja's sphere of influence. The problem at El Jardín led to several confrontations between associations which then led to its militarization. An armed group from the UCA launched an invasion against Antonio Diosdado's union of *colonos*, who in turn were protected by a group of *pistoleros* from Petatlán. A commander of an Infantry Battallion arrived with a platoon of soldiers to mediate between the antagonistic groups. Shortly afterwards Heredia Merckley came back with the bad news that the bureaucratic procedures for

the legalization of lands had been prolonged for two more months in Mexico City. A similar clash took place in La Mira, but this time it involved a quixotic American entrepreneur, Hal B. Hayes, who built one of his atomic-proof houses on the cliffs. In El Jardín the municipal president told the leaders to avoid any confrontations, since a “spectacle in Acapulco [would] only show that *paracaidismo* continues to exist.” Meanwhile the tense stalemate continued until there was a riot that was easily controlled by the army.<sup>554</sup> These problems would quickly lead to the fraying of the informal city in Acapulco, at least of the city we came to know in the 1950s and 1960s.

### III **The Fraying of the Informal City** *Urban Displacements and Acapulco's Hinterland*

“One day I'll be riddled with bullets, but only by treason. No one can outmatch me” was one of the many headlines appearing in the summer of 1967 in a flurry of reports from local and national newspapers describing the assassination of Alfredo López Cisneros. Reporters and analysts described the bewildering assassination of “el Rey Lopitos.” The leader of the movement of *colonos* had “appeared out of nowhere to forge an empire” in the words of Mexico City’s *La Prensa*; he had built “an informal empire” that, through the provision of housing, basic services, and political organization, had come to dominate the ever-growing settlements of the working poor on the hillsides of “Acapulco’s other face.”<sup>555</sup>

A mass funeral followed. Like never before, the informal city appeared in a multitudinous funeral procession. *Colonos*, squatters, maids, bellboys, waiters, guards, beach and market vendors, gardeners and countless other service workers descended upon the port in a meandering procession of nearly twenty-five thousand people that progressed along the port’s main avenues.

---

<sup>554</sup> Unión Municipal de Colonos de Acapulco Gro., filial CNOP. AGN-DFS, 100-10-1-66 L-20 H-5, 10, 17, 28 (January –February 1966).

<sup>555</sup> Wilbert Torres Gutiérrez, “Presentía su trágica muerte el hombre que surgió de la nada para formar un imperio”, *La Prensa*, 6 August 1967.

The scene elicited the passionate responses of powerful allies of the *colonos*. One of Guerrero's former governors condemned the assassination; an influential lawyer and former attorney called the leader of *colonos* a “modern Robin Hood,” a “champion” of the urban poor worthy of a monument, which, in the long run, was erected in La Laja by its residents and the parish priest.<sup>556</sup> Critics were equally startled: a member of the boatmen association dubbed him the PRIísta version of “Chucho el Roto”, the famous Porfirian bandit. Colorful stories of his life were brought up: like the probably apocryphal story of when he “crowned himself King of La Laja,” in a “coronation” attended by several politicians, including the governor’s brother.<sup>557</sup> Yet allies and critics alike were bewildered by the meteoric rise to power of a “squatter:” “misery creates kings,” ridiculed one of Mexico City’s journalists, making references to his decade-long stronghold of *colonos* in Acapulco’s municipality. This rung true for many sectors of society in Acapulco. Once leaders like López Cisneros and Nicolás Román Benítez had consolidated the movement of *colonos* under their leadership, it became very difficult for politicians and boosters to sidestep the important role played by Acapulco’s informal city in transforming a small port and resort into a populous boomtown with a thriving tourist economy. Recurrent references to the “other” Acapulco capture this anxiety in official thinking with the press echoing these concerns. López Cisneros’ “empire” of informality in La Laja towered over Acapulco in the imagination of cosmopolitan reporters for Mexico City’s *La Prensa*.

The funeral procession moved along mournfully down the main avenues, eliciting many other responses. Tourists and the international press also commented on the event that had shaken the tourist city. By the late 1960s Acapulco’s urban problems had become salient in the world of tourism. In the eyes of many international journalists, Acapulco became the palpable manifestation

---

<sup>556</sup> Xavier Olea Muñoz, “Alfredo López Cisneros: Adalid de los Pobres” *Diario de Acapulco*, 8 August 1967.

<sup>557</sup> Gómezjara, Bonapartismo y lucha campesina en la Costa Grande Guerrero. (Mexico: Editorial Posada, 1979), 212.

of what Michael Harrington described in *The Other America*, when referring to the Appalachian Mountains, as a place where “beauty and myths [became] perennial masks of poverty.” The international press constantly brought up the image of the “two faces” of Guerrero and Acapulco. *The New York Times*, for instance, exploited this marked difference late in 1967, after a spate of regional massacres in Guerrero and the assassination of López Cisneros, to remind American tourists of Acapulco’s hidden surroundings where “the people have a tendency to settle their disputes with guns and machetes, and bandits are not infrequent.”<sup>558</sup> Boosters and politicians became increasingly concerned with the adverse effect this “dirty linen” could bring to tourism in Acapulco. Heredia Merckley, when he was Mayor of Acapulco (1966-1968), told a reporter from *Los Angeles Times* that he wished “he could somehow stop the steady stream of rural people who daily flush into this [luxurious] town (...) Many become squatters in the surrounding hills and stress the resources of an underpaid police force.”<sup>559</sup> The appearance of what Claudio Lomnitz and Brodwyn Fischer call the “dirty linen” or the “developmental dirty laundry” behind the façade of modernization, nationalism, and international tourism in Mexico and many other countries in Latin America is a well-explored subject that provides valuable insights into how in the mindset of boosters and officials a clear distinction was drawn between the formal and informal sides of a city. Anger at the airing of this “dirty lining” was often the reason for construing a narrative that would ultimately ignore the indissoluble social and political ties between the informal and formal cities, binding residents in the *colonias populares* to tourism and the city at large in Acapulco. The funeral procession was a reminder of these oft-ignored ties that had spliced both cities.

The funeral procession, however, elicited a more worrying response. In the popular imagination, the informal city was melded with its hinterland, and Acapulco’s hillsides began to

---

<sup>558</sup> Henry Ginger, “Mexico’s Leading Resort City Wears Two Faces,” *New York Times*, 30 September 1967.

<sup>559</sup> Rubén Salazar, “Sea of Sorrows Besets Fun City of Acapulco. Killings, Weather, Lynda Bird Johnson’s Abrupt Departure Trouble Mexican Resort,” *Los Angeles Times*, 2 October 1967.

be associated with rising crime, violence, and all of Guerrero's endemic regional problems. On the eve of his political assassination Colonos Union controlled thirty-five *colonias populares*, as well as many tourist and local businesses. The funeral procession of nearly twenty thousand *colonos* sparked fears of riots in the *colonias populares*. On his arrival in Acapulco, the same morning López Cisneros was murdered, Salvador del Toro Rosales, a special envoy from the Attorney General of the Republic, recalled "the state of commotion" of the port after the assassination.<sup>560</sup> When the president of Acapulco's hotel association was murdered, two bellboys were hounded and arrested in La Laja. Consequently, an increased awareness of crime in Acapulco's *colonias populares*, and the presence of so many rural migrants, in the eyes of officials, tourists, and boosters, placed the inaccessibility of Guerrero's rural regions in close proximity to the urban and cosmopolitan world of tourism. Many of Guerrero's coastal politicians had for centuries perceived with a deep distrust the remoteness of some rural places like the neighboring region of La Costa Grande. Alejandro Gómez Maganda— who had been governor for a brief period of three years (1951-54)— described in his memoirs how during his governorship there had been a massacre of local politicians inside the "Tahiti" restaurant in Acapulco. He explained that this was the result of the port's proximity to dangerous places like the "Frente del Diablo" near Pie de la Cuesta. The history of those places "surpasses any legend (...) bordering on fantasy," wrote Gómez Maganda in the late 1950s; there, he continues, "rural politicians, petty thugs, prisoners" and other *políticos de poca monta*, "distant from civilization [and] culture," have disappeared in their steep cliffs.<sup>561</sup> The rural violence of regions like the Atoyac *sierra* near Acapulco fed the febrile imaginations of local officials who interpreted the expansion of informality in terms of urban crime, corruption, loss of culture, and the erosion of the city.

---

<sup>560</sup> Salvador del Toro Rosales, *Testimonios* (Monterrey, México: Sindicato de Trabajadores de la Universidad Autónoma de Nuevo León, 1996) 174-177. My translation.

<sup>561</sup> Alejandro Gómez Maganda, *Acapulco en mi vida y en el tiempo* (Mexico: Libro Mex Editores, 1960), 294-301. My translation.

Acapulco's hinterland began to loom larger over the tourist city. Only a few months after the assassination of López Cisneros, Acapulco's *economía de traspasio* entered a serious crisis as a large group of coconut growers marched towards Acapulco; there, they mounted a protest demonstration in front of the union's headquarters in the city's center. A raise in taxes on *copra* of 0.01 per kilo had caused the agitation. Theirs, however, was a dissident group that was pitted against other rivalling factions within the powerful union of *copreros*, which was in the difficult process of being incorporated into the CNC, unsurprisingly generating tensions and disagreements among rivalling groups. Tensions within the union surfaced at the demonstration. Simultaneously, a group of gunmen surrounded the crowd, then scuffles followed by confusion. The State police, guarding the demonstration, opened fire, setting off a chaotic scene that would only be settled by the army's intervention. A dozens of *copreros* were murdered. It happened only a few months after the assassination of López Cisneros. Earlier that summer, a similar scene had taken place in the rugged highlands of Acapulco's hinterland, leading to a massacre that took place in front of a school. Social leaders, teachers, and peasants began to mobilize like never before as a response, until rumors of guerrilla activities spread like fire in Acapulco's hinterland. The first guerrilla ambush on the army took the government by surprise. In June 1972 the Party of the Poor attacked an army truck, in Arroyo las Piñas on the path to San Andrés de la Cruz: ten soldiers were killed, many injured and a couple kidnapped. The army and the government desperately tried to conceal the news of the alarming event until it finally leaked a couple of weeks later, generating a political scandal. In response to a bombardment of questions on the guerrillas, the defense Secretary, Cuenca Díaz, retorted angrily: "they are brigands not guerrillas" insisting that the ambush was not political in motivation, in Mexico there were only 'bandits.'<sup>562</sup> Meanwhile, the editorial of the weekly magazine '*¿Por Qué?*' called the ambush 'the biggest guerrilla achievement' which marked

---

<sup>562</sup> 'Son bandoleros, no guerrilleros,' *Excélsior*, July 1972.

the beginning of a ‘New Era.’ Many relatives of Lucio Cabañas were arrested and interrogated; *El Universal* mentioned that there was ‘great alarm’ among peasants in the Atoyac sierra, who feared being “detained and subjected to torture if they go out to work to their fields, and “dozens” have therefore left for Acapulco in search of work and protection.”<sup>563</sup>

The exodus from the rugged and coastal hinterland continued. Hundreds of migrants flocked to Acapulco as the Costa Grande went through a cycle of demographic compression and economic pressure in the 1960s and 1970s. This saw political violence spreading quickly through the region, further pushing migrants either to *rancherías*, recently settled areas in the *sierra*, or to Acapulco. Myths began to inform how Acapulco’s informal city was perceived and acted upon: the “culture of poverty,” “social marginality,” and the rural-urban divide. “The unintended consequence,” Fischer notes, “was to further stigmatize rural people as the sick, malnourished, ignorant, degraded, helpless victims of systemic violence,” but not only that, perceived rural backwardness meant that “rural workers were viewed as lacking the mental capacity and skills to fully participate in the development process.”<sup>564</sup> DFS analysts, dismally unprepared, constantly brought up rural backwardness and social marginality as the main culprits of Acapulco’s problems: the expansion of “núcleos de población económicamente débiles,” spawned by families from many distant regions in Guerrero, one of the DFS analysts noted, “campesinos frustrados” who seek a “solución fácil en los centros urbanos a sus problemas de supervivencia;” the problem was serious in their view, “porque también en las ciudades donde llegan fracasan debido a su impreparación e inadaptacion [sic]”<sup>565</sup>

A perceived dividing line in local official thinking between orderly development and lawlessness was real in its consequences. Rural-urban divides were blurred by the constant inflow

---

<sup>563</sup> Telegram, “Internal Security: Arrest of Guerrero Ambush Suspects and Other Developments”, Department of State, Aug 1972.

<sup>564</sup> Fischer, Cities from Scratch, 38-45.

<sup>565</sup> AGN, DFS Alfredo López Cisneros, Public Version, 100-10-1-L2-60 (April 01, 1960), 11.

of migrants from the countryside; a matter of great concern for the army, becoming the driving force behind campaigns of *despistolización* in rural, semi urban areas, and informal settlement commonly seen as hotbeds for guerrillas and *pistoleros*. Rural “lawlessness” was perceived as violence spilling over into cities becoming a key justification for the mediation of the army in land invasions, and the militarization of *colonias populares* and informal settlements in Acapulco. For instance, there was a shoot out between families in an unspecified neighborhood in the city. According to a very dubious account, the shooting originated from one family member killing the dog of the other family. The local authorities, ‘unable to control the confrontation,’ called for the intervention of the military forces which remained in the neighborhood for a couple of days.<sup>566</sup> But this highly improbable Montague-Capulet story of hatred, justifying the intervention of the armed forces, reveals a growing social instability at the heart of the local community; a balance that was increasingly restored by the police forces, and most worryingly, by the army which had been creating more or less harmonious relations with the Unión Inquilinaria under López Cisneros.

With the assassination of López Cisneros, visitors and residents in the populous boomtown, for the first time, confronted Acapulco’s informal city. The assassination of López Cisneros on August 1967 came at a particular moment in time when renewed popular mobilization and increasing social polarization became entangled with growing social and political networks in the informal city that allowed squatters and *colonos* to ties themselves to the city at large and momentarily unsettle an adverse urban order. Soon this sparked a violent reaction with an alliance between political and commercial circles in Acapulco that also enjoyed popular support from antagonistic corporate sectors and other independent groups in society. There was a process of “inverse racketeering,” where the client ended up controlling the patron, which led to the *pistoleralización* of the police forces, a key factor in the radicalization of some social movements

---

<sup>566</sup> AGN, DFS Alfredo López Cisneros, Public Version, 100-10-1 L-24/ 9-V-67.

that turned into full-blown guerrillas in the late 1960s. Attempts by such alliances at disentangling the network spun by *colonos* only fragmented the fragile and heterogeneous groups of the working poor tied to the informal city, generating a wave of political violence that had long-lasting repercussions in Acapulco and the region. Antonio Diosdado Mendoza, after being arrested under accusations of having murdered López Cisneros, was later disappeared in the early 1970s. Other key leaders in Acapulco like Tomás Diego Paco, leader of the union of boatmen and fishermen, had been murdered a couple of months before López Cisneros' political assassination. Two weeks later, a group of gunmen single-handedly massacred a large number of *copreros* (coconut oil producers) in Acapulco.

The appearance of a dangerous face of urban informality weighed heavily on many observers. By the late 1960s, it began to inspire reflections on the city's contrasting social and natural landscapes. In a 1974 electoral speech, the PRI president, Jesús Reyes Heroles, exclaimed: "We want the two Guerreros to disappear!", a remark that acquired even more importance in Mexico's intelligence reports, serving as the basis for an analysis of the "unruly" state of the urban and rural poor in Guerrero.<sup>567</sup>

So catchy has this narrative been that even modern-day American historians have recycled it to rewrite it into the story of urban transformation of Acapulco. Simplistically, the city became a pure reflection explaining the workings of an authoritarian state in the throes of a process of modernization. The urban history of Acapulco, when it became an international resort, has attracted the attention of several scholars. Against the grain of some cultural studies that have ventured into the years of the Mexican Miracle, I argue that the early development of the tourist industry in Acapulco is not a magical transformation, a post-revolutionary alchemy, so to speak, nor is it the result of "the workings of an authoritarian regime" on picturesque places, which are

---

<sup>567</sup> AGN-DGIPS, box 1488, file 4, 263 (3 May 1974).

often portrayed as sleepy towns inert and cut off from the center by insurmountable distances. A number of studies on tourism have adopted this approach, focusing on how tourism severely questioned Mexico's national identity, resulting in national anxieties about the very essence of *Mexicanidad*. Apparatchiks like Reyes Heroles and Heredia Merckley perceived informality in terms of clear-cut distinctions between the two faces of Acapulco. This bicolored worldview helped them render their increasingly confusing political realities more comprehensible and manageable. Historians, however, should not take at face value such sharp separations so common in the literature of state formation. They fall short of explaining the entanglements of the formal and informal city in processes of urbanization, and of the consequent adaptation of squatter movements to emerging gray areas in local politics.

Modern states tend to reveal shades of informality behind bureaucratic records that speak to the contrary. Charles Tilly's remark that "state-makers are papermongers" serves as a cautionary reminder that scholars of modern states often deal with records, systematically produced and preserved, in such ways that their "residues overrepresent the final, official, legal," and public sides of institutions. Tilly further notes that despite relying on large, residual amounts of paperwork "we shall always be hard-pressed to find adequate documentation on the preliminary, unofficial, illegal, informal, immoral, and private aspects of state-making."<sup>568</sup>

From different historical perspectives in the Latin American region, Tamar Herzog and Alan Knight suggest a different picture from conventional accounts of state formation. "This story," Herzog argues, "involves no state builders, as Charles Tilly has led us to believe, and no rigid institutions acting upon and modifying society, as others have described. On the contrary, it reveals an administration whose boundaries and active members were never clearly defined." It would be "naively formalistic", Knight would add, to make rigorous distinctions "between state

---

<sup>568</sup> Tilly, *The Formation of National States*, 8-10.

and party, between formal officeholders and informal power brokers, between elected officials, bureaucrats, and caciques.”<sup>569</sup> This picture, I would argue, is what defines the relation of squatter movements to the wavering state boundaries of Mexico’s “soft authoritarianism” (1940-1970).<sup>570</sup>

A relatively borderless state, indeed, stretching along the periphery of Latin American cities runs parallel to the unilinear narratives of the onward expansion of formal institutions. According to Hernando de Soto, the rise of informality marked the steady retreat of the state;<sup>571</sup> there was no preliminary, unofficial, or temporary situation before the state resumed its up and forward expansion. Administrative chaos spurred intensive and often disorganized processes of urbanization that forced administrative officials to reexamine their roles in this momentous shift. It is precisely on these gray areas in politics that the security reports in newly-opened Mexican intelligence archives tend to focus almost obsessively. Consequently, the surveillance of squatter movements and their leaders was paramount to intelligence bureaucracies bewildered with the erasure of the precious fine lines separating formality from informality both in the tourist economy and in institutions.

### ***The Multifaceted City and the City of Displacements***

The affluent and the poor city emerged from the old town of Acapulco, east of the bay—what used to be the heart of the seaport. Suffocating conditions in tenements in the *old barrios* initiated the initial expulsion to the higher grounds of the hillsides. There, as the informal city became consolidated, Acapulco was thrown into a continuous wave of population displacements in Acapulco.

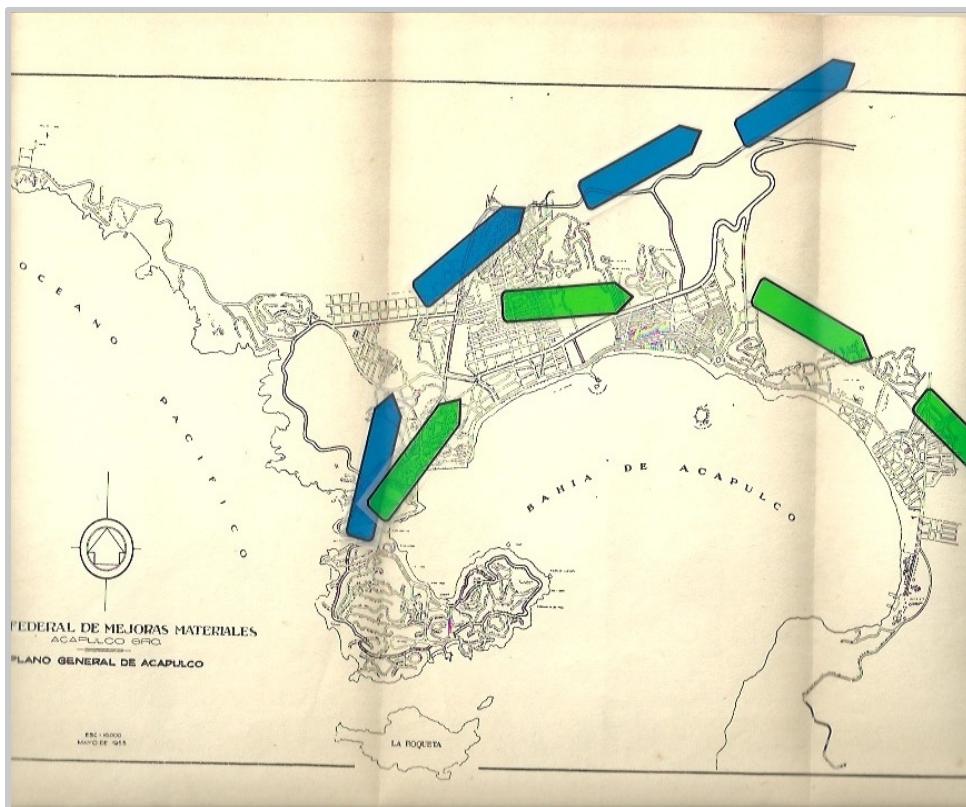
---

<sup>569</sup> Tamar Herzog, *Upholding Justice. Society, State, and the Penal System in Quito* (1650-1750), (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2004) 8-9; Alan Knight, “The Modern Mexican State: Theory and Practice” in *The Other Mirror. Grand Theory through the Lens of Latin America*, edited by Miguel Angel Centeno and Fernando López Alves (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2001), 190-191.

<sup>570</sup> See the work of historians like Benjamin T Smith and Paul Gillingham.

<sup>571</sup> Hernando de Soto, *The Other Path. The Economic Answer to Terrorism* (United States: Basic Books, 1989), 12-13.

**Image 17: General Plan of Acapulco from the Junta Federal de Mejores Materiales, 1955**



The Map has been taken from Tomás Oteiza Iriarte, *Acapulco. La ciudad de las naos de oriente y de las sirenas modernas* (México: Casa Ramírez Editores, 1965), but it is a map of urban planning, Plano General de Acapulco, from the Junta Federal de Mejoras Materiales, May 1955.

Public and private spaces were formed in the popular and affluent sectors of society as new groups of people moved in and circulated. Their displacement and movement along the bay has profoundly shaped Acapulco's built and natural landscape. In the wake of population displacement, trails were left behind by two distinctive groups: by the affluent classes, namely, the post-revolutionary bourgeoisie (green arrows, see Image 17 map above) and popular classes, the urban poor, and the service workers (blue arrows). Both have sculpted the bay of Acapulco, affecting social relations in the city and creating a fundamentally segregated urban landscape.<sup>572</sup>

<sup>572</sup> The Map has been taken from Tomás Oteiza Iriarte, *Acapulco. La ciudad de las naos de oriente y de las sirenas modernas* (Mexico: Casa Ramírez Editores, 1965), but it is a map of urban planning, Plano General de Acapulco, from the Junta Federal de Mejoras Materiales, May 1955.

The first trail runs parallel to that of the affluent society. As the tourist industry expanded, and the flow of migration thickened, public services were saturated and the appearance of a dangerous face of informality in Acapulco weighed heavily on official thinking. James Holston's concept of "autoconstruction" is a useful tool for understanding this displacement of peoples (both rich and poor, even though Holston only applies it exclusively to urban poor in the margins of São Paulo). For Holston "autoconstruction" is a key attribute of a form of development patterned by private market operations without state regulation that became the driving force behind peripheral expansion. It is worth quoting his analysis at length. "Each instance of autoconstruction", Holston notes:

reproduces the periphery, pushing its leading edge farther into the hinterland...as each autoconstructing family develops, the entire neighborhood evolves. Thus the newest and most outlying neighborhoods have the most precarious dwellings in which reside the poorest and youngest families. As these families grow in size and accomplishment, they transform their houses and urbanize their neighborhoods, and those improvements in turn displace the fringe of the periphery and its attributes of poverty to new areas of the hinterland. As the sum of all instances of autoconstruction, the development of São Paulo's peripheries is thus a story of constant displacement and transformation.<sup>573</sup>

A number of plans for the relocation en masse of squatters and *colonias populares* initiated a tumultuous movement of large swaths of the population living precariously on the hillsides. Erstwhile crowded tenements in the *barrios históricos* gave way to a briefly planned *colonia obrera* that then moved away from the first *colonia popular*, Colonia Progreso, near the old colonial center, towards La Laja, the first squatter settlement (right above the modern-day Hotel President); urban expansion continued until it reached the upper side of the bay's mountainous area, spilling over to the peripheries of the bay and the city. Over the years, this trail, initiating from Colonia Progreso, was gentrified into middle-class areas as the movement of *colonia*

---

<sup>573</sup> James Holston, *Insurgent Citizenship. Disjunctions of Democracy and Modernity in Brazil*. (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2008) 165-167.

*populares* progressed outwards, away from the bay, and towards the aptly and ironically called Ciudad Renacimiento created in the 1970s and 1980s by Governor Rubén Figueroa Figueroa (1975-1981) who relocated 100,000 residents living on the bay's so called “*anfiteatro*”. The leading edge of this outward push, Ciudad Renacimiento, El Coloso, Colonia Zapata, are some of the poorest neighborhoods in Acapulco, and the emblematic zone of Acapulco’s modern-day tragedy: drug and gang violence. But it is worth noting that all along the trail that leads to Ciudad Renacimiento lies a series of gentrified neighborhoods that had been tenements and squatter settlements during Acapulco’s urban boom. Nowadays, colonias like La Laja are going through a process of involution that began with the mass relocations in the 1970s but significantly worsened in the last decade as crime has increased.

Then there is the affluent trail. “La ciudad creció porque llegaron los ricos,” noted writer Jorge Ibargüengoitia in one of his satirical articles on the development of Acapulco. “Se abrieron carreteras, se descubrieron nuevos lugares, se desmontaron los cerros, se construyeron terracerías y se hicieron casas y hoteles. Para esto fue necesario primero traer un ejército de trabajadores y más tarde, otro ejército de criadas.”<sup>574</sup> In Acapulco, this parallel trail of urban development left successive displacements of rich neighborhoods, as in a mirror image—an inverted one however—of Holston’s pattern of poor peripheral expansion. In its early stages, the rich development of Acapulco irradiated from the old town, on the west side of the bay. Old *barrios* in the historic center like La Lima Petaquillas, La Guinea, La Pinzona, but most importantly the Fraccionamiento Las Playas had been inhabited by wealthy merchants in the nineteenth century; later in the 1930s and 1940s they were displaced by rich politicians and revolutionary generals who built their mansions. Maximino Ávila Camacho’s house is a glimpse of this transformation of old Acapulco

---

<sup>574</sup> Jorge Ibargüengoitia, “La meca del holgazan. Los invasores de Acapulco,” (17-IV-70) in *La casa de ustedes y otros viajes* (1991, editorial Planeta Mexicana), pp. 49-51.

and the deformation of its natural landscape when he built his house on the small island in the middle of Caleta, even building a bridge that would connect it to the beach front. A new revolutionary class was gradually transforming the old barrios, the beaches and small bays in Acapulco—this was the point of departure of a long trail of displacements.

Urban development continued its relentless expansion, in a southeast direction, towards Puerto Marqués, and as services and hotels multiplied due to the tourist industry, armies of maids, servants, cleaners, and gardeners working in large summer houses quickly turned these residential areas into overcrowded tenements near the historic center. Consequently, there was an exodus of elites moving farther and farther away from old Acapulco, eventually away from the bay and the historic center, leaving a trail of affluent residential areas that have slumped down as decades go by. Thus the newest and most outlying residential areas had the richest mansions in which the wealthiest politicians and entrepreneurs resided. Between the 1930s and the 1970s there appears worn down architectural trail of affluent neighborhoods, dotted by derelict mansions of different styles and fashions depending on the years they were built. Acapulco's tourist zoning is not a coincidence, and it reflects this twofold trail: from El Acapulco Viejo, to the Zona Dorada, to Punta Diamante.

Space and landscapes were initially transformed by the JFMM, then remodeled and reordered by Carlos Contreras' Plan Regulador, then drastically transformed, once again, by the unintended consequence of urban planning and state-directed infrastructure: an uncontrollable displacement of social groups that altered public and urban spaces, as well as natural landscapes, and the geography of social relations. Acapulco reveals a society that has been deeply marked by a temporary population in the throes of constant displacements of groups of people, indeed, the unintended consequences of mass tourism and urban planning.

## Conclusion

Informality had always been present in Acapulco's economy, yet tourism came to deeply transform its nature. There was a shift from informality in the old service port town to the informal tourist city on the hillsides. This set off a continuous wave of population displacements, altering the nature of the tourist economy and the circulation of people, and changing the spatial location of welfare goods and basic services across the geography services of Acapulco's tourism industry. Ultimately, many migrants began to regulate and slowly urbanize their neighborhoods in the 1960s, only to attract more peripheral, informal, and precarious settlements of young rural families who had recently arrived in Acapulco in the 1970s and who kept pushing the confines of the coastal city beyond the bay and farther into its hinterland.

Acapulco should be understood as a multifaceted coastal city: the old service port town, the service and tourist cities, the waterfront, the port, and the foreland, the informal city, and the welfare city. This is partly why the rise of the informal city, the main focus of this chapter, does not fall squarely into the frame of old controversies: namely, certain longstanding divides in debates, the rural-urban, the state- non state divides; or debates that make clear divides between the formal and the informal cities, all the more to show whether marginality showed through the glittery façade of modernization with all its dirty linen draped behind in rags by the urban poor; whether urban marginality spurred radicalism and communism or social anomie and cooption; or whether Acapulco's marginality belts and the *colonias proletarias* were the reflection of an enclave economy, that is, a situation of extarctivism in which international capital, buttressed by cheap labor, generated a a city that exploited migrants languishing in anomie and in a disintegrated social fabric.

The story of a boomtown like Acapulco does not fit any of these somewhat Manichaeian depictions of urban marginality. Acapulco quickly became a coastal city as diverse as the visitors

and the melting pot of rural migrants who migrated from all corners of the country and who became part of the complex social fabric of Acapulco's social and urban geography. This coastal city showed, simultaneously, different facets of a boomtown, seemingly built from scratch, but actually raised on the vestiges of an old port. The bay became the city, with its neighborhoods, communities, welfare, and economy seeing explosive growth, concentration, and location of the labor force of the city's tertiary economic activities.

The narrative about poverty changed when connections were established among elements of urban development that back then were perceived as seemingly disparate from each other: marginality, the informal city, tourism, and the bay's natural and aesthetic features were then reinterpreted as an interconnected problem. These were all social, economic, and legal issues, some of them novel, that the informal city brought to the city of Acapulco, issues which often went beyond the question of informality and entered other thorny conflicts like land ownership, ultimately becoming entangled with novel conflicts over property, urban development, and nature.

These were all dilemmas in the welfare city of Acapulco which go beyond the scope of this investigation. As proponents of the welfare city argue, the “welfare city was formulated by Manuel Castells as the question of the city as the spatial location of the public provision of welfare goods and services for labor-power and the related urban struggles;” but, as many contradictions began to haunt the welfare state, “then the falling apart of the welfare city into unconnected fragments and the urban problems related to this situation, is the new urban question.”<sup>575</sup> The tourist economy during these decades, 1940s-1970s, can be seen as one of those first moments of the falling apart of the welfare city into disconnected fragments, which partly explain modern-day violence in the tourist city.

---

<sup>575</sup> Niels Albertsen and Bülent Diken, “Welfare and the City,” *NA* 17, no. 2 (11 April 2013).

## CHAPTER 10

### The Kaleidoscopic City

*Image Economies, the Advertisement Machine, and the “Imaginario de Acapulco”*

Miguel Alemán, during his 1945 presidential campaign, had highlighted the importance of tourism, advertisement, and artistic creation in the development of new urban economies: “de la política de buena voluntad, que incluía por igual a todas las naciones de este hemisferio, México obtuvo, hábilmente, lo que ningún otro país pudo conseguir: una publicidad radiada, cinematográfica, visual y periodística por valor de muchos millones de dólares.”<sup>576</sup> Acapulco was partly the creation of what I will call here the advertisement machine of the postwar era in Mexico. Advertisement ultimately turned Acapulco into a radiating economy, fostering artistic production and innovation in the service and marketing industries, while attracting large amounts of capital and investment to the city. In the creation of Acapulco’s advertisement machine, boosters, artists, architects, designers, and local and federal officials now had the support of moguls like Carlos Trouyet, Conrad Hilton, Paul J. Getty, Emilio Azcárraga Milmo, Howard Hughes, Raúl Baillères and other “magicians of money” who did their trick by investing in a city envisaged as an international capital of leisure, modernity, and tourism.

An elaborate image of Acapulco was thus created by the advertisement machine; over time, it became highly attractive, an image that was eventually commercialized and advertised in the most distant of markets in the tourism imaginary. Historian Luis Castañeda has called this strategy the workings of an “image economy;” in the world of modern-day advertising and marketing, this strategy would be called “city branding.”<sup>577</sup> Here, I would add, are the origins of nation and city branding in Mexico, and Acapulco is an integral part of this early creation. But, to avoid

---

<sup>576</sup> Miguel Alemán, “El problema nacional de la industria del turismo,” Acapulco, Gro., September-October, 1945, p. 63 Archivo Fundación Miguel Alemán Valdés (AMAV), box 8, File 220: Campaña Presidencial. Programas.

<sup>577</sup> Luis M. Castañeda, *Spectacular Mexico: Design, Propaganda, and the 1968 Olympics* (University of Minnesota Press, 2014).

anachronistic terms, this was not city “branding” *per se*, since the idea of place branding is of recent creation that dates no farther back than the 1990s. This was an image economy of a different sort. It was the image of a city that grew out of the specific postwar era of advertisement, tourism, and consumption in North America. Acapulco and Mexico City thus spearheaded an innovative economic strategy that associated Acapulco with modernist trends in urban growth and planning, architecture, design, tourism, marketing and advertisement, as well as cultural and cinematographic production. Urban agglomeration spurred innovative services, products, and images in Acapulco as new ideas emerged from the growing city and began to circulate quicker through the service industry. These ideas were in turn converted into veritable artistic and cultural creations that propelled Acapulco’s development further and projected its image outwards to far-away tourism markets. The city radiated in its creation of new markets and continued to attract big business and unprecedented flows of capital.

Exploring this image economy entails retelling the story of Acapulco and its spectacular boom from the mid twentieth century onwards. Envisaged as an international capital of leisure, the city projected its kaleidoscopic images through the mystifying effects of a rising coastal city dedicated to tourism: the effects of consumption and capital accumulation, inequality and poverty, modernism and cosmopolitanism, creating a phantasmagoria—worthy of Walter Benjamin’s analysis—through which the city was perceived by its potential consumers.

How did an urban imaginary emerge in Acapulco and how did it decisively shape its form and function? To understand how the image of Acapulco changed over time, and how this image gradually shaped its built environment, the proverbial analogy of the kaleidoscope can be called to mind. Ricardo Garibay likened Acapulco to a “caleidoscopio que no se aquiega nunca, ni en lo que va de un instante al que le sigue.”<sup>578</sup> Like the optical device, Acapulco’s urban economy

---

<sup>578</sup> Garibay, *Acapulco* (1979), p. 7.

possessed many image-forming properties that moved depending on the context, a context of changing cultures of leisure amidst exploding megalopolises and consumption markets in North America. It is from this context that the city of Acapulco and its image economy begins to rotate producing infinite geometric designs and reflections, like a kaleidoscope, out of loose shards of colored glass that are moved, readjusted, and displaced depending on what happened to the city. Its designs and images could keep on changing, endlessly, as long as the loose fragments that make up the city's essential aspects kept moving. As long as the kaleidoscope kept rotating, the city would keep projecting its changing images to a growing postwar audience. These images slowly created a multifaceted urban imaginary that changed, constantly, depending on the conditions that rotated the kaleidoscope and gave rise to a particular image at a certain moment in time. I will call the collection of these rotating images, *el imaginario de Acapulco*.

To imagine the surge of this city, how it quickly rose to become a veritable boomtown of mass tourism, requires telling how a complex urban imaginary was created. *El imaginario de Acapulco* was projected kaleidoscopically from the city as the urban imaginary of Acapulco boomed in the mid twentieth century. Full of optimism, experimentation, ambitions, and even utopias, Acapulco turned into a coastal city and soared in the imagination of many consumers. This was after all a city that branded its way out of a severe urban and commercial crisis until it created a distinctive and renowned model of tourism and mobility. It became a powerful regional economic pole that advertised itself successfully into a powerful *imaginario* in the Mexican and American postwar consumer markets. But it eventually fell into the trap of its own success. An urban imaginary that became as hard to shed as the one of its splendorous colonial past—henceforward, the tourist city would always be measured against these mystified “golden years.”

It is my central argument that this *imaginario* deeply transformed the function and urban make-up of Acapulco. Boosters in the coastal city advertised the city's images and used them both

as a foundational element of consumption for the city and as an important source of growth for Acapulco's economy and built environment. *El imaginario de Acapulco* had a powerful influence on the development of its urban form and function. A corollary to the argument is that the new urban imaginary that boomed during the postwar era, between 1940 and 1970, turned Acapulco into a water-gazing city, the culmination of a long process that had started in the twentieth century. The process leading to this outcome had started earlier, as the previous chapters have shown, with the rise of the service sector, shaped by the unintended consequences of mobility, connectivity, and urban and regional planning. In the end, this new urban imaginary turned Acapulco into a North American playground and an extension of the Mexican heartland on the Pacific coast.

### **El Imaginario de Acapulco and its Advertisement Machine** *From Quaint Fishing Village to Coastal Boomtown c.1940-1970*

There are striking parallels between Los Angeles and Mexico City: two postwar megalopolises that sprawled and became centers of consumption, industry, and culture. In this way, Jennifer Josten argues that both megalopolises ultimately turned into massive urban markets increasingly connected by new forms of mobility and transportation. By drawing these parallels, Josten begins to trace the flow of “jet setters” and “power players” between these two exploding cities in the postwar era. “The parallels continue,” she adds, “these two centers of industry and culture were connected by frequent jet service in the decades following World War II, allowing designers and their elite clients to shuttle easily between L.A. and Mexico City (as well as Palm Springs and Acapulco, their respective vacation enclaves).”<sup>579</sup>

---

<sup>579</sup> Jennifer Joston, “Jet-setters and Power Players: Cross-Border Design in the Postwar Era.” In Wendy Kaplan, *Design in California and Mexico, 1915-1985: Found in Translation* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 2017), pp. 290-321.

Acapulco thrived in this new circuit established between both postwar megalopolises and their system of tourist destinations. It thrived in tandem with an expanding horizon of consumption and advertisement, becoming a city full of artistic creation, big business, and novel techniques in the advertisement industry and the service economy of postwar tourism. As the *Miami Herald* put it, “Acapulco is the mecca for migratory jet-setters, international financiers and corporation presidents, politicians, starlets and barons, dukes, counts and princes from countless countries.”<sup>580</sup> Businessmen, bankers, boosters, and investors changed the nature of finance and tourism in a city whose future had been irreversibly pegged to its own successful image. The relation between the city and its potential visitors became mediated by the mystifying effect of cosmopolitanism, international film festivals, Mexican and American advertisement campaigns, Hollywood, and the Golden Age of Mexican Cinema. A speculative and creative society, as ephemeral as its vast temporary population, filled urban ventures with optimism, experimentation, ambition, and utopias all projected onto Acapulco’s image, an image which was then refracted to national, regional, and transnational consumer markets.

It is from this postwar context that Acapulco’s multifaceted *imaginario* emerges with full force. To speak of an urban “imaginary” entails delving into the question of representation and modernity in the history of urban development in Mexico, dealing with the thorny questions of “image” and “reality.” There is much to say of the representation of a city. Representations of cities are often mediated and conflictual, like shadow plays or kaleidoscopic images that may shift completely in a matter of seconds. Acapulco’s tourist city, its *imaginario*, emerged in the twentieth century from this mediation of images and narratives. The last chapters, in some way, have tangentially explored Acapulco’s changing *imaginario*. This strategy, the creation of an urban image and the crafting of an accompanying narrative, is also crucial for cities that depend heavily

---

<sup>580</sup> *Miami Herald*, 11 February 1968.

on tourism and their mediated representation to potential visitors, creators, and investors. It is a form of mediation structured by advertisement and branding campaigns, boosting projects, photography, artistic productions, journalistic and scholarly narratives, etc.

Nevertheless, urban representations, through the mediation of images, advertisement, and artistic productions, are not exclusive to tourist cities. Any city is immersed in the active projection of its image and the careful crafting of certain representations and narratives, of which their promoters in charge are only partially in control. Moreover, the creation of a certain mediated representation of a city is often a messy business that all cities are constantly going through.

The connections between the built environment and the changing representations of a city are crucial in explaining how cities change and grow in certain ways. Hence insisting on the disjuncture between “image” and “reality” is futile and simplistic; worse still, insisting that this disjuncture is exclusive of cities in the unfortunate term, “Global South,”<sup>581</sup> entails an exercise in separating an hemispheric urban phenomenon in which cities with postwar “image economies” became increasingly specialized in techniques of representation, planning, and advertisement for attracting visitors and investment. Built environments were also transformed by these new techniques of postwar image economies.

How the city has been depicted and narrated by different people and groups with different perceptions is crucial to understand how the city’s shape, form, and function has changed over time. All of the resulting depictions and narratives—like any myth—harbor grains of truth. They have contributed to the emergence of *el imaginario de Acapulco*, generating a rich series of stories that over the years have proliferated in the popular imagination of the United States and Mexico. Nevertheless, historians and scholars, in emphasizing one narrative over another when telling the

---

<sup>581</sup> City Branding and an “image economy.” Luis M. Castañeda, *Spectacular Mexico: Design, Propaganda, and the 1968 Olympics* (University of Minnesota Press, 2014); “Global South,” the term being an unfortunate, newfangled version of the equally obtuse term, “Third World,” as opposed to the North Atlantic, “First World.”

history of Acapulco, inevitably end up becoming either heroic muckrakers or wide-eyed tourism promoters, without really explaining why their favored imaginary emerged in the first place. Neither do they explain how some aspects of the city were perceived in a certain way, nor explain why some narratives and images came to dominate a specific representation, let alone explaining the impact of a certain imaginary on the city by showing its tangible effects on the path of urban development adopted by Acapulco. Thus, telling the history of Acapulco from the perspective of only one of these narratives, which together form the kaleidoscopic city of Acapulco, would produce an incomplete history.

Most importantly, and one of the central claims in this dissertation is that, behind Acapulco's changing representations, narratives, and depictions, lies a powerful myth that connects them all—the cyclical myth of urban decline, revival, and splendor. It has also shaped how historical actors have come to understand and reinterpret Acapulco's past to thereby act upon its city. This is a constant thread that ties the city, the seaport, and the bay in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

### ***Artistic Creation, Photography, and the Film Industry in Acapulco***

From the 1940s onwards, many boosters designed innovative policies to try to draw to the city hundreds of artists, photographers, as well as directors, producers, and actors from the national and international film industry. This campaign was far from the concerted effort of tricksters, alchemists, and advertisers of Mexico's modernizing, authoritarian regime, as some historians would simplistically have it. The process behind the photographic and cinematographic production of Acapulco's image was a subtler one; and it was certainly not the only image or narrative that was produced of the growing city in its transition from a small port town to a bustling boomtown. There were many representations, often in conflict with each other, drawing from unexpected

sources, forming several different depictions drawn from the photographic work of Acapulco's local merchants and photographers, the ethnographic work of American anthropologists who photographed "deeply local" traditions in Guerrero's *sierra*, and international images of two imaginary cities: the jet set glamorous resorts and the fishermen's village.

Particularly in the 1940s, Acapulco stimulated not only the imagination of boosters but of writers, film directors, and photographers who married development campaigns on Mexico's Pacific coast with cultural productions in the United States and Mexico. Yet, surprisingly, an important part of Acapulco's urban and natural imaginary was not just the spectacular bay and its quaint town but the well-traversed littoral space between San Francisco and Panama. The maritime route that for decades had made a strong impression on many travelers in the nineteenth century was now, unexpectedly, stimulating the creative minds of film producers and literary writers who, intentionally or not, contributed to the imaginary of Acapulco as a place of untouched natural beauty, noir glamour, and exclusive consumption in a place that was difficult to reach. In this way, writers and artists in the late 1940s and early 1950s began, in subtle yet perceptible ways, to create a romantic image of Acapulco's dramatic landscapes being part of a vast and unexplored littoral space on the Pacific between Central America and California.

The dangerous road between Mexico City and Acapulco, which would become safer and quicker in 1955 when it was completely rebuilt, barely figured in literary and cinematographic productions. It figured in the stories of fatal car accidents of famous people like the architect Juan Legorreta or the son of mogul Raúl Baillères, stories that proliferated in the popular imagination, stimulated by sensationalist tabloids in Guerrero that echoed the news of socialite sections in Mexico's metropolitan press.<sup>582</sup> But beyond such stories, the road between Acapulco and Mexico

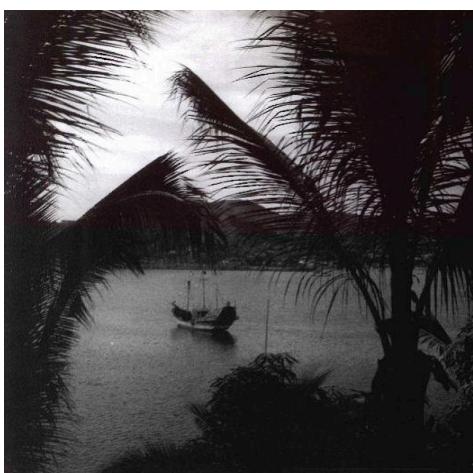
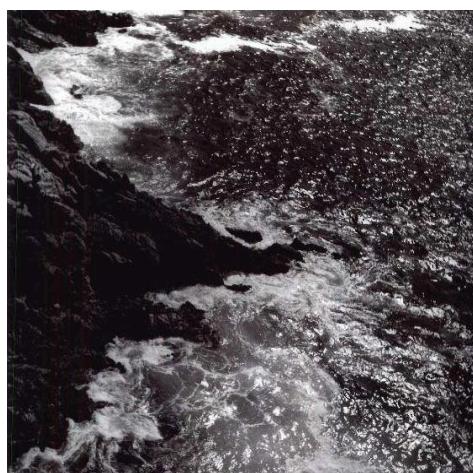
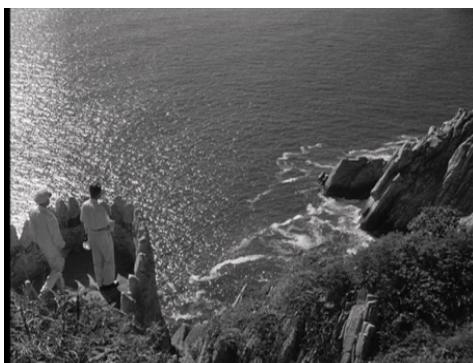
---

<sup>582</sup> Alejandro Gómez Maganda, *Acapulco en mi vida y en el tiempo*. (México: Libro Mex, 1960).

was no longer as attractive as it had been for travel writers during the nineteenth century, the 1920s and the 1930s. Paradoxically, the road was ignored in cultural representations at a moment in time when it was used the most as a means of communication, while sea routes became iconic as they became obsolete, used less and less by travelers and regular passengers.

Acapulco's cameo appearances in films thus projected the port as a remote paradise that could only be accessed from the sea, after several days of traveling from Panama to San Francisco, a long sea voyage providing ample time for seductive stories of crime and glamour to easily unfold. In his 1948 film noir, *Lady from Shanghai*, Orson Welles filmed all of his scenes in Acapulco and San Francisco. As the film leads its spectators through the movie, the plot unfolds between New York, Panama, Acapulco, and San Francisco. The crime story becomes increasingly convoluted as the main actors venture deeper into Mexico's remotest corners along the Pacific coast. The crucial turning point in the story, the consummation of a plot to murder one of the main characters, ends up sealing everyone's fate when they finally reach Acapulco, onboard a yacht from Panama, on their way to San Francisco. As a sideline, the same setting on the Pacific coast, between Panama and San Francisco, can be found in Luis Spota's 1956 novel *Casi el paraíso* which begins to unfold with a seemingly torrid romance between an older woman, Liz Avrell, from San Francisco and heir to a fortune, and the fraudster Italian prince, Ugo Conti, who unsuccessfully entices her to marry him while navigating back and forth on her yacht between San Francisco, Acapulco, and Panama. We will return in the next sections to the impact of literary productions on the creation of Acapulco's image.

**Image 18: Photographs from *Acapulco en el sueño* (1951) and *Lady from Shanghai* (1947)**



Photographs from *Acapulco en el sueño* (1951), top left, bottom right, and bottom left photographs; and *Lady from Shanghai* (1947), top right, middle left, and middle right photographs

The penchant for noir productions lingered on, perhaps until the 1950s, but the specific representation of Acapulco as a hidden paradise, accessible only through the Pacific coast, has its origins in the immediate postwar years. Many of the scenes of Acapulco's dramatic landscapes,

its sea-worn rocks, jagged cliffs, and spectacular views of the bay, that appear in Orson Welles's *Lady from Shanghai* bear a striking resemblance to a collection of photos put together by photographer Lola Álvarez Bravo: the iconic series *Acapulco en el sueño* [See Image 18 above]. Published a few years later, in 1951, the book, with poems by writer and great connoisseur of cities, Francisco Tario; his poems accompanied the photos. It was a carefully edited project funded and fully-supported by Alemán's administration. The images of Acapulco's natural landscapes echo the film noir genre, but with a different focus. The book completes the picture of Acapulco by moving the focus away from Hollywood's scenes onto other landscapes. It contains a series of romanticized images of Acapulco's black, mulattoes, and fishermen from the Costa Grande and Costa Chica of Guerrero. Humans and animals pose against desolate shores, bleak sands, mangroves, and the gullied landscape of Acapulco's enormous cliffs and granite boulders.<sup>583</sup>

Most of these photographic campaigns also echoed other sources. Some probably drew their inspiration from Acapulco's local photographic traditions found in the black and white series sponsored by Acapulco's merchants from the eve of the Mexican Revolution to the 1930s. Two figured prominently among them, the collection of photos by Navarro, Marroquín and Pintos in the Casa Pintos and the Hudson and Billings House.<sup>584</sup>

Although some productions were the result of coordinated campaigns, jointly designed by federal agencies and artists to promote the tourist destination, most of the images and representations of Acapulco at the time can instead be interpreted as reflecting the changing mood and aesthetics of the postwar years in the United States and Mexico. It is no coincidence that

---

<sup>583</sup> Rafael Aviña, *Orson Welles en Acapulco: y el misterio de la Dalia Negra*, Primera edición (México, D.F.: Conaculta, 2013). Francisco Tario and Lola Alvarez Bravo, *Acapulco en el sueño*, 1951.

<sup>584</sup> Samuel Luis Villela Flores, "Retratos de Guerrero en vilo: imágenes de la Revolución en Guerrero" in *Guerrero. Obra de un pueblo* (Hebra y trama del Alma Suriana: Guerrero, México, 2005), pp. 164-185. "Anita Brenner en la fotografía mexicana y su expedición etnofotográfica a Guerrero," *Antropología. Boletín oficial del INAH*, 2003, pp. 38-49 Seminario Permanente de Estudios sobre Guerrero, que organiza el Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia (INAH). "De la Villa de Acapulco al Acapulco del Jet set. 160 años de fotografía en el puerto," 9 April, 2013.

Acapulco, during most of its postwar appearances, combined film noir productions with several different literary and journalistic narratives.

Yet a different declension narrative of Acapulco would only emerge later in the 1960s and 1970s, once Acapulco had boomed and turned into a city with the accompanying and proverbial ills of any sprawling city: stark inequality, crime, violence, pollution, and congestion. But in the late 1940s and 1950s the focus was different, and the image and narrative of the growing city was drawn from several different sources. All of these aforementioned urban appearances of Acapulco in films and photography gradually infused the place and its paradisiac littoral space, between San Francisco and Panama, with the glamorous pessimism of seductive crime stories so prevalent in the immediate postwar years.

This postwar representation left a long-lasting mark on Acapulco as the city kept projecting its image to growing consumer markets in Mexico and the United States. Once again, but in a different form, San Francisco and Panama had played an important role in the development of Acapulco's kaleidoscopic representations during the early stages of the rising tourist city. Perhaps it was the last moment during which the city played with this vanishing littoral space.

A highly seductive image of Acapulco was created during the 1940s. Hollywood, cosmopolitan aesthetics, and universal images drawn from a new world of postwar consumption and leisure combined with the construction of Mexico's post-revolutionary and all-too successful image to create a highly seductive representation of Acapulco that mixed inequality and noir glamorous images. In the late 1940s and early 1950s Acapulco's image of a tourist, cosmopolitan paradise that still kept its past of a quaint fishermen's village became all too successful.

International film festivals, on-location media productions, and the marriage between Hollywood and Mexico's Golden Age of Cinema successfully turned Acapulco into a hub of cinematographic and media creation. The image of Acapulco was projected through a thin veil

gilded by the advertising industry, Mexico's Golden Age of Cinema, and Hollywood. This is the proverbial golden years of Acapulco; the *Acuérdate de Acapulco* where Teddy Stauffer, Errol Flynn, María Felix, Rita Hayworth, and Dolores del Río served as important boosters in the successful branding of a city. This was the "hidden paradise" where glamorous Mexican and international actors and artists created the Acapulco International Film Review that was closely linked with its counterpart in another old sister city in the Pacific, the San Francisco International Film Festival. From then on, the narratives of *Acapulco en el sueño* and the *Acuérdate de Acapulco* evoked the Yacht Club, the Club and Restaurant La Perla, the proverbial Acapulco divers in La Quebrada, plunging against the sunset paintings of Diego Rivera collected by Dolores Olmedo; the Acapulco of Tarzan interpreted by Johny Weissmuller; of the noir stories of intrigue, fictional and real, of Rita Hayworth in *Lady from Shanghai* or Jean Rouverol and the refugees who had been blacklisted by Hollywood and the long arms of McCarthyism.

The nostalgic patina of these so-called "golden years," often set off against the alluring images conjured by the Mexican Miracle and Mexico's modernizing authoritarianism, have prevented many scholars from drawing far more interesting conclusions for the study of cities. An important one has been persistently overlooked: Acapulco was one of the most important international feats of urban reinvention and economic renewal in the postwar years. It is also the story of a seaport that branded and rebranded its way out of a seemingly endless urban and economic crisis, becoming, through cycles of invention and reinvention, one of the most influential alchemies of "city branding" in tourism in North America.

#### ***Architecture, Design, and the Transport Advertisement Machine c. 1930-1970***

These initial decades eventually gave way to the years when Acapulco was sold and advertised as a capital of leisure to a growing postwar Mexican and American consumer market

that emphasized traveling and tourism as new and modern forms of mobility on the west coast of Mexico and the United States. The deep history of mobility in Acapulco was brought up in California's press and refashioned to tell the story of a "Resort City-Once Mexican 'Port o'Call,'" "Hawkers and hucksters, great merchants and king's officials, anxious folk on their way to the California gold fields, the curious— and now the Jet Set. They've all come to this spot over the last five centuries."<sup>585</sup> When tourism was coupled with air travel, new forms of mobility like mass tourism were created, establishing an important connection between design, architecture, and advertisement in Acapulco.

The transport industry contributed to the "branding" of Acapulco, a long-lasting image of the tourist resort. Over the years, airlines, bus lines, cruise lines, the highway commission, and many other state-owned and private companies in the transport industry in Mexico and the United States began to invest heavily in the advertisement of Acapulco from the mid twentieth century onwards. The designer, Bob Bride, the businessman, politician, and founder of Aeronaves de México, Antonio Díaz Lombardo, and the Californian advertising agent, Fred Ludekens became prominent Mexican and American boosters in the transport industry and advertisement world of the 1950s and 1960s [See image 19 below, poster in the middle]. Through a marriage of transport and advertisement companies, they began to promote tourist destinations with innovative designs funded by the Mexican government, hotel chains, and Mexican and American airlines.<sup>586</sup> Private and public capital from Mexico and the United States poured into the creation of Acapulco's image.

---

<sup>585</sup> Linda Anderson "Resort City-Once Mexican 'Port o'Call'", *The Times San Mateo*, Ca., 27 January 1968.

<sup>586</sup> Ximena Cassab, "Aeromexico's History as Seen through its Advertising Lines through Time" *Aire* no. 15.

**Image 19: Airline Advertisements of Acapulco, 1950s and 1960s**

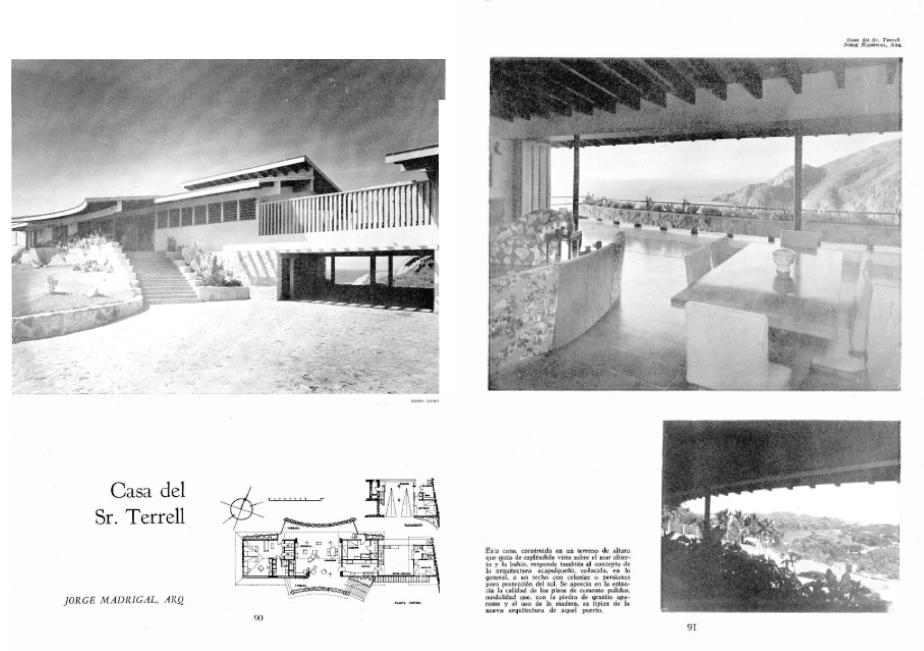


Advertisement by Aeronaves de México, S.A. in the Acapulco magazine *Sur*, November 1, 1955, Acapulco, Gro. Found in AGN, Fondo Presidentes, ARC, 404.11-936; Fred Ludekens, American Airlines, Mexico, 1950s Image credit: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Decorative Arts and Design Deaccession Fund (M.2016.89.1); Display ad in the *New York Times*, August 11, 1968, showing the sponsors of the campaign below.

The flow of capital and investment into Acapulco saw a boom not only in advertisement but also in architectural experimentation, resulting in many businessmen and politicians acting as patrons to sponsor the work of renowned architects. Their work, built or unbuilt, would then be projected outwards to the international stage. In Acapulco's new neighborhoods, there was an initial attempt by the Alemanista elite, architects, and businessmen in Mexico and the United States, to integrate *fraccionamientos* and residential houses into the natural scenery of the bay. This resulted in feats of architecture and urban planning experimenting with scenic views of the bay and the waterfront. Together they contributed to a modernist and cosmopolitan face of the tourist resort. Wolfgang Schoenborn, one of the main stakeholders of the Fraccionadora de Acapulco in the Peninsula Las Playas, according to Mario Pani, was the first who brought the ideas on architecture of houses with scenic open-air views of the bay; houses which were meant to be naturally cooled by the formation of cross-currents and breezes flowing in from the ocean. Pani deemed it Schoenborn's "Hawaiian style," confessedly admitting he had emulated this style in

most of the houses and structures he built in Acapulco: “un hombre muy artista, que dio algunas ideas de cómo hacer la arquitectura en Acapulco, arquitectura abierta, medio hawaiana, que nosotros, [Enrique] del Moral y yo, en las casas que hicimos copiamos un poco.” [See Image 21 next page]<sup>587</sup>

**Image 20: Casa del Señor Terrell, Acapulco, 1954**



See Case Study-like Houses in the issue “Arquitectura en Acapulco,” in the image is the “Casa del Sr. Terrell” by Architect Jorge Madrigal, *Arquitectura México*. Tomo X, No 46, 1954. Another example is “Casa en Acapulco, de Enrique de la Mora, Arq.” *Arquitectura México*. No. 13, July 1943, pp. 152-153.

The postwar housing crisis in California was intimately connected to modernist architectural experimentation in Mexico City and Acapulco. The Case Study House movement, 1945 to the mid 1960s, was initially designed by the magazine *Arts & Architecture* and architect Richard Neutra. It was destined for a market of modest means in California: the millions of returnee soldiers who sought cheap and efficient model homes for their families. In Mexico it was translated into a boon in architectural experiments for the affluent classes in the iconic

<sup>587</sup> Sexta entrevista al arquitecto Mario Pani por Graciela de Garay,” 5-9.

neighborhoods of El Pedregal in Mexico City and the Fraccionamiento Las Playas in Acapulco, among many other new residential areas in both cities. The Mexican magazines *Espacios* and *Arquitectura México*, designed by Mario Pani, Jorge Madrigal, and Enrique del Moral began to publish many designs of houses in the form of the Californian Case Study Houses. But over time they became models in themselves: the Acapulco model. [See Image 20 above]

Pani's contribution to the built environment of Acapulco in the 1940s and 1950s added yet another layer of residential houses to the bay's affluent neighborhoods. The first layer had been added by Andreu Almazán in his various visits to Miami in the 1920s and 1930s, when Miami Beach was experiencing a boom in hotel and beachfront constructions. Miami had been very much a source of inspiration when Almazán initially built his bungalows and hotels in Los Hornos in the 1930s.

This was the story of an architectural boom in Mexico. The trend to experiment with design and architecture continued, becoming more ambitious in the 1940s and 1950s. Businessman Raúl Baillères was very much involved in Acapulco's development through a financial and fiduciary institution he owned, Crédito Minero y Mercantil S.A., Baillères. During his visit to Rochester, New York, he got acquainted with Frank Lloyd Wright's work. In the end, he found Lloyd Wright and struck a friendship with him, then asked the American architect to build a "completely modern house" for Baillères and his family in Acapulco.<sup>588</sup> Wright took the opportunity to promote his work in Mexico and to experiment with new landscapes, accepting to design the businessman's summer house near the federal shipping yards. When he arrived in Mexico City, the American architect experienced the beginnings of a bustling scene in Mexico City and Acapulco, where the profession of architecture and the real estate business were thriving in the mid twentieth century.

---

<sup>588</sup> For description of the house see Wright to Baillères, 5 September, 1952, B162 A03; Raúl Baillères to Frank Lloyd Wright, May 15, 1952, B158 D06; June 5, 1952 B158 D09; (for a description of the house by Frank Lloyd Wright), see Wright to Baillères, September 4, 1952, B162 A03 The Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation Archives. (The Museum of Modern Art | Avery Architectural & Fine Arts Library, Columbia University, New York).

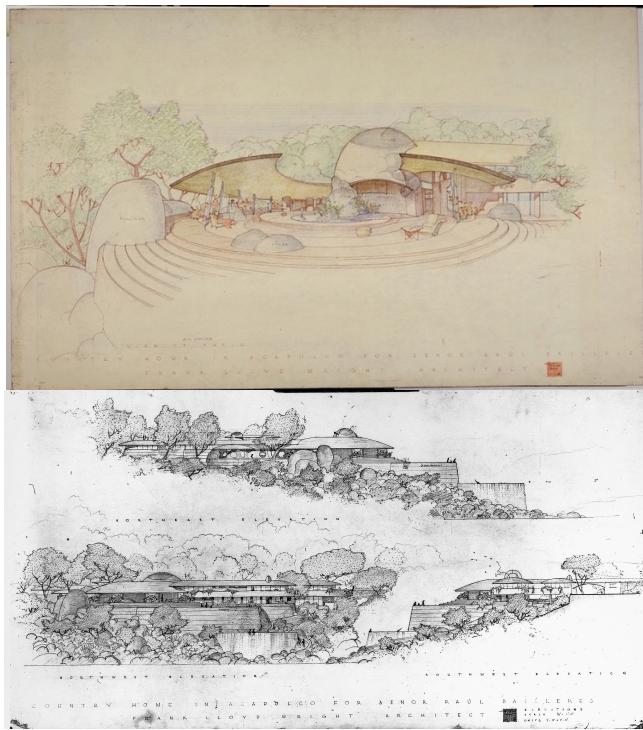
Baillères invited Wright to Acapulco in 1952; interestingly, on his way to Acapulco, Wright received several letters from architects and financiers in the construction business in Mexico, inviting him to participate in construction projects, and conventions.

Baillères commissioned Antonio Peláez, the powerful construction businessman and President of Construcciones de Acapulco to build his house. Peláez had been involved in the construction of multiple public works carried out by the Junta Federal de Mejoras Materiales. They started the work, clearing the ground and measuring the land's confines, while Wright began to work on the plans after visiting the site where the house was projected to be built. Wright's house was very much inspired on the model of his work in California. The design integrated the land's boulders, one of Acapulco's distinctive characteristics, into the house's structure, leaving wide open spaces for ventilation. The materials extracted from the site and the boulders, Wright noted, would become "an artistic feature of an artistic whole."<sup>589</sup> [See Image 21, next page]

---

<sup>589</sup> Similar to the curvilinear geometry of the 1940s and 1950s is the Boulder House in Palm Springs, designed (unbuilt) between 1950-1 as a vacation residence for the Kauffmans. Wright would establish close relationships with sponsors (merchants, bankers, and businessmen) and many of his works were left unbuilt but were also part of the advertisement of his work, see Richard Cleary, Richard Louis., and Frank Lloyd Wright. *Merchant Prince and Master Builder: Edgar J. Kaufmann and Frank Lloyd Wright*. (Pittsburgh, Pa.: Heinz Architectural Center, 1999).

**Image 21: Sketches of Raúl Baillères House (unbuilt), Acapulco, 1952**



Raúl Baillères House (Acapulco, Mexico).

Unbuilt Project. 1952; Sheets 5202.013, (top image) "Patio View" and 5202.014, "Elevations" Brown ink, pencil and color pencil on tracing paper. Courtesy of The Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation Archives. (The Museum of Modern Art | Avery Architectural & Fine Arts Library, Columbia University, New York)

The power of the Marina Nacional and the 1940 law would, nevertheless, haunt this architectural feat. The project experienced significant delays and the paperwork was taking longer than expected, until Baillères found out his lands were being expropriated: "the government has in mind using the land to enlarge the federal shipping yards, as a result of which they will have to expropriate my land." To which Wright responded, courteously—his eyes set on the next project, on the next patron in his rising career—"it was a beautiful opportunity for us both. But I can see how the proximity of the Navy was an unwelcome menace and has finally won."<sup>590</sup> The project fell through. Ironically, the navy would barely use these shipping yards. It was a fading port, after

<sup>590</sup> (B166), Baillères to Wright, March 16, 1953 and Wright to Baillères March 21, 1953 (the proposed cost of the house was between 150 and 200 thousand dollars), The Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation Archives. (The Museum of Modern Art | Avery Architectural & Fine Arts Library, Columbia University, New York).

all; military navigation was not an important activity for Acapulco. Unlike, San Diego, Acapulco did not need active shipping yards for the navy. Instead more summer houses for members of the armed forces were built on Baillères's land. Wright would eventually request the original designs from Baillères. His unbuilt work in Acapulco made its way into exhibits in New York and Chicago together with several other unbuilt projects.

Even though the entire project fell through due to land title conflicts, Wright's students would retake his work to build houses in the later 1960s and 1970s, following the innovative lines and designs laid out by Wright in the 1950s.<sup>591</sup> This was the case of the Arango house built in the 1970s.

The Californian housing crisis also had its underbelly of corruption that was reflected in Acapulco's built environment. Most illuminating is the story of Hal B. Hayes & Associates, Inc. Hayes, a Californian builder in his thirties who developed his own system of mass production of houses with pre-cast concrete. In California, he had been involved in one of the major military housing scandals that led to his legal prosecution.<sup>592</sup> He fled to Acapulco. There the fraudulent and quixotic American entrepreneur built a house, modeled on one of his atomic-proof houses, on the cliffs of Acapulco, but eventually clashed with the municipality and with a group of *paracaidistas* from the colonia El Jardín. In El Jardín the municipal president told the squatter leaders to avoid any confrontations with the entrepreneur, since a “spectacle in Acapulco [would] only show that *paracaidismo* continues to exist.”<sup>593</sup> Haye's monstrosity was left unfinished and abandoned, a

---

<sup>591</sup> An example is John Lautner and his work in Acapulco, the Casa Arango.

<sup>592</sup> United States. Congress. Senate. Committee on Armed Services. Preparedness Investigating Subcommittee. *Capehart Military Family Housing: Hearings, Eighty-seventh Congress, First Session. March 10, 14, 21, 1961*. Washington: U.S. Govt. Print. Off., 1961. Keith Eggener, “Good Neighbors Make Glass Houses. Design Dialogues in Mexico City and Southern California, c1940-1960” in Wendy Kaplan, *Design in California and Mexico, 1915-1985: Found in Translation* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 2017), 593 Unión Municipal de Colonos de Acapulco Gro., filial CNOP. AGN-DFD, 100-10-1-66 L-20 H-5, 10, 17, 28 (January –February 1966) Gomezjara, *Bonapartismo y lucha en la Costa Grande*, pp. 211 DFS López Cisneros; Hearst Magazines, *Popular Mechanics* (Hearst Magazines, 1953), p108-112.

testament to the odd mixture of architectural beauty, housing booms, and corruption, that flourished as part of the modernist movement in architecture between Mexico and California.

In sum, modernists and functionalists—Mario Pani, Félix Candela, Enrique del Moral—would all contribute to the built environment of Acapulco by building countless houses, yacht clubs, hotels, nightclubs, airports, and governmental buildings. Architectural feats, unfinished works, designs, demolished buildings, old and new, would all contribute to the changing face of the built and unbuilt city. Simultaneously, the imagined city and the actual, constantly evolving, built city marked the urban imaginary and architectural landscape of Acapulco as a modernist cosmopolitan resort with very few traces left of its past as commercial port of trade.

### **Literature, Journalism, and the *Imaginario de Acapulco* in North America's Postwar Society**

Modernization bred disenchantment in certain sectors of Mexican society, and Acapulco became a reflection of that disenchantment with the postwar economic miracle in Mexico, thus rotating the kaleidoscope once more. 1947, however, was an anomalous year. It was marked by political and economic crises that reached a nadir with currency devaluations, soaring inflation, and the intensification of rumors of military coups against recently-elected President Miguel Alemán (1946-1952), a critical moment that led historian Daniel Cosío Villegas to write his seminal essay “La crisis de México” in 1947, thereby laying the ground for the narrative of the “spoils of the Revolution” to take root. “Why did the old struggle for justice—violent, confused, but intent—turn into the new drive for development?” asked John Womack a few decades later; “how did the Revolution become a bonanza?” He quickly noted how observers of the metamorphosis disagree: “those resenting the bonanza decry the change as corruption, or

subversion, if not betrayal. Those favoring the bonanza welcome the change as the Revolution's happy fruition." Mexico's postwar society was quickly polarized around these two positions.<sup>594</sup>

As the Revolution and its aura of social justice faded, the effects of modernization and booming capitalistic consumption quickly set in. Acapulco began to be perceived through the lens of scathing and pessimistic criticisms of Mexico's post-revolutionary society. Most depictions projected Acapulco as a paradise and a seedbed of corrupt, money-driven, and idle revolutionaries-turned-businessmen. The city became the world of the parvenu as depicted in widely-read literary depictions: namely, Luis N Spota's novel *Casi el paraíso* (1956), and most importantly in Carlos Fuentes's novel *La región más transparente* (1958). Slowly, without losing its glamour, Acapulco became a symbol of the moral bankruptcy of Mexico's political elite and social class, mingling with a rising international cosmopolitan elite projected as equally bankrupt in its morals. This was the world of the "Acapulco popoff" as revealed in the unfolding scene at the beach in Caleta where one of the most vacuous social groups of Mexicans and foreigners at some point gathers in Fuentes's novel:<sup>595</sup>

Todo el que quería ser visto en Acapulco se sentaba a esa hora, hasta atestarla, en el Bar Bali. Más tarde irían cayendo, con aires de conquista oceánica, los aristócratas del yacht y la lancha...

—Fuchi, si ahora está requete feo esto— intervino mientras espolvoreaba su bata a rayas, Gus. — Acapulco era padrísimo hace veinte años, cuando nadie te conocía y podías correr desnudo por Hornos a las seis de la tarde. No había turistas y todo era virgen, virgen... .

—Y tú chamaco, chamaco—dijo Charlotte. — ¡Ay, Gus! Esto no será Cannes, ni modo, pero para lo que puede ofrecer el pinche país, date de santos. Por lo menos se ven caras conocidas y te puedes dar taco con los ricos. Además de qué te quejas. Sale en los periódicos que viniste aquí, que anduviste en el yacht del Junior, que te fuiste a la fiesta de Roberto Régules. Todo eso se traduce en devaluados, entérate. Regresas a la Gran Tenochtitlán y te llueven las invitaciones, haces conexiones, ¡prosperas, gordito! No te hagas.

---

<sup>594</sup> See, for instance, Daniel Cosío Villegas, *La crisis de México*, 1. ed., Obras completas de Daniel Cosío Villegas (México: Clío, 1997); Womack, "The Spoils of the Mexican Revolution," *Foreign Affairs* Volume 48, Number 4 (July 1970).

<sup>595</sup> Carlos Fuentes, *La región más transparente* (México, D.F: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1973), pp. 318-319.

“Dame clase y te doy lana. Dame lana y te doy clase. No hay pierde,” noted one of the central characters in Fuentes’s novels upon seeing one of the post-revolutionary parvenus and a member of the Mexican elite, both walking entwined in each other’s arms. Mexico’s “burguesía rastacuera” at its best, as one of Luis Spota’s critics observed when commenting on his novel *Casi el paraíso*.<sup>596</sup> The plot is crowded with tricksters, fraudulent foreigners, parvenus full of dollars; with aristocrats, their heyday long-since gone before they arrived in Acapulco, and even disingenuous intellectuals and bohemians imitating the elite they so much despised. In the Acapulco of Spota, they all drift from one party to the next, mingling with the main character, the fraudster Italian prince, Ugo Conti who, after failing to entice an old Californian heir to marry him, ends up living off the Rondia family, the parvenus par excellence. He slowly worms his way into the heart of the family to marry into the patriarch’s fortune and his daughter. Ugo Conti’s entire artifice eventually comes crashing down as intrigues and broken hearts, so characteristic of the 1950s, eventually catch up with the impostor. The Rondia patriarch finds out and sends his hoodlums to look for the fleeing “prince.” Ugo Conti is spectacularly murdered.

The city, in the *imaginario*, becomes a fraudulent place, glamorous for its artifice and illusions, a fool’s paradise hiding the real world of intrigue, greed, and corruption. This narrative has been picked up by historians and journalists over the decades. “Visiting Acapulco became a virtual sign of social status” noted historian Alex Saragoza. “Famous movie actors, well-known writers, eminent artists and the socially prominent made Acapulco their playground, adding a unique social patina to the port city,” further notes Saragoza in an essay aptly called “The Selling of Mexico” for it reveals the underlying premises of the narrative he chose to focus on when writing about Acapulco: “as a budding, attractive opulent spot for influential Mexicans—as well

---

<sup>596</sup> Luis Spota, *Casi el paraíso* (Mexico: Debolsillo, 2013).

as foreign tourists— Acapulco invited intrigue, greed, corruption, and a deepening commercialization of Mexico’s ‘official culture.’”<sup>597</sup>

Then there was the international elite. Mexico’s postwar bonanza and the “Mexican Miracle” expanded the country’s middle class and strengthened their purchasing power, while the Mexican elite soared to new heights and began to mingle with the international cosmopolitan elite. Like Carlos Fuentes’s depiction of Caleta, “rich nomads” and “social pacesetters” dominated Acapulco’s cosmopolitan scene as described in an article on how in Acapulco the “wealthy live in quiet elegance.”<sup>598</sup> Tres Vidas en la Playa was created as a highly exclusive club for jetsetters, J. Paul Getty, D. K. Ludwig and Warren Avis were already involved in the hotel business near there, and eventually this would attract investors and tycoons like Paul R. Braniff who invested in these clubs. These “rich nomads” were “neither hermits nor homebodies.” Aside from “an occasional shopping spree, they aren’t out on the town giving the masses of tourists something to talk about.” Instead, they conducted their lives almost entirely “within the elegant confines of the marble *palacios* in the green hills above Acapulco Bay, and it often consists of nothing more spectacular than sitting around in bathing suits watching the evening sun sink into the Pacific.”

Mexico’ wealthy industrialist, Bruno Pagliai, and his wife Anglo-Indian Hollywood star Merle Oberon would spend six months in Acapulco. They had their main house and three “smaller palacios and a succession of fascinating house guests,”<sup>599</sup> becoming part of the built environment of the bay, as Jorge Ibargüengoitia mockingly described, “vista desde el mar, Acapulco es una ciudad moderna y llena de actividad, vista desde tierra es, en ciertas épocas del año, una ciudad fantasma….

---

<sup>597</sup> “The selling of Mexico: Tourism and the State, 1929-1952” in Gilbert M Joseph, Anne Rubenstein, and Eric Zolov, *Fragments of a Golden Age: The Politics of Culture in Mexico since 1940* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), p. 103.

<sup>598</sup>, “In Acapulco the Wealthy Live in Quiet Elegance” *Star Tribune* By Charlotte Curtis from the *New York Times Service*, 17 April 1968.

<sup>599</sup> “In Acapulco the Wealthy Live in Quiet Elegance” By Charlotte Curtis, *New York Times Service*, 17 April 1968.

Las casas de lujo, con jardines exuberantes y albercas cristalinas que se iluminan por la noche, están desocupadas entre cuarenta y ocho y cincuenta semanas de cada año. Todos los días llega un mozo y riega el jardín, enciende la luz de la alberca y se va a dormir a su propia casa, que está en la punta de un cerro y no tiene ni luz ni agua corriente.<sup>600</sup>

The Pagliais would now and then have their guests over at their mansion. Princess Lalla Nezah from the Moroccan Royalty, Henry J. Heinz would be invited to “their little party dinners.” Yet “not everyone would get an invitation,” notes the article “which is one reason why the Pagliai parties have such cachet.” Others from these sectors of society are also mentioned. Emil Fors, a Californian whose father gave him the money to settle in Acapulco in the early 1950s, would throw important costume dinner parties for 300 people and the most important private party of the season. Charity and philanthropy, of course, were never missing: “Next year, my party’s going to be for Padre Ángel’s Boys Town” referring to the orphanage run by Parish Priest Ángel Martínez in La Laja, as mentioned in the previous chapter. Acapulco would then have two charity balls a season with multicharity gala usually held in the Hilton Hotel’s gardens. “There are needs here.” Ramón Beteta and other industrialists would also receive floods of letters for charities and sanatoriums, and they often founded schools and hospitals.<sup>601</sup> Then the Hollywood star Lisa Farraday married to a multimillionaire family of Detroit industrialists (the Andersons); then there was the less charitable and “socially sensitive” Warren Avis, the founder of the Avis Car Rental, who hosted many members of the jet set; handling and hosting “150 people at the top of a hat” in his mansion. He “wanted a house where you’d never see the servants, and you don’t...but what you do see,” added the *New York Times Service* reporter “are terraces leading to other terraces, all of which overlook the bay, a telescope for Avis to identify pals on the yachts that come to call.”

---

<sup>600</sup> Jorge Ibargüengoitia, “La meca del holgazán. Los invasores de Acapulco.” (17-IV-70) in *La casa de ustedes y otros viajes*, (1991, editorial Planeta Mexicana), pp. 49-51.

<sup>601</sup> AHCM, Archivo Particular Ramón Beteta Bajas Documentales (En proceso de ordenación), Box 87, Exp. 1087, Sanatorio de Recuperación de Acapulco, propuesta de construcción, 1943\*/ Exp. 1009 (carpeta 88)/ Exp. 97 (carpeta 57).

The city begins to emerge as the site of jet setters, and the *imaginario* takes another turn. The Italian Prince Ugo Conti, the Prussian Duchess Frida von Becker, the alleged heir of Wilhelm II, Wolfgang Schoenborn, and Princess Lalla Nezah from the Moroccan Royalty; the fraudulent Californian architect, Hal B Hayes, escaping prosecution and building his house in La Mira; the parties of the Pagliais and Roberto Régules—fictional and real historical characters begin to shade into one another in the urban *imaginario* of Acapulco.

It is from this moment that the story of Acapulco's spoliation begins to emerge. Historians have been captivated by this story. It is fairly simple, yet remarkably persuasive for its simplicity: a group of spoilsman, the story goes, collected the “spoils of the Mexican Revolution” that ended spoiling Acapulco irreversibly. The city and its natural beauty were forever lost in the speculative climate of the “Mexican Miracle.” Yet the story does not end there. Any story of spoliation requires a necessary tale of misleading artifice to cover it up. The post-revolutionary bourgeoisie colluded with a cosmopolitan coterie to deceitfully manipulate images and appearances of the city. They created Acapulco's famous gilded façade—of cosmopolitan glamour and stories of overnight wealth—to hide away the piling heaps of corruption, fraud, blood, repression, displacement of people, and all the waste that went into the creation of the city of Acapulco.

Scholars, journalists, and historians, facing this evident moral and historical responsibility, have time and again come to the rescue of the underdogs in this forgotten tale of spoliation, and time and again it has become imperative to retell the story of how an unsullied city became “*un paraíso perdido*,” a paradise lost to speculation and corruption, or perhaps even less forgiving, a fool's paradise or “*casi un paraíso*” that was all along lost to parvenus, violence, and greed. Paradise is not paradise until it is lost; indeed, one of Marcel Proust's dictums: “the only true

paradise is a paradise that we have lost.”<sup>602</sup> Golden Age thinking at its best. Yet in this nostalgic reappraisal of Acapulco’s history, the main culprit of this lost paradise became the very modernizing dictatorship who created the paradise in the first place. In subtle ways, the narrative has left its lasting imprint on Mexicanist historiography. Andrew Sackett, Gilbert M. Joseph, and Timothy J. Henderson show a hidden face to modernization, a hidden face behind the illusion of paradise, that had been largely ignored until they revealed it:

[one side] reveals a face of modernization that the state-promoted industry strenuously sought to hide” ... “This disjunction between image and reality was not accidental. The Mexican state constructed both the physical infrastructure necessary for tourism in Acapulco and the image of Acapulco as a glittering locus of recreation and relaxation. The idealized Acapulco found in tourist publications was thus not merely fluff for ignorant readers. It was a reflection of what the state was attempting to create, both through advertising and the forced relocation of people who belied the image—peasant farmers on valuable coastal land or indigent ambulatory vendors wandering among tourist on the beaches. The image, though, was often challenged by the popular classes of Acapulco, who appropriated land owned by developers and the state and used it for housing instead of hotels.

Thus the story of Acapulco’s spoliation.<sup>603</sup> Perhaps as simple is the nostalgic counter narrative of Acapulco’s golden years, the proverbial “*Acuérdate de Acapulco*,” which also plays into the tale of the lost and forgotten paradise, but from a different angle. Acapulco became a booming modern tourist resort and continues to thrive despite the decisive interference of Mexico’s inequality, injustice, and poverty. Notwithstanding this cameo appearance of the “Third World,” it still is a story of resounding success, as Acapulco placed Mexico on the map of international leisure markets and mass tourism. Nevertheless, to emphasize the ultimate failure of Acapulco to alleviate poverty and contain violence, and the failure to create a sustainable tourist industry that preserved the built and natural landscapes, also means to ignore the indisputable fact that a long-

---

<sup>602</sup> “Les vrais paradis sont les paradis qu’on a perdus.” The translation is from *In Search of Lost Time*: Vol. VI: *Finding Time Again* by Marcel Proust, edited by Christopher Prendergast, translated by Ian Patterson. For an interesting discussion on this phrase and its meanings and different translations into English, see the review o multiple books by Michael Wood, “The Thing” *London Review of Books* 27 no. 1 (2005): 18-20.

<sup>603</sup> Joseph, Gilbert M., and Timothy J. Henderson. *The Mexico Reader: History, Culture, Politics*. Duke University Press, 2009. Andrew J Sackett, “The Two Faces of Acapulco” P. 501 Andrew J. Sackett, “The Making of Acapulco: People, Land and the State in the Development of the Mexican Riviera, 1927-1973”. PhD diss., Yale University, 2009; “The Two Faces of Acapulco During the Golden Age” in *The Mexico Reader. History, Culture, Politics* edited by Gilbert Joseph & Timothy Henderson. Durham: Duke University Press, 2002.

lasting industry and economic pole was successfully created in the region, acting as an inevitable shock absorber to the violent conflicts of the impoverished state of Guerrero. Surely, violence, poverty, and urban chaos have been major markers of Acapulco's development; but they have also been overemphasized. They tell only one side of the story. The result is that historians, scholars, and journalists, facing this evident moral and historical responsibility, have come to Acapulco's rescue to show how the country's modern-day tourism industry, booming by all standards, is indebted to the contributions made by the tourist city during its golden years. Acapulco then becomes a story of success in urban reinvention that had long-lasting, palpable consequences for the tourist industry and Mexico's economy.

Both narratives of Acapulco's *imaginario* harbor grains of truth, and there is much to say of these two main opposing narratives that have stabilized around a compromise offered and suggested by the “Two Acapulcos” published by the *National Geographic* in 1964. It was an easy compromise which was then further reinforced by historian Andrew Sackett in what he saw as the port city being decisively shaped by “the Two Faces of Acapulco,” consisting of one side smeared by idle wealth, the other by destitute poverty. But then again, this narrative only cherry picks certain aspects of the urban transformation of Acapulco and does not bring in the specific North American context out of which this particular narrative emerged.

Natural beauty and glamour in the 1960s began to be perceived as perennial masks of poverty. In the United States, informality and inequality had remained off the public agenda during the immediate postwar years; back then it was “un-American to focus on lingering class inequalities,” Thomas Sugrue notes in his study of the origins of the urban and economic collapse of Detroit. By the 1960s, however, the focus had radically shifted as “Michael Harrington and others identified a world that countless Americans already knew, but whose harsh realities [had] barely penetrated the postwar veneer of consensus and civility.” Indeed, Sugrue notes, “the

invisibility of economic hardship in the affluent age” became particularly visible in the shock that greeted the depictions of poverty in the United States, what Michael Harrington referred to as the “invisible land,” a world forgotten by the “affluent society,” brutally exposed in his 1962 book, *The Other America*.<sup>604</sup> In this land there were the unskilled workers, skid rows, migrant farm workers, the aged, the minorities and black inner cities, and the desolate landscape of Appalachian communities who all lived, in Harrington’s words, in “the economic underworld of American life.”<sup>605</sup> Indeed, Harrington’s description of the Appalachian Mountains is telling of how the American press would increasingly come to understand nature and wilderness, reinterpreted as intimately bound to abject poverty. This is what many visitors began to see in Acapulco, showing through behind “façade” of glamour, jet-set tourism, and postwar prosperity during the Mexican Miracle.

Then, too, beauty and myths are perennial masks of poverty. The traveler comes to the Appalachians in the lovely season. He sees the hills, the streams, the foliage—but not the poor. Or perhaps he looks at a run-down mountain house and, remembering Rousseau rather than seeing with his eyes, decides that “those people” are truly fortunate to be living the way they are and that they are lucky to be exempt from the strains and tensions of the middle class. The only problem is that “those people,” the quaint inhabitants of those hills, are undereducated, underprivileged, lack medical care, and are in the process of being forced from the land into a life in the cities, where they are misfits.<sup>606</sup>

Meanwhile, in Mexico, this type of criticism born out of a deep disillusionment with the promises of modernization thrived and found a common intellectual ground with this new criticism. The reception of articles like those of the *National Geographic* “The Two Acapulcos,” in 1964, found a common intellectual ground with authors and journalists who had written scathing criticisms of the age of affluence in the United States and of authoritarian modernization in

---

<sup>604</sup> Thomas J. Sugrue. *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit*. (Princeton, USA: Princeton University Press, 2005), pp. 6-7.

<sup>605</sup> Michael Harrington, *The Other America* (United States: Simon and Schuster, 1997), p. 2.

<sup>606</sup> Harrington, *The Other America*, p. 3.

Mexico. “The Two Acapulcos,” written by James Cerruti for the *National Geographic* in a 1964 issue, was published only two years after Harrington’s pioneering book. Cerruti noted how,<sup>607</sup>

A dream world and a ruggedly real world meet in an intriguing city on Mexico’s Pacific shore … Sapphire set in a ring of hills, thus Acapulco bay appears to the eye of the airplane pilot and passenger … In 17 years Acapulco had grown up; the youthful simplicity has all but gone, but an alluring sophistication has replaced it. And yet there is another, more serious Acapulco: a sprawling city of 100,000 Mexicans fighting for a toehold in paradise. Most of these residents live on tourism, the only major industry except for the copra trade. Their Acapulco has grown too—tenfold in thirty years—and this has brought all the problems of too-rapid expansion.

But this two-faced development has inevitably led to urban crises, violence, and ecological disasters. In recurrent cycles and different degrees of intensity, these problems persistently erupt to blow apart Acapulco’s imaginary. Yet the beauty of the bay remained. The natural landscape was constantly brought up to remind the readers how much the city had grown, and how much nature had played a part in the creation of this city. Thus history, nature, and the port-city began to be melded in the changing *imaginario* of Acapulco. Acapulco, “vértice de todas las fuerzas caóticas de la Naturaleza,” concluded Francisco Tario when he photographed Acapulco’s deserted beaches and breathtaking cliffs.<sup>608</sup>

La Historia, aquí, pertenece a la tierra. Es decir, a la tierra, al agua y al viento. La incauta Historia a que se refieren otros pueblos aquí no cuenta. Y el hombre cuenta aquí como un quinto y maravilloso elemento, producto íntegro de esa tierra, de esa agua y de ese viento. Yo diría que ese hombre que nos contempla es exclusivamente una floración desmesurada que arranca de entre las rocas más antiguas y crece vertical e impasible a expensas del primer vendaval, marejada o sismo que lo aniquele.

Like an organism, the city grew and spread, “como una floración desmesurada,” a city that in the *imaginario* began to fuse natural landscapes with human constructed nature: “la tierra, el

---

<sup>607</sup> James Cerruti, “The Two Acapulcos,” *The National Geographic Magazine*, December 1964, 126(6): 848-878.

<sup>608</sup> Alejandro Toledo, “Acapulco en el sueño de Francisco Tario,” *Letras Libres*, Special Issue: “Acapulco en caída libre,” México No.230 (February, 2018).

agua y el viento han escrito aquí una Historia de asombro, belleza y espanto.”<sup>609</sup> As the Mexican seaside grew into sight, nature and city began to forge an ever more complex relationship in Acapulco’s kaleidoscopic *imaginario*.

---

<sup>609</sup> Francisco Tario’s description of one of Lola Álvarez Bravo’s photographs in *Acapulco en el sueño* (Mexico: Centro Cultural/Arte Contemporáneo, 1951).

## CONCLUSION

### **The “Void Pacific” and the Mexican Seaside** *A Synthesis and Cultural Reappraisal of Urban Change and Coastal Development in Acapulco and Mexico, 1849-1970*

There is a series of photographs collected by Acapulco's merchants, William McCann Hudson and Romana Billings, during the Mexican Revolution: the chaos, the occupation, the fort of San Diego turned into military barracks, the port into a war zone by garrison troops, revolutionaries, and evacuees. Soon thereafter, the dust settled in Acapulco and another collection appeared in 1927, when the road was inaugurated. Put together by Marroquín, Navarro, and Pintos, the photographs reveal the story of Acapulco—run-down and on the verge of a sea change in the 1920s. The usual sea-worn huts on the beach, the old markets, the retailing houses, water troughs for mules and the group of muleteers standing quietly behind them as steamships weigh anchor in the calm waters of Santa Lucía Bay.

As the beach resort grew into sight, these photographs show a fading world. Heaps of coal rotting away in the humidity of a forgotten warehouse, stevedores waiting for the lonesome steamer to finally make its appearance after many lifeless months at the dockside. Then, another picture: the pier—unused, splintered, unrepaired—but turned unwittingly into a fish butchery by yacht owners. Boats, cameras, sailfish, the carcass hanging off hooks, initially improvised out of masts, then repurposed for recreational water sports. As the spectacle unfolds, from the shore, one can only imagine stevedores and muleteers darting a suspicious glance through the dragnet, cast by fishermen in high hopes — yachts and sailfish, a new opportunity after all. Then, in the collection, there is the photograph of the bayside, full of beach goers, stumbling their way along the shore. Hot sand slapping their burnt bodies as they bungle every attempt to enjoy the sand, the beach, and the sun.

The Mexican seaside slowly began to appear in the 1920s as the world of Pacific trade, its last traces, began to fade. The transformation that ensued in Acapulco was profound. The old port city and the coaling station disappeared completely, never to return again; henceforth, the bay was redefined by the desire to enjoy the shore. It had all begun with the bay itself, when its natural features were ascribed more recreational and aesthetic roles related to beach leisure, water-gazing and non-commercial activities on the shore. The seashore went from being “a source of food where journeys began and ended” to a dangerous wasteland, visited by shipwrecks, diseases, and invasions only to end up being a site of leisure and contemplation, a natural landscape that invoked the sublime and romantic. “El valor del turismo, desde el punto de vista estético, es indudable:” noted Carlos Contreras in an editorial and article published in his magazine *Planificación* in 1927. “Nos pone en comunión con la Naturaleza, despertando en nuestra alma la sensación de lo bello y lo sublime; mezcla de dolor y de placer, en la que el alma se encuentra a la vez atraída y rechazada. En este sentido tiene un alto valor moral, ya que el bien y lo bello van unidos por un lazo indivisible, siendo este último el símbolo del primero.” Yet William Cronon notes that “as more and more tourists sought out the wilderness as a spectacle to be looked at, the sublime in effect became domesticated,” hence the “cultural invention of wilderness.” Its creation has always entailed a “flight from history.” In the words of the marine biologist Rachel Carson, who wrote a lyrical scientific study in the 1950s, “the boundary between sea and land is the most fleeting and transitory feature of the earth.” The very nature and ecology of the seashore makes the flight from the past even more noticeable. Along these lines, John Gillis argues that in the late nineteenth century, and especially in the twentieth, “the beach was denatured even as it was reconstructed as the purest expression of nature.” Indeed, slowly, as the seaside holiday began to appear, “the beach was created ex nihilo,” thus other scholars have noted that “the beach’s appeal lay in this pristine

emptiness; a lack of history and sense of place.” It all “began as a nonplace, a void...its emptiness, its artificial desertification” has been crucial to the “discovery” of the seaside holiday.<sup>610</sup>

In the cultural imaginary, Acapulco was eventually conflated with the beach and its emptiness, hence the notion that the port-city lacked a sense of place, redeemed only by the existence of a deep history, of which very few physical traces remain—thus, the narrative that tourism and the city were created on a blank slate. The story of the Mexican seaside in Acapulco was not the story of a place created on the pristine emptiness of the beach as many postmodern renderings and environmental stories would have it. Rather, the birth of the Mexican seaside was rowdy, violent, and certainly very eventful. It displaced many coastal dwellers and replaced an entire littoral world. Its first signs were the harbinger of Mexico’s irreversible decline in the world of commerce in the Pacific, which entailed the further collapse of an entire seaside economy and society on Mexico’s Pacific coast. The Mexican seaside after all has been a very complex process, and its final outcome has been equally rowdy, violent, and eventful. In the end, it generated a city with a very complex society, culture, and economy, perhaps as complex as that of the world of Pacific commerce it had replaced.

Around this time, in the 1920s, the Pacific Ocean became, through myths and popular characterizations, also an empty space. Like the beach, it was soon declared a ‘void’ in the collective imagination. The seaside holiday emerged from the Pacific coast in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and surely contributed to this idea of hollowness in the Pacific, a

---

<sup>610</sup> Carlos Contreras editorial, n.a., and “Cartilla de planificación y arte cívico-La evolución de las ciudades,” *Planificación*, Tomo 1, Número 4 (December, 1927), pp.4-7. William Cronon, “The Trouble with Wilderness: Or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature,” *Environmental History* 1, no. 1 (1996): 7–28, John R. Gillis, *The Human Shore: Seacoasts in History*. Seacoasts in History. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2013. P.149; Daniela Blei, “Inventing the Beach: The Unnatural History of a Natural Place,” *Smithsonian Magazine*, June 23, 2016. “The seashore went from being a source of food and where journeys began and ended, to a site of amusement and recreation” in a conversation with Gillis. Rachel Carson, *The Sea Around Us* (Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 127-29. Quoted from Blei “Inventing the Beach” “The beach’s appeal lay in this pristine emptiness; a lack of history and sense of place.” Jean-Didier Urbain explains that “unlike the countryside, the beach is not so much a place of return as a place of new beginnings. . .It is a tabula rasa, a blank slate, an abstraction.”

world that ebbed away and emptied out onto the beach. The beach, slowly construed as a place where nothing happened, was the main culprit. When D.H Lawrence, the English novelist and poet, stared into the Pacific from California in the 1920s, he could not help but notice how the seaside emptied out into the immensity of the ocean. “California is a queer place,” he noted, “in a way, it has turned its back on the world, and looks into the void Pacific. It is absolutely selfish, very empty, but not false, and at least, not full of false effort.”<sup>611</sup> Indeed, Lawrence echoed a myth, prevalent at the time, about the seashore and the Pacific world; a myth that would reverberate in the popular imaginary, not only in the English-speaking world but in other latitudes like Latin America. Many decades later, the Chilean poet Pablo Neruda also wrote about the Pacific from the other side of the continent, the remote Chilean corner of Isla Negra, another country emptied out into the immensity of the ocean. He looked out into the Pacific from the window of his house:<sup>612</sup>

El Océano Pacífico se salía del mapa.

No había dónde ponerlo. Era tan grande, desordenado y azul que no cabía en ninguna parte. Por eso lo dejaron frente a mi ventana.

Los humanistas se preocuparon de los pequeños hombres que devoró en sus años:  
No cuentan.

Ni aquel galeón cargado de cinamomo y pimienta que lo perfumó en el naufragio.  
No.

Ni la embarcación de los descubridores que rodó con sus hambrientos, frágil como una cuna desmantelada en el abismo.

No.

El hombre en el océano se disuelve como un ramo de sal. Y

el agua no lo sabe.

Nothing really happened in the Pacific Ocean. Or if anything ever happened, any trace left of its occurrence had long since disappeared in its vastness. This void became even more

---

<sup>611</sup> Letter (September 24, 1923); published in *The Letters of D.H. Lawrence*, James T. Boulton, E. Mansfield, and W. Roberts (1987), vol. 4.

<sup>612</sup> “El mar” Pablo Neruda, *Una casa en la arena* (Pehuén Editores Limitada, 2002), p. 7.

salient when observers began to compare the histories of the Pacific Ocean with the frantic pace of other maritime spaces, like the Indian or Atlantic oceans, or the Mediterranean Sea, where everything seemed to happen. Hence a void in many historical narratives has been created in the historiography of the Pacific Ocean. Fernão de Magalhães baptized the South Seas with the strange moniker Pacific Ocean upon seeing the vast calmness of its waters, sailing its deceptively smooth sea currents and trade winds on his way to the Philippine Islands in the sixteenth century. Ever since, the Pacific Ocean has been often portrayed as a void where calm reigns and very little happens; surrounded by forgotten lands that turn their back on the world, like Chile and California, self-absorbed and staring deep into the ‘void Pacific’ where any trace of human history has dissolved in its waters, “como un ramo de sal.”

Mexico’s Pacific littoral became a seaside economy with very few connections to the world of commerce. Without any significant transpacific commercial activity since the Manila Galleon ended in the early nineteenth century, it became another ‘void Pacific’ for many coastal regions in Mexico by the time the seaside emerged in the 1920s. Yet it was seething with activity like Neruda’s poem, this ocean was “la potencia extendida de las aguas, la inmóvil soledad llena de vidas.”<sup>613</sup> Around that decade, Mexico’s commercial past in the Pacific continued to be disadvantageously compared to the glorified age of transpacific commerce. The situation was made even more evident with many celebrations, one of them was the San Francisco Panama-Pacific International Exhibition in 1915. Mexican preparations for the exhibition can be seen “as evidence of postrevolutionary adjustments in handling the national image.”<sup>614</sup> I would add that such preparations also involved a public reexamination of Mexico’s past involvement in the Pacific World. This sparked a rivalry of symbolic events: of projected monuments, commemorations,

---

<sup>613</sup> Pablo Neruda, “El gran océano,” *Canto general*, XIV.

<sup>614</sup> Mauricio Tenorio-Trillo, Mauricio. *Mexico at the World’s Fairs: Crafting a Modern Nation*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 196.

exhibitions, speeches, and cultural celebrations revolving around the Pacific World in the Americas, emphasizing its Asian and Hispano-American pasts and serving as a counterpoint to its Anglo-American present of commercial glory.

Francisco Madero's government had already been in contact with the Porfirian exhibition team to organize Mexico's participation at the world's fair in San Francisco. The International Exposition had been projected since May of 1913, coinciding with the consolidation of the coup against Madero. Huerta, in this context of uncertainty, was in desperate need of the United States' public recognition of the legitimacy of his government, but at the same time, the dictator's vulnerability, his fate wholly dependent on the whims of Mexican popular insurrections and the United States, led many of Huerta's supporters to publicly chastise the US for its constant military interventions in Latin America. This effort, as Tenorio notes, "combined with the Mexican government's interest in obtaining official U.S. recognition, made Mexico's great effort to join the 1915 Panama-Pacific exposition inevitable." As Tenorio notes, "the United States encouraged the participation of Latin American countries in part to smooth over its hitherto rather harsh relationships with that bloc."<sup>615</sup>

Gonzalo de Murga, a Spanish man of letters, was a guest of honor who addressed a packed audience of diplomats and high officials of Victoriano Huerta's counterrevolutionary dictatorship, all gathered at the Casino Español. It is not a coincidence that they were celebrating the fourth centennial of Vasco Núñez de Balboa's "discovery of the Pacific Ocean." Now they lamented the current order of things: the new "Yankee lake" supplanting the old "Spanish lake." The event took place in September of 1913, and Gonzalo de Murga, talking about the Opening of the Panama Canal, condemned the United States for not recognizing Huerta's government.

Pero recordad la doctrina Monroe...recordad que el Roosevelt de las declamatorias protestas, fue también el bravonel '*rough rider*,' quien afirmó en Chicago que el Pacífico

---

<sup>615</sup> Tenorio-Trillo, Mexico at the World's Fairs, 196.

debía convertirse en lago yankee, quien con brutal crudeza preconizara para las naciones de América la política del ‘big-stick’...admiro en cuanto de admirable tiene a la gran República de Norte... a pesar de las reiteradas protestas de fraternidad hacia las mismas naciones que ha despojado; a pesar de su invitación a todos los pueblos del globo para asistir a la Exposición Panameña que se celebrará en San Francisco California en 1915 y para concurrir a la cual los buques de los pueblos invitados habrán de recorrer el canal de Panamá al alcance de los formidables cañones que en el Atlántico y en el Pacífico defenderán el paso como una amenaza al mundo<sup>616</sup>

The day after the celebration of the “discovery of the Pacific Ocean,” *El Imparcial* responded to his speech, celebrating Murga’s condemnation of the United States for not having recognized Huerta’s regime. Another orator traced the economic history of the Pacific Ocean, redeeming mercantilism in the Pacific Ocean: “error indudable, mas no perversidad.”<sup>617</sup> Quixotic plans were also mentioned, like the erection of a statue of Núñez de Balboa in front of the Panama Canal, rivaling the Statue of Liberty in New York. Meanwhile, the winds of war blew stronger than ever. Historian Robert W. Rydell writes, “in August 1914 the Panama Canal was completed and Europe went to war. Designed to commemorate the opening of the canal, San Francisco’s Panama-Pacific International Exhibition of 1915 and San Diego’s Panama-California Exposition 1915-16 stood out as colorful oases in a world that had suddenly become much smaller and more terrifying.”<sup>618</sup> In Mexico, Huerta’s regime could not hold amid a wave of insurrections that swept across many regions—the country seemed to be stumbling towards a civil war. Mexico eventually withdrew its participation from the San Francisco Panama Exposition.

This is “the termination of an epoch,” announced Charles Moore, the president of San Francisco’s international fair, as he delivered a closing speech at the 1915 Panama-Pacific

---

<sup>616</sup> Gonzalo de Murga, “De Vasco Núñez de Balboa al Coronel Goethals,” Speech at the Casino Español, September 23, 1913 in Sociedad Mexicana de Geografía y Estadística. *El descubrimiento del Océano Pacífico y la Sociedad Mexicana de Geografía y Estadística: reseña, discursos y documentos relacionados con la solemne sesión verificada en honor de Vasco Nuñez De Balboa, el 25 de septiembre de 1913.* (Mexico: Impr. de la Secretaría de fomento, 1913), 37, 45-48.

<sup>617</sup> Speech by Enrique Santibáñez SMGE, *El descubrimiento del Océano Pacífico*, p. 37.

<sup>618</sup> Robert W Rydell. All the World’s a Fair: Visions of Empire at the American International Expositions, 1876-1916. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), p. 209.

International Exhibition; it is “the end of a perfect day, the beginning of an endless memory.”<sup>619</sup> But in “the final act of putting out the light,” the memory of Acapulco’s global legacy in the Pacific also grew dimmer in the commemoration. Earlier engagements with the Pacific World, especially those between Acapulco and Manila, had become a mere afterthought in the public imaginary of the United States, and nowhere was this more evident than during the exposition. Perhaps it had been a deliberate act of historical erasure. For, in the New Pacific, there was no place for the older history of the world created by Asia and the Americas, an older Pacific created by China and New Spain. The exhibition projected a newer world, the one created by the Gold Rush, the Industrial Revolution, and California. It was the endless memory of the New Pacific heralded by Bancroft.

One “lake” had replaced another; and in this process of replacement, as another speaker at the Casino Español put it, “Acapulco ha perdido su grandeza a pesar de lo hermoso de su bahía.” The natural beauty of the bay was the only thing that was left for Acapulco, at least in the collective imaginary. Natural beauty was the most important feature that was highlighted, not its geographical advantages—a deep-water, sheltered bay suitable for commerce. Times had changed indeed. The international seaport, its transpacific commerce but also its important role as a coaling station during the gold rush, had virtually disappeared by the time the revolution struck the country, signaling the end of a long-lasting order of commerce in the Pacific world, an order that had been slowly declining, since the mid eighteenth century, gradually being replaced by the New Pacific. The opening of the Panama Canal in 1914 was indeed a triumphant moment in the history of the New Pacific as one of the speakers noted at the Casino Español. It meant that “el hallazgo de caminos naturales, al ensanchar los ámbitos de la tierra...abatía el comercio en ciudades antes

---

<sup>619</sup> Rydell. *All the World's a Fair*, 232; “Friends, the exposition is finished. The lights are going out.”

poderosas, hacía surgir nuevos imperios de riqueza, y disipando las nieblas del misterio y de la fábula que envolvían a pueblos remotos, desencajaba y trasponía el eje de la civilización.”<sup>620</sup>

Mexico is, after all, a country that has experienced, by and large, an urban and economic explosion mainly in the interior, while California has led urban growth outwards to the ocean, since the gold rush, and has ever since dominated the North American Pacific economy. But there is an older story. Many historians have noted that, in the case of Mexico, “su devenir histórico no puede comprenderse sin su relación con el mar y los contactos externos que se establecieron desde el siglo XVI.” Yet Carlos Bosch has argued that many historical studies have solely focused in the interior, since human development has mainly grown inwards, towards the Mexican heartland. Guadalupe Pinzón Ríos further notes that “durante mucho tiempo el mar fue percibido como frontera o como medio de contacto con otros territorios; es decir, se ha mirado a las costas y a litorales como frontera geográfica y temática que delimita la historia de tierra adentro.”<sup>621</sup>

Thus, modern-day Acapulco is the result of deep historical processes that have decisively shaped an entire urban and seaside economy on the Pacific coast. What, then, can Acapulco’s particular story of urban change tell us about the nature of coastal development in a country like Mexico? Perhaps Acapulco is the reflection of a stunting or inhibiting effect on urban growth in Mexican Pacific ports Mexico’s Pacific coast and seaside economy has been trapped between the pulling force of two enormous gravitational centers: California and the Mexican heartland. That is why, against received wisdom, ports like Acapulco, despite being situated strategically on the

---

<sup>620</sup> SMGE, *El descubrimiento del Océano Pacífico* (Mexico, 1913).

<sup>621</sup> John Mack, *The Sea. A Cultural History*, (London, Reaktion Books, 2011), p. 14-18. 2 Carlos Bosch, *México frente al mar. El conflicto histórico entre la novedad marinera y la tradición terrestre*, (México: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1980), p. 448-449. “No obstante, Carlos Bosch explica que los estudios históricos han dado prioridad a los espacios del interior debido a que los asentamientos y desarrollos económicos se volcaron más hacia ellos. Lo anterior hace necesario preguntarnos, ¿las aguas oceánicas se encuentran presentes en nuestro patrimonio cultural? De acuerdo con las investigaciones de José Medina González Dávila, el mar es una de las herencias socioculturales más importantes en nuestro país.” p. 1-11. Guadalupe Pinzón Ríos. *El mar: percepciones, lectura y contextos Una mirada cultural a los entornos marítimos* (México: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, Instituto de Investigaciones Históricas/ Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia 2015) p. 1-11.  
[http://www.historicas.unam.mx/publicaciones/publicadigital/libros/el\\_mar/001\\_pinzon.pdf](http://www.historicas.unam.mx/publicaciones/publicadigital/libros/el_mar/001_pinzon.pdf)

Pacific, connecting it to the interior of Mexico, and despite having access to larger markets in the Pacific, California, and the Mexican heartland, have so far generated only tourist boomtowns but not a Mexican megalopolis on the Pacific coast. Indeed, Acapulco is part of an extended region that has stunted the flourishing of cities, like Chiapas, “cuando no florecen las ciudades,” to borrow Juan Pedro Viqueira’s metaphor.<sup>622</sup> In other words, the explosive growth of both California and the Mexican heartland, over the years and decades, have inhibit the development and flourishing of cities along Mexico’s Pacific Coast.

New Economic Geography is not as new as its proponents would have it. Urban and regional planners have discussed the historical origins of natural location and agglomeration economies for a long time now. In an interesting discussion on the historical origins of cities, the urban planner Carlos Contreras explained in the 1920s that:

las agrupaciones humanas se establecen generalmente en lugares que ofrecen alguna ventaja desde el punto de vista geográfico, ya sea en una planicie o en un promontorio, o frente al mar o a algún río o lago, o en donde se cruzan dos o más caminos. Es curioso notar que las principales capitales del mundo están localizadas a orillas de grandes ríos o son puertos de mar... Según Lavedan, podemos dividir las ciudades en dos categorías: las ciudades espontáneas que han nacido al azar y que han crecido poco a poco y las ciudades artificiales, creadas por la voluntad del hombre. Las primeras han dejado al azar o a la naturaleza el cuidado de agrupar los elementos que las constituyen alrededor del elemento generador. Las otras han sido construidas de acuerdo con un plano preconcebido...

Contreras, continuing to explore the historical origin of classical cities, further noted how the place itself was fundamental for the development of cities. Some cities were formed around “fortalezas en lugares fáciles de defenderlos y geográficamente ventajosos;” others “en lugares favorables para el comercio,” and some others where “el lugar es eminentemente bello (Lavedan).”<sup>623</sup> Natural location is a cultural invention. In the end, Acapulco’s story of growth can

---

<sup>622</sup> Juan Pedro Viqueira, “Cuando no florecen las ciudades,” in Lira Vásquez, Carlos y Rodríguez Kuri Ariel (coords.), *Ciudades mexicanas del siglo XX. Siete estudios históricos* (México: México: COLMEX UAM, 2009), 57–178.

<sup>623</sup> Carlos Contreras, “Cartilla de planificación y arte cívico-La evolución de las ciudades,” *Planificación*, Tomo 1, Número 4 (December 1927), pp. 4-7.

be seen as the reinterpretation, over time, of all these three advantages for urban and economic growth in a single bay; each reinterpretation spawned different social, economic, and urban environments. Yet the coastal city only took off upon the last reinterpretation: when the natural beauty of the bay took over and generated a geography of services. The Santa Lucía Bay and the city of Acapulco thus began to trade services and images instead of goods and commodities. As coastal cities influenced one another, architects, engineers, and urban planners—their actions and projects—were also influenced by the traffic of ideas and models of shoreline planning of the postwar era. This entailed a broader reinterpretation of the role of obsolete port cities and their new relationship to the sea and shore. Thus beaches became an integral part of coastal cities; in some cases, like Acapulco, the entire city began revolving around the shore, the beach, and the beauty of the bay, all the more to satisfy the needs of an emerging culture of leisure, water-gazing, and beach tourism. Acapulco ultimately became one of those old port cities that had fundamentally altered its age-old relationship to the sea and the shore

Up until the 1960s, it became a highly attractive model of resort development in the hemisphere, a successful response to significant challenges many harbors began to face as they became obsolete. But there was an underlying problem in this new seaside economy that emerged in the 1920s and boomed during the postwar: lack of economic diversification—a problem that accompanied urban development in Acapulco all throughout its maturation into a coastal city.

The success and sudden prosperity of Acapulco created the ideal conditions for lack of economic diversification, ultimately binding the city to a one-track path from which it could hardly deflect in the face of too many unforeseen bottlenecks. Any attempt to diversify and change course in Acapulco's development was immediately thwarted by those developers and boosters who were deeply involved in its successful development. And yet, by the late 1960s, tourism had proved to be insufficient for the growing city. It was increasingly perceived as unsustainable by a new

generation of politicians and regional planners who recognized how the first group of developers in Acapulco had put all of their eggs in one basket. But by then it was already too late. When the new generation of regional planners sought to reverse course, the city was already growing far too quickly and on very shaky ground. Urban growth was all too dependent on tourism which became the only source of economic development for Acapulco.

To make matters worse, the regulatory and legal framework continued to bring up, recurrently, new and unexpected problems to the surface. Quivers in tourist markets, no matter how distant they were from Acapulco, could suddenly turn into violent shakeouts with the potential to either further boost Acapulco or send it altogether into a spin.<sup>624</sup> This could happen at any moment, adding to Acapulco's structural and regulatory problems. Entering a serious urban crisis was always a possibility.

The engineer and economist Moisés de la Peña described Acapulco's situation eloquently in his economic study of Guerrero in the late 1940s:

Pero en 1927 la carretera, que sacó a Acapulco de la oscuridad y la impotencia y puso en marcha su vigoroso despertar, a la vez lo arruinó como puerto marítimo, y en buena hora, porque esta última categoría la debía a su aislamiento e incapacidad para hacerse valer, al menos como centro turístico. Ahora, una vez que en este último aspecto ha conquistado un glorioso prestigio nacional e internacional, volverá a ser puerto, y de grandes vuelos, cuando se le dote de comunicación ferroviaria con la altiplanicie. Si la carretera mató al puerto e hizo surgir al bello centro turístico, el ferrocarril fortalecerá a éste y dará vida vigorosa al puerto, permitiendo así consolidar la economía y prosperidad de Acapulco, por ahora sujeto a los vaivenes e inestabilidad que son propios de todo centro turístico.<sup>625</sup>

He had identified the city's fundamental problem: lack of economic diversification accompanied urban development in Acapulco, by the 1940s expanding relentlessly. Following de

---

<sup>624</sup> Urban economists who specialize in agglomeration economies would refer to this type of city and dynamic of urban growth as a “localization economy” where urban growth takes place under a single economic activity or industry, compared to an “urbanization economy” which consists of urban growth being spurred by the increasing diversification of industries.

<sup>625</sup> De la Peña, *Guerrero económico*, volumen II, p. 521.

la Peña's assessment, roads doomed the port and made the city rise, but railroads would eventually save the day; and Acapulco would recover its old port and commercial glory which, together with its prestigious reputation as an international resort, would turn Acapulco into the long-awaited coastal metropolis that would boom one day at the edge of the Pacific World. Yet Acapulco never became the Pacific metropolis envisioned at the time.

Given his analytical acuity, de la Peña's wishful thinking sounds like the kind of sound reasoning that emerges in a situation quickly becoming hopeless. And yet everything seemed full of promise at the time. The type of gloomy forecast one might expect would not have tuned in well with the moment. Unfortunately, reviving Acapulco's commercial past, despite all of the planning and infrastructural projects invested in its future, became a hopeless task by the 1950s. Railroads, the panacea of progress in the nineteenth century, were revived by de la Peña in a situation in which, ironically, such overland communications began to matter less and less for Acapulco's particular path to development. In fact, railroads would have stymied growth in the tourist city, for an industrialized port with a thriving industrial and commercial site would have rendered hopeless any attempt to beautify the resort so as to keep attracting more visitors. For that reason, railroads were nowhere to be seen arriving in Acapulco nor were they ever seriously projected by the federal government once the tourist city took off. Instead, more and more boats, cruise ships, flights, buses, and cars full of tourists, national and foreign alike, kept arriving in the port. As a response, new airports and roads communicating Acapulco were built and refurbished particularly in the 1950s.

Even in the hypothetical scenario of an industrializing port, commerce and industry prioritized at the cost of the tourist city, still, there were larger forces at work that could not be controlled. New and far-reaching developments in communications, mobility, and urban growth were changing far too quickly for Acapulco and many other port-cities, struggling to catch up and make it through the second half of the twentieth century. Old towns and ports like Mazatlán and

San Blas were suffering a similar fate as that of Acapulco's, a reflection of Mexico's diminished commercial presence and general decline in the Pacific World.

The first signs of a full-blown age of containerization were already wreaking havoc in old piers and harbors not only among many ports within Acapulco's immediate Pacific littoral space, between California and Panama, but also among hundreds of ports at a global scale. Their commercial decline was set on an irreversible path with the spread of container ships for commercial purposes in the 1950s. Spectacular stories of urban collapse, reinvention, and waterfront redevelopment like those of Marseilles, San Francisco, Bilbao, Calcutta, and London were often heard like ominous signs or promising events for smaller ports like Acapulco. As historian Sunil Amrit put it: "if the harbors of the past were set up to make the most of a site's natural advantages — like the sheltering shape of a bay — the new ports remake coastlines according to their own needs, dredging waters and reclaiming land." Even the new commercial ports that were built on— sometimes ancient— sites were "unmistakably modern creations," as "huge industrial facilities that are self-contained and divorced from their surroundings" emerged in the new empty places left behind by vanishing old ports; "inhuman in size, these mega-harbors [were] built for an economy of scale."<sup>626</sup> Old bays and piers could no longer house containers twice their size, and modern terminals were often built far away from the increasingly obsolete harbors.

Few ports survived and adapted to this momentous, if silent, revolution in transport communications at sea. And if larger ports had not survived these changes, then it would have been nearly impossible for Acapulco to single-handedly reverse this sea change, sweeping at a global scale through more and more ports. Competition also grew from other ports like Lázaro Cárdenas and open-sea commercial terminals that struggled to revive Mexico's commercial

---

<sup>626</sup> Sunil S. Amrit. "Opinion | Snapshots of Globalization's First Wave." *The New York Times*, January 10, 2014.

decline in the Pacific; as a result, many towns and their old harbors and piers along Mexico's Pacific coast were repurposed and redeveloped into tourist resorts.

Acapulco could have hardly accommodated and harbored these new economies of scale, with containerships the size of tall buildings, even less so with a tourist city that depended on the pristine image of a coastal town without an industrial port. It was after all a resort dedicated to visitors escaping the ugly realities of a city. The natural beauty of an urban place, however, has always been fragile. Here was another paradox inherent to a coastal city and a service economy that grew out of the eminent natural beauty of a place. Acapulco fell victim to its own success. The seaside economy spoiled the desirer, then the natural object of desire, then ultimately the very desire to enjoy the shore. When Acapulco was recreated in the 1940s as a site of leisure, it always carried within its own development the possibility of ecological ruin. For ruin implied the physical destruction of the bay's natural landscape, its most salient attraction—and with this the possibility of environmental degradation, overpopulation, and the depletion and pollution of its natural resources. Indeed, ruining the bay's physical landscape, its beaches, water, and natural scenery, meant the end of the tourist industry—the main source of economic renewal for Acapulco in the twentieth century.

This was the central tension addressed at the time, in the 1960s and 1970s, when tourism became yet another visible form of acting upon the bay and the shore: how to preserve the natural and aesthetic features of Acapulco and at the same time make use of them to provide services to its residents, improve their standards of living, and attract more visitors. This required a series of concrete actions: attracting more service workers, spurring urban development, and building recreational landscapes. But for these actions to succeed, ironically, their completion depended on preserving the pristine image of an “untouched” natural landscape. A number of modern-day political sensibilities in Acapulco’s politics—environmentalism, sustainable development, and

conservationism— have their origins in this old tension between the transformative economy and the economy of nature in the tourism economy. Such political sensibilities also have their origins in nineteenth century public works, but also in twentieth-century agendas advocating the eradication of marginality, public health campaigns, and aesthetic conservation of natural landscapes in Acapulco.

Moreover, the creation of a tourist industry saw the emergence of new property rights. This meant a clash between regulations that sought to preserve the aesthetic aspects of Acapulco's natural environment and the rights of private property owners to develop the tourist industry. But it also meant the problem of social inequality emerging as squatters launched large-scale land invasions in the late 1950s. It involved other dilemmas in property rights: whether access to a certain beach and to a scenic view belonged to the public or to the private domain, which coincided with the explosive problem of land expropriation of ejidal lands, and the expansion of informal settlements on the hillsides of the bay.

Moreover, for Acapulco, the old channels of communication that had connected the Pacific littoral for nearly a century were fast disappearing. The connections were stretched beyond breaking point and replaced by new tourism circuits created by booming markets in Mexico City, California, Texas, Florida and the Caribbean, and North America's Pacific Coast. Acapulco's economic life in commerce and the immediate coastal surroundings were no longer the town's mainstays of growth. Indeed, Mexico's heartland and other markets in North America took over the coast as urbanization transformed California and Mexico's west coast in soaring waves during the first half of the twentieth century. These coasts and many port cities would eventually be integrated into booming postwar consumer markets in North America.

In sum, tourism, containers, and postwar markets had made obsolete the slow-moving coasting trade or *cabotaje*, the mainstay of economic life for Acapulco and many Mexican seaside

economies for more than a whole century. The traditional relation between the port and its immediate coasts was becoming a mere relic of the past for Acapulco. It became a powerful model emulated by urban planners when dealing with other trading posts and ports in decline. Yet any attempt to diversify and change course in Acapulco's development was immediately thwarted by the stunting force of its own successful reinvention.

"Old port cities," Amrit further notes, "are a picture of quaint cosmopolitanism; no wonder they are now looked upon with nostalgia." Yet, he argues, this is a "revivalism mostly for tourist consumption," producing a "romanticized rendering of the past" that has airbrushed the "ugly realities" of these old seaport societies with their "cacophony of languages and competing gods [which] made them messy, sometimes violent places, of rough-and-ready compromise." The old port cities of the past were places marked by a long history of epidemics, revolutions, nativist fevers, sacking and occupations. Yet economic life thrived on these old port cities. They thrived, nonetheless, "on the back of an underclass with few rights, poorly paid migrants who worked desperately to improve their lot." But modern-day ports and resorts have also boomed on the back of an underclass of poor migrant and service workers. That is why, upon seeing the size of container terminals, and—I would add—the size of enormous resorts for mass tourism in these old port cities, "we recoil at these mammoth creations and look back on the past with longing," Amrit concludes. And that is "why when we see in the past the origins of the modern behemoths, we look away again."<sup>627</sup>

Acapulco's past was also brought up in different forms. Nature, for instance, and the ecology of the place were invoked as a natural paradise fast disappearing in the tourist resort. These were nostalgic reappraisals of the city and its primeval bonds with the sea and the shore in the 1940s. From then onwards, city and nature recurrently irrupt, violently, into the *imaginario* of

---

<sup>627</sup> Sunil S. Amrit. "Opinion | Snapshots of Globalization's First Wave." *The New York Times*, 10 January 2014.

Acapulco in the twentieth century. Nowhere is this vortex of city and nature in Acapulco better projected in literature than in Carlos Fuentes's *La región mas transparente*. Initially, Acapulco's seascape surges forth in full display. A small boat capsizes, carrying two of the novel's main characters, Norma and Ixca; both are hopelessly plunged into the sea amidst walls of water. Then a brutal scene ensues, unfolding climatically, as both lovers desperately fight for their lives, grasping for the sole lifesaver amidst choppy breaking waves; both splashing, gargling, jostling, then eventually floundering until Norma gets hold of the life preserver and sinks Ixca's head into the water, drowning him.

Then the city erupts into the scene in one of Fuentes's masterful cinematographic-like depictions. After lying unconscious on the sand for a while, Norma wakes up, jolted by a flashback of the entire novel. Disoriented, head still pounding, she starts running mindlessly along the beach; up the road to La Quebrada; then up the stucco stairs and through the garden of those iconic modernist houses—through a garden-terrace, like the one overhanging Warren Avis's mansion, with “terraces leading to other terraces” suspended between the bay, the shrubbery of shadow plants and bougainvilleas, and the sea. She does not stop until she reaches her room. “Comb, towel, lipstick, mascara, her body and her face, a print dress, white shoes, a bag, money. She turned the key in the ignition and raced to the highway.” It is then that the kaleidoscopic world of Acapulco opens up, in full display; the city zooms in, drumming by her window:

[Norma] corrió por la oscuridad hasta encontrar las luces azules del puerto, el tráfico tardío que ascendía de las playas a los hoteles, los convertibles llenos de jóvenes bronceados, de camisas abiertas hasta el ombligo, de bikinis y toallas arenosas y radios puestos a todo volumen; el pueblo laxo junto a los muelles de la bahía: mulatos verdosos, negras panzonas, niños amarillos, hilitos de pesca infructuosa, vendedores de coco: todos de espaldas a la ciudad, sentados frente al mar; el “cuar-cuar” de las bandas de norteamericanos con sombreros de paja y faldas de colorines y anteojos oscuros y habanos y cámaras: las luces neón de los bares y los hoteles, el olor a gas y pescado descompuesto, los claxons insistentes, el pitido de los policías, las sinfonías como acordeones ahogados en el calor; los edificios nuevos, descarados ya, frente alto y brillantón que escondía tres techos de paja, una niña desnuda, el temblor del paludismo: cuerpos enjutos que caminaban

de las playas populares al centro; trajes de baño de lana sobre cuerpos obesos y permanentes deshechos; batas, castillos de arena abandonados, playas cubiertas de colillas y botellas; perros viejos, cansados, calientes, de hocicos cremosos; el mar lleno de aceite, los esquís aventados, las lanchas bamboleantes: ginebra y ron, batachán, ginebra y ron, batachán, batachán, iba y venía, de Playa Azul a Copacabana al Bum-Bum, el ritmo del tambor tropical, los cuerpos enlazados, ginebra y ron, las axilas al aire, batachán, la contorsión de miembros, la uña blanca y vegetal de Acapulco incrustada en el dedo de alcohol y cemento y dólares. Todo ello respiraba su aliento sobre las mejillas encendidas de Norma mientras su coche corría.<sup>628</sup>

On the edge of the vast Pacific Ocean, Acapulco had ultimately become a bustling coastal city, the playground of a landlocked megalopolis. Once a seaport, Acapulco had become a full-blown tourist city that melded North American mass tourism with the vast spectrum of Mexico's post-revolutionary society: endless kinds of lifestyles with all different sorts of social classes; tourists with migrants from all walks of life, "el pueblo laxo junto a los muelles de la bahía... todos de espaldas a la ciudad, sentados frente al mar;" all jostled up against one another, coexisting, if fleetingly, in a mixture of hedonism and poverty on the beach—"Mexico City on the beach," some would say back then. In the end, both seaport and resort had succumbed and disappeared, giving way to a coastal city with no tangible connections to the sea beyond the waterfront and the beach; a populous city that began to stare listlessly into the ocean, into what had then become, irreversibly for Acapulco, the "void Pacific."<sup>629</sup>

By then it was the turn of a decade, and perhaps of an era too. It was the year of 1970—only a matter of time before a small fishing village was "discovered" in the Caribbean; the smallest of villages no seventeenth-century observer could have ever imagined for Acapulco. It was then that Cancún began to be projected as the primal site for the dawn of mass tourism. Acapulco was

---

<sup>628</sup> Carlos Fuentes, *La región más transparente* (Méjico, D.F: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1973), p. 332.

<sup>629</sup> "California is a queer place — in a way, it has turned its back on the world, and looks into the void Pacific." Letter (September 24, 1923); published in *The Letters of D.H. Lawrence*, James T. Boulton, E. Mansfield, and W. Roberts (1987), vol. 4.

henceforward displaced as cycles of boom and bust were set off in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s. These cycles overlapped with a proliferation of critical works of tourism development informed by “Third Worldism,” Marxist studies, and dependency theory. Tourism in Acapulco and Mexico reflected certain aspects of “underdeveloped societies with the result of maintaining and not improving their underdevelopment or dependency.”<sup>630</sup> Yet tourism kept growing by the millions, and the city kept growing. “The sun cuts through the morning fog that blankets the Pacific Coast of central Mexico;” noted an observer standing from an overhanging terrace in Las Brisas in the 1990s, “in the fog is a constant smoky, blue-gray reminder that inland, a struggling, churning, vibrant economy, poised between the third world and modernity, may come to threaten the tourist paradise below.”<sup>631</sup> The nostalgic tale of the threatened *paraíso perdido* quickly kicked in and became a declensionist narrative of decadence, opulence, violence, environmental degradation, and pollution.

All of these narratives—like any myth—harbor grains of truth. They have generated many stories that for decades have proliferated, time and again, in the popular imagination of the United States and Mexico. Yet behind Acapulco’s changing narratives, depictions, and representations, lies a powerful myth that connects them all—the cyclical myth of urban decline, revival, splendor, decadence, and renaissance. For centuries, this urban trope has shaped how historical actors have come to understand and reinterpret Acapulco’s past to thereby act upon its port, its bay, and its city.

Nowadays, senseless violence dissolves into the run-down luxury of bygone years—“Acapulco,” notes Julián Herbert, again nostalgically, “es un lujo derritiéndose al sol.... Acapulco

---

<sup>630</sup> Rosemary L. Lee, “El turismo en América Latina: el comercio de subdesarrollo” in *Turismo y desarrollo*, 1989]” Quoted from Sackett, Andrew Jonathan Sackett, “The Making of Acapulco: People, Land and the State in the Development of the Mexican Riviera, 1927-1973” (Yale University, 2009), p. 17 for more examples of dependentista accounts, including Gomezjara. *Bonapartismo y lucha en la Costa Grande*, and Ricardo Garibay *El paraíso perdido*.

<sup>631</sup> Rodney P. Carlisle and Domic Monetta, *Brandy, Our Man in Acapulco. The Life and Times of Colonel Frank M. Branstetter*. (Denton, Texas: University of North Texas Press, 1999), 1.

es *timeless*... Entre el glamour de medio siglo, el lujo decadente de los ochenta y la zona de guerra de la última década, Acapulco es todos los episodios de su historia al unísono. Su declive ha hecho de la ‘bahía más hermosa de México’ un síntoma del país.”<sup>632</sup> And the kaleidoscope shuffles its shards. Now “Acapulco timeless” emerges in the public imaginary. The horror of gang and drug violence lacerates “the most beautiful bay of Mexico,” and Acapulco turns it into the timeless reflection of a national tragedy. But this is not the end-all, the *imaginario* will keep on revolving. And as one looks on, farther and farther back into Acapulco’s past, there lies at the other end of the kaleidoscope an old port city, set against an even older bay, projecting their history—in shapes, images, and forms—that whirl and renew for ages on end.

---

<sup>632</sup> Julian Herbert, “Acapulco timeless,” *Letras Libres*, Special Issue: “Acapulco en caída libre” México No. 230 (February, 2018).

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

### Archival Sources

#### Mexico

Archivo Fundación Miguel Alemán (AMAV)

Archivo General Agrario (AGA)

Acapulco de Juárez

Archivo General de la Nación (AGN). Mexico City.

Ramo 1 - Dirección Federal de Seguridad (DFS)

Ramo 2 - Dirección General de Investigaciones Políticas y Sociales (DGIPS)

Ramo 3 - Presidentes

Francisco I. Madero (FIM)

Álvaro Obregón - Plutarco Elías Calles,

Emilio Portes Gil (EPG)

Pascual Ortiz Rubio (POR)

Abelardo L. Rodríguez (ALR)

Lázaro Cárdenas del Río (LCR)

Manuel Ávila Camacho (MAC)

Miguel Alemán Valdés (MAV)

Adolfo Ruiz Cortines (ARC)

Adolfo López Mateos (ALM)

Ramo Administración Pública Federal S. XX

TSJDF

Secretaría del Patrimonio Nacional

Junta Federal de Mejoras Materiales-Acapulco

Administración Pública Federal S. XIX

Fototeca

Mapoteca y Micropelícula

Hemeroteca

Archivo Histórico del Colegio de México (AHCM), Mexico City.

Archivo Particular Ramón Beteta Papers

Archivo Histórico del Estado de Guerrero

Fondo Alejandro Wladimir Paucic Smerdou

Miguel F. Ortega

Registro Público de la Propiedad, Comercio y Crédito

Archivo Histórico Municipal de Taxco (AHMT)

Ramo Presidencia Municipal

Archivo General del H. Ayuntamiento del Municipio de Acapulco de Juárez. Acapulco, Gro.

Archivo y Biblioteca del Centro de Estudios Históricos “Carso.” Mexico City.

Archivo de la Palabra, Instituto de Investigaciones Dr. José María Luis Mora. Mexico City.

Biblioteca Manuel Orozco y Berra, Dirección de Estudios Históricos. Tlalpan, Mexico City.

Biblioteca Nacional, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México. Mexico City.

Hemeroteca

Fideicomiso Archivos Plutarco Elías Calles y Fernando Torreblanca (FAPECFT)

Archivo Fernando Torreblanca

Fondo Plutarco Elías Calles (FPEC)

Fondo Álvaro Obregón (FAO)

Archivo Plutarco Elías Calles (PEC), Anexo (APEC)

Colección Embajada de EU en México (CDEEUM)

### United States

California History Room, California State Library Archives (CSL)

Manuscript Collection

Allan Ottley Papers

John Augustus Sutter Papers, 1839-1880.

John Augustus Sutter, Jr., Papers, 1850-1890.

Columbia University Rare Book & Manuscript Library. New York, New York.

The Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation Archives. (The Museum of Modern Art | Avery Architectural & Fine Arts Library, Columbia University, New York.

University of California, Berkeley. Bancroft Library, Manuscript Division  
Latin American Collection

University of California, San Diego, Hill Collection of Pacific Voyages

Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection, General Libraries, University of Texas at Austin.

García Archives Collection  
Ignacio Comonfort Papers  
Manning and Mackintosh Papers  
Riva Palacio Papers

## **Periodicals**

### Mexico

*Arquitectura/México* (Mexico City)

*El Avisador* (Guerrero)

*El Imparcial* (Mexico City)

*El Sur* (Guerrero)

*El Trópico* (Acapulco)

*El Universal* (Mexico City)

*La Prensa* (Mexico City)

*La Verdad* (Acapulco)

*Palpitaciones Porteñas* (Acapulco)

*Planificación* (Mexico City)

*Regeneración de Acapulco* (Acapulco)

*Siglo XIX* (Mexico City)

### United States

*Chicago Tribune* (Chicago)  
*Los Angeles Times* (Los Angeles)  
*New York Times* (New York)  
*San Francisco Chronicle* (San Francisco, California)  
*San Mateo Times* (California)  
*Washington Post* (Washington, D.C.)

### ***Manuscript Sources***

*Articles of Contract between the Pacific Mail Steamship Co. and the Republic of Mexico.*  
Panama, Star & Herald Office, 1874.

Banco de México. *El turismo norteamericano en México, 1934-1940.* México: Gráfica Panamericana, 1941.

Benítez, José R., and Mexico. *Guía histórica y descriptiva de la carretera México-Acapulco.* México: Editorial "Cvltvra," 1928.

Carrera Sabat, Manuel. *Oferta de tierras para colonizar en el estado de Guerrero en su sierra madre ó antiguo Anahuac.* México, Imp. de Vicente G. Torres, 1875.

Duflot de Mofras, Eugene, and Marguerite Knowlton Eyer Wilbur. *Duflot de Mofras' Travels on the Pacific Coast.* Santa Ana, Calif.: The Fine Arts Press, 1937.

———. *Duflot de Mofras' Travels on the Pacific Coast.* Santa Ana, Calif.: The Fine Arts Press, 1937.

Fernández, Justino. *Aportación a la monografía de Acapulco, México, 1932 / González Lobo, Carlos, pról.* México, D.F.: INBA, Dirección de Arquitectura y Conservación del Patrimonio Artístico Inmueble : Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes, 2004.

Gemelli Careri, Giovanni Francesco. *A Voyage Round the World*, n.d.

Ejército Restaurador de la Libertad Comisaría General. *Cuentas de la Comisaría y sub-comisaría del Ejercito Restaurador de la Libertad: que manifiestan los ingresos y egresos que han tenido, en las fechas que mencionan.* Vicente García Torres, 1856.

Humboldt, Alexander von. *Political Essay on the Kingdom of New Spain: Containing Researches Relative to the Geography of Mexico, the Extent of Its Surface, and Its Political Division Into Intendancies, the Physical Aspect of the Country, the Population, the State of Agriculture and Manufacturing and Commercial Industry, the Canals Projected Between the South Sea and Atlantic Ocean, the Crown Revenues, the Quantity of the Precious Metals Which Have Flowed from Mexico Into Europe and Asia, Since the Discovery of the New*

*Continent, and the Military Defence of New Spain.* Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, and Brown; and H. Colburn., 1814.

*Informe que el Secretario de Gobernación rinde á la Cámara de Diputados del Congreso de la Unión, en cumplimiento del acuerdo aprobado en la sesión del 5 del actual, sobre líneas de vapores subvencionados.* México, Impr. del Gobierno, 1880.

Manuel de la Barrera, and M.M. Toro. “Noticia estadística del Distrito de Tabares perteneciente al estado de Guerrero.” *Boletín de la Sociedad Mexicana de Geografía y Estadística*. VII (1859): 407–47.

México, Comisión Nacional de Caminos. *Los caminos de México*. México: CNC, 1931.

México, and Secretaría de Bienes Nacionales e Inspección Administrativa. “Informe de labores de la Secretaría de Bienes Nacionales e Inspección Administrativa correspondiente al periodo de...1947 a 1955.” *Informe de labores de la Secretaría de Bienes Nacionales e Inspección Administrativa correspondiente al periodo de ...*

Náxara, Manuel Crisóstomo. *Observations critiques sur le chapitre XIII du dernier volume de l'ouvrage intitulé, “Exploration du territoire de l'Oregon, des Californies et de la mer Vermeille, exécutée pendant les années 1840, 1841 et 1842, par mr. Duflot de Mofras.”* México: Impr. de V.G. Torres, 1845.

Old Nick (pseud.). “Un paseo a México, 1859 y 1860 .” *Boletín de la Sociedad Mexicana de Geografía y Estadística* I (1869): 766–89.

Perkins, William, Dale L. Morgan, and James R. Scobie. *Three Years in California; William Perkins' Journal of Life at Sonora, 1849-1852*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1964.

Prieto, Guillermo, and Nicolás. León. *Memorias de mis tiempos ...* Paris: Vda. de C. Bouret, 1906.

*Revista mexicana de la Sociedad Promovedora de Mejoras Materiales: septiembre de 1852.*  
Imprenta de Ignacio Cumplido, 1852.

Rogers, Woodes. *A Cruising Voyage Round the World: First to the South-Seas, Thence to the East-Indies, and Homewards by the Cape of Good Hope. Begun in 1708, and Finish'd in 1711. Containing a Journal of All the Remarkable Transactions; Particularly, of the Taking of Puna and Guiaquil, of the Acapulco Ship, and Other Prizes; an Account of Alexander Selkirk's Living Alone Four Years and Four Months in an Island; and a Brief Description of Several Countries in Our Course Noted for Trade, Especially in the South-Sea. With Maps of All the Coast, from the Best Spanish Manuscript Draughts. And an Introduction Relating to the South-Sea Trade.* A. Bell and B. Lintot, 1712.

Hernández Rodríguez, Rosaura. *Ignacio Comonfort: trayectoria política, documentos*. [1 ed.]. Vol. 7. Instituto de Investigaciones Históricas. Serie de historia moderna y contemporánea.

México: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, Instituto de Investigaciones Históricas, 1967.

Sabat, Manuel Carrera. *An Offer of Lands for the Purpose of Colonization in the State of Guerrero, Mexico, Situated in the Sierra Madre or Antiguo Anahuac Mountains of the Said State* / . Mexico, 1875.

Secretaría de Hacienda. *Noticia de la importacion y exportacion de mercancías 1872-1875.* Mexico: Tip  
Gonzalo A. Esteva, 1880.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Estadistica fiscal. Movimiento de transportes marítimos y terrestres: 1893-1894, 1894-1895, 1895-1896.* México, 1893.

\_\_\_\_\_. Exportaciones de los años fiscales de 1890-1895. Tip. de la Oficina Impresora de Estampillas, 1891.

\_\_\_\_\_. Comercio exterior: Año fiscal de 1896-1897, 1897-1898, 1899-1900, 1901.

Secretaría de Hacienda y Crédito Público. *Noticias del movimiento marítimo de altura y de cabotaje; 1886-1887, 1887-1888, 1888-1889.* México: Imprenta del Gobierno, 1887.

Sociedad Mexicana de Geografía y Estadística. *El descubrimiento del Océano Pacífico y la Sociedad Mexicana de Geografía y Estadística; reseña, discursos y documentos relacionados con la solemne sesión verificada en honor de Vasco Nuñez de Balboa, el 25 de septiembre de 1913.* México: Impr. de la Secretaría de fomento, 1913.

Tornel y Mendivil, José J. *Manual de derecho mercantil mexicano, o sea, El Código de Comercio de México.* México: Imprenta de Vicente Segura Arguelles, 1854.

Velasco, Alfonso Luis. *Geografía y estadística de la República Mexicana.* Oficina Tip. de la Secretaría de Fomento, 1897.

Vicuña Mackenna, Benjamín. *Páginas de mi diario durante tres años de viaje, 1853-1854-1855* ... Universidad de Chile, 1936.

## Secondary Sources

Adelman, Jeremy. *Republic of Capital: Buenos Aires and the Legal Transformation of the Atlantic World.* Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1999.

Adelman, Jeremy, and Stephen Aron. "From Borderlands to Borders: Empires, Nation-States, and the Peoples in between in North American History." *The American Historical Review* 104, no. 3 (1999): 814-41.

———. “Of Lively Exchanges and Larger Perspectives.” *The American Historical Review* 104, no. 4 (1999): 1235–39.

Adrià, Miquel. *Mario Pani : la construcción de la modernidad*. Ciudad de México: Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes y Literatura, 2016.

Aguilar, Luis Aboites. “En busca del centro. Una aproximación a la relación centro-provincias en México, 1921-1949.” *Historia Mexicana* 59, no. 2 (2009): 711–54.

Albertsen, Niels. “Welfare and the City.” *Nordic Journal of Architectural Research/Nordisk Arkitekturforskning*, no. 2 (2004).

Alisky, Marvin. *Mexico’s Federal Betterment Boards: Financial Mainstays of Border Municipalities*. Arizona State University, Institute of Public Administration, 1970.

Almadox, Arturo. “From Urban to Regional Planning in Latin America, 1920–50.” *Planning Perspectives* 25, no. 1 (January 1, 2010): 87–95.

Amith, Jonathan D. *The Möbius Strip: A Spatial History of Colonial Society in Guerrero, Mexico*. Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 2005.

Amrith, Sunil S. “Opinion | Snapshots of Globalization’s First Wave.” *The New York Times*, December 20, 2017.

Andrade, Tonio, and Xing Hang. *Sea Rovers, Silver, and Samurai: Maritime East Asia in Global History, 1550-1700*. Perspectives on the Global Past. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2016.

Antuñano, Emilio de. “Planning a ‘Mass City’: The Politics of Planning in Mexico City, 1930-1960.” Ph.D., The University of Chicago, 2017.

Armitage, David, and Alison Bashford. *Pacific Histories: Ocean, Land, People*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014.

Aviña, Alexander. *Specters of Revolution: Peasant Guerrillas in the Cold War Mexican Countryside*. Oxford University Press, 2014.

Aviña, Rafael. *Orson Welles en Acapulco y el misterio de la Dalia Negra*. Primera edición. México, D.F: Conaculta, 2013.

Azuela, Antonio. “‘La hechura jurídica de la urbanización. Notas para la historia reciente del derecho urbanístico.’” In *Los grandes problemas de México. Tomo 2. Desarrollo urbano y regional*, edited by Gustavo Garza y Martha Schteingart, coordinadores. El Colegio de México AC, 2012.

Bancroft, Hubert Howe. *The New Pacific*. New York: The Bancroft Co., 1900.

- Bancroft, Hubert Howe, Henry Lebbeus Oak, William Nemos, and Frances Fuller Victor. *History of California*. History Company, 1886.
- Bartra, Armando. *Guerrero bronco: campesinos, ciudadanos y guerrilleros en la Costa Grande*. Ediciones Era, 1996.
- Bashi, Vilna. *Survival of the Knitted: Immigrant Social Networks in a Stratified World*. Stanford University Press, 2007.
- Benítez, José R., and Mexico. *Guía histórica y descriptiva de la carretera México-Acapulco*. México: Editorial "Cvltvra," 1928.
- Benjamin, Thomas, and Mark Wasserman. *Provinces of the Revolution: Essays on Regional Mexican History, 1910-1929*. 1st ed. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1990.
- Bentley, Jerry H. "Sea and Ocean Basins as Frameworks of Historical Analysis." *Geographical Review* 89, no. 2 (April 1, 1999): 215–24.
- Bentley, Jerry H., Renate Bridenthal, and Kären Wigen. *Seascapes: Maritime Histories, Littoral Cultures, and Transoceanic Exchanges*. University of Hawaii Press, 2007.
- Berger, Dina, and Andrew Grant Wood. *Holiday in Mexico: Critical Reflections on Tourism and Tourist Encounters*. Duke University Press, 2009.
- Bernabéu Albert, Salvador, and Carlos Martínez Shaw, eds. *Un océano de seda y plata: el universo económico del Galeón de Manila*. Colección Universos Americanos 12. Sevilla: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 2013.
- Bernecker, Walther L. *Contrabando: ilegalidad y corrupción en el México del siglo XIX*. Universidad Iberoamericana, 1994.
- Bethell, Leslie. "Brazil." In *Latin America between the Second World War and the Cold War, 1944-1948*, edited by Leslie Bethell and Ian Roxborough, 33-65. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992.
- Bethell, Leslie, and Ian Roxborough. *Latin America between the Second World War and the Cold War, 1944-1948*. Cambridge; New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1992.
- Bicalho, Maria Fernanda. *A cidade e o império: o Rio de Janeiro no século XVIII*. Civilização Brasileira, 2003.
- Hudson, W.H., "Great Opportunities in Mexico," *Frank Waterhouse & Company's Pacific Ports*, 1919.
- Bolton, Herbert Eugene, and John Francis Bannon. *Bolton and the Spanish Borderlands*. [1st ed.]. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1964.

- Bonialian, Mariano Ardash. *El Pacífico hispanoamericano: política y comercio asiático en el imperio español, 1680-1784: la centralidad de lo marginal*. 1a ed. México, D.F.: El Colegio de México, 2012.
- Borja, Dora León, and Ádám Szászdi Nagy. “El Comercio Del Cacao de Guayaquil.” *Revista de Historia de América*, no. 57/58 (January 1, 1964): 1–50.
- Borsay, Peter, and John K. Walton. *Resorts and Ports: European Seaside Towns since 1700*. Channel View Publications, 2011.
- Brading, D. A. “Creole Nationalism and Mexican Liberalism.” *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs* 15, no. 2 (1973): 139–90.
- Brand, Donald D. *Coastal Study of Southwest Mexico*. Austin, 1957.
- Braudel, Fernand. *Civilization and Capitalism, 15th-18th Century: The Structure of Everyday Life*. University of California Press, 1992.
- \_\_\_\_\_. “History and the Social Sciences: The Long Duration.” *Political Research, Organization and Design* 3, no. 6 (February 1, 1960): 3–13.
- \_\_\_\_\_. “History and the Social Sciences: The Longue Durée.” In *On History*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II*. University of California Press, 1995.
- Bulmer-Thomas, Victor, John Coatsworth, and Roberto Cortes-Conde. *The Cambridge Economic History of Latin America: Volume 2, The Long Twentieth Century*. Cambridge University Press, 2006.
- Bushnell, Clyde Gilbert. *The Military and Political Career of Juan Alvarez, 1790-1867*, 1958.
- \_\_\_\_\_. “The Military and Political Career of Juan Alvarez, 1790-1867,” 1958.
- Bustamante Alvarez, Tomás., and Sarmiento Silva. *El sur en movimiento: la reinvenCIÓN de Guerrero del siglo XXI*. México: Consejo de Ciencia y Tecnología del Estado de Guerrero, 2001.
- Busto Ibarra, Karina. “Acapulco en la segunda mitad del siglo XIX. ¿Estancamiento o desarrollo portuario?” In *El Mar: percepciones lecturas y contextos. Una mirada cultural a los entornos marítimos*, edited by Guadalupe Pinzón Ríos and F. Trejo, 267–87. México, D.F: UNAM, Instituto de Investigaciones Históricas, Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia., 2015.
- \_\_\_\_\_. “El espacio del Pacífico Mexicano puertos, rutas, navegación y redes comerciales, 1848-1927.” P.h.D diss., Colegio de México, 2008.

- Campuzano, Juan R. *Acapulco, belleza trágica y otros paisajes*. México: L.E.A.R, 1937.
- Carlisle, Rodney P., and Dominic J. Monetta. *Brandy, Our Man in Acapulco: The Life and Times of Colonel Frank M. Brandstetter*. 1st ed. Denton, Tex.: University of North Texas Press, 1999.
- Carson, Rachel. *The Sea Around Us*. Oxford University Press, 2003.
- Castañeda, Luis M. *Spectacular Mexico: Design, Propaganda, and the 1968 Olympics*. A Quadrant Book. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2014.
- Castillo, Rubén H. Luz. *Recuerdos de Acapulco*. Acapulco, Gro.: Monroy Padilla, 1973.
- Centeno, Miguel Angel, and Fernando. López-Alves. *The Other Mirror: Grand Theory through the Lens of Latin America*. Princeton [N.J.]: Princeton University Press, 2001.
- Chamberlin, Eugene Keith. "Baja California After Walker: The Zerman Enterprise." *The Hispanic American Historical Review* 34, no. 2 (1954): 175–89.
- Chang, David A. "Borderlands in a World at Sea: Concow Indians, Native Hawaiians, and South Chinese in Indigenous, Global, and National Spaces." *Journal of American History* 98, no. 2 (September 1, 2011): 384–403.
- Chang, Kornel. *Pacific Connections: The Making of the U.S.-Canadian Borderlands*. University of California Press, 2012.
- Chapman, Charles E. "The Age of the Caudillos: A Chapter in Hispanic American History." *The Hispanic American Historical Review* 12, no. 3 (1932): 281–300.
- Chaunu, Pierre, Jacques Bertin, and Serge Bonin. *Les Philippines et le Pacifique des Ibériques (XVI<sup>e</sup>, XVII<sup>e</sup>, XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècles)*. Vol. 11-11 bis. Ports, routes, traffics. Paris: S.E.V.P.E.N., 1960.
- Chu, Julie Y. *Cosmologies of Credit: Transnational Mobility and the Politics of Destination in China*. Duke University Press, 2010.
- Cisneros Méndez, Alejandro, Samuel Villela Flores, and Martha Alicia López Díaz. *Guerrero: obra de un pueblo*. Guerrero, México: Gobierno del Estado de Guerrero, 2003.
- Clancy, Michael. *Exporting Paradise: Tourism and Development in Mexico*. New York: Pergamon, 2001.
- Coatsworth, John H. "Obstacles to Economic Growth in Nineteenth-Century Mexico." *The American Historical Review* 83, no. 1 (1978): 80–100.
- Coatsworth, John H., and Jeffrey G. Williamson. "Always Protectionist? Latin American Tariffs from Independence to Great Depression." *Journal of Latin American Studies* 36, no. 2 (2004): 205–32.

Cocks, Catherine. *Tropical Whites: The Rise of the Tourist South in the Americas*. University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013.

Colín, Ostwald Sales. *El movimiento portuario de Acapulco: el protagonismo de Nueva España en la relación con Filipinas, 1587-1648*. Plaza y Valdés, 2000.

Corbin, Alain. *The Lure of the Sea: The Discovery of the Seaside in the Western World, 1750-1840*. University of California Press, 1994.

Cosío Villegas, Daniel. *La crisis de México*. 1. ed. Obras completas de Daniel Cosío Villegas. México: Clío, 1997.

Cronon, William. *Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West*. W. W. Norton & Company, 2009.

\_\_\_\_\_. "Revisiting the Vanishing Frontier: The Legacy of Frederick Jackson Turner." *The Western Historical Quarterly* 18, no. 2 (1987): 157–76.

\_\_\_\_\_. "The Trouble with Wilderness: Or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature," *Environmental History* 1, no. 1 (1996): 7–28.

Cruz Barney, Oscar. *El comercio exterior de México, 1821-1928: sistemas arrancelarios y disposiciones aduaneras*. Vol. 246. Doctrina jurídica ; México: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, Instituto de Investigaciones Jurídicas, 2005.

Cuevas, Mariano. *Monje y marino; la vida y los tiempos de fray Andrés de Urdaneta*. Vol. II. Españoles en América. México: Galatea, 1943.

Culver, Lawrence. *The Frontier of Leisure: Southern California and the Shaping of Modern America*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010.

Cumings, Bruce. *Dominion from Sea to Sea: Pacific Ascendancy and American Power*. Yale University Press, 2009.

Davis, Jack E. *The Gulf: The Making of an American Sea*. 1 edition. New York: Liveright, 2017.

Deas, Malcolm. "The Fiscal Problems of Nineteenth-Century Colombia." *Journal of Latin American Studies* 14, no. 2 (1982): 287–328.

DeLay, Brian. "How Not to Arm a State: American Guns and the Crisis of Governance in Mexico, Nineteenth and Twenty-First Centuries." *Southern California Quarterly* 95, no. 1 (2013): 5–23.

Devienne, Elsa. "Shifting Sands: A Social and Environmental History of Los Angeles's Beaches, 1920s-1970s." *California History* 93, no. 2 (June 30, 2016): 61.

Di Tella, Torcuato S. "Las clases peligrosas a comienzos del siglo XIX en México." *Desarrollo Económico* 12, no. 48 (1973): 761–91.

Díaz, Carlos Tello. Los señores de la Costa: Historias de poder en Careyes y Cuixmala. Penguin Random House Grupo Editorial México, 2014.

Díaz Clavel, Enrique. El Rey Lopitos. Acapulco, Gro.: Comisión Editorial Municipal, 1997.

Díaz Díaz, Fernando. Caudillos y caciques; Antonio López de Santa Anna y Juan Álvarez. [1. ed. Vol. 15. Centro de Estudios Históricos. Nueva serie, 15. México]: El Colegio de México, 1972.

Díaz López, Lilia. Versión francesa de México; informes diplomáticos. [1. ed. México]: Colegio de México, 1964.

Ducruet, César. Ports in Proximity: Competition and Coordination among Adjacent Seaports. UK: Routledge, 2016.

Falcón, Romana., and Raymundus Thomas Joseph Buvé. Don Porfirio presidente ... nunca omnipotente: hallazgos, reflexiones y debates, 1876-1911. 1a. ed. Mexico, d.f.: Universidad Iberoamericana, 1998.

Ficker, Sandra Kuntz. El comercio exterior de México en la era del capitalismo liberal, 1870-1929. El Colegio de Mexico AC, 2007.

Fischer, Brodwyn M. A Poverty of Rights: Citizenship and Inequality in Twentieth-Century Rio de Janeiro. Stanford University Press, 2008.

Fischer, Brodwyn, Bryan McCann, and Javier Auyero. Cities from Scratch: Poverty and Informality in Urban Latin America. Duke University Press, 2014.

Fisher, Andrew Bryan. "Worlds in Flux, Identities in Motion: A History of the Tierra Caliente of Guerrero, Mexico, 1521–1821." Ph.D., University of California, San Diego, 2002.

Flores, Samuel Villela. "Anita Brenner En La Fotografía Mexicana y Su Expedición Etnofotográfica a Guerrero." Antropología. Boletín Oficial Del INAH. Accessed October 10, 2018.

Foner, Eric. Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877. 1st ed. The New American Nation Series. New York: Harper & Row, 1988.

Fowler-Salamini, Heather. Agrarian Radicalism in Veracruz, 1920-38. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1978.

Frazer, Robert W. "Trade between California and the Belligerent Powers during the French Intervention in Mexico." Pacific Historical Review 15, no. 4 (1946): 390–99.

Freese, Barbara. Coal: A Human History. Basic Books, 2016.

- Fuentes, Carlos. *La región más transparente*. Edición: 9. Madrid: Cátedra, 2000.
- Fujita, Masahisa, Paul Krugman, and Anthony J. Venables. *The Spatial Economy: Cities, Regions, and International Trade*. Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 2001.
- Fujita, Masahisa, and Tomoya Mori. "The Role of Ports in the Making of Major Cities: Self-Agglomeration and Hub-Effect." *Journal of Development Economics, Increasing Returns, Monopolistic Competition and Economic Development*, 49, no. 1 (April 1, 1996): 93–120.
- Fulwider, Benjamin. "Driving the Nation: Road Transportation and the Postrevolutionary Mexican State, 1925–1960." Ph.D., Georgetown University, 2009.
- Gándara, Guillermo., and Manuel Muñoz Lumbier. *Pérfil botánico - geológico de la carretera México-Acapulco*. Mexico: Talleres Gráficos de la Nación., 1935.
- García, Erik Velásquez, Enrique Nalda, Pablo Escalante Gonzalbo, Bernardo García Martínez, Bernd Hausberger, Óscar Mazín Gómez, Dorothy Tanck De Estrada, et al. *Nueva historia general de México*. El Colegio de México AC, 2010.
- García, Genaro. *Los gobiernos de Álvarez y Comonfort, segun el archivo del general Doblado. Documentos inéditos o muy raros para la historia de México*; Mexico: Vda. de C. Bouret, 1910.
- Garibay, Ricardo. Acapulco. Editorial Grijalbo, 1979.
- Gilbert, Benjamin Franklin. "French Warships on the Mexican West Coast, 1861-1866." *Pacific Historical Review* 24, no. 1 (1955): 25–37.
- Gill, Mario. "Los Escudero, de Acapulco." *Historia Mexicana* 3, no. 2 (1953): 291–308.
- Gillingham, Paul, and Benjamin T. Smith. *Dictablanda: Politics, Work, and Culture in Mexico, 1938-1968. American Encounters/Global Interactions*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2014.
- Gillis, John R. *The Human Shore: Seacoasts in History. Seacoasts in History*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2013.
- Giráldez, Arturo. *The Age of Trade: The Manila Galleons and the Dawn of the Global Economy. Exploring World History*. Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015.
- Glantz, Margo. Un folletín realizado: la aventura del conde de Raousset-Boulbon en Sonora. 1.ed. SepSetentas, 75. México: Secretaría de Educación Pública, 1973.
- Gómez, Erika Patricia Cárdenas. "Crecimiento y planeación urbana en Acapulco, Cancún y Puerto Vallarta (México)." *Investigaciones Turísticas*, no. 12 (2016): 99–120.
- Gómez Maganda, Alejandro. *Acapulco en mi vida y en el tiempo*. México: Libro Mex, 1960.

Gomezjara, Francisco A. Bonapartismo y lucha campesina en la Costa Grande de Guerrero. México, D.F.: Editorial Posada, 1979.

González Claverán, Virginia. Malaspina en Acapulco. 1. ed. [Madrid]: Turner, 1989.

González Navarro, Moisés. Anatomía del poder en México, 1848-1853. 2a ed. Vol. [23]. [Nueva serie] - Centro de Estudios Históricos ; México: El Colegio de México, 1983.

Gootenberg, Paul. Between Silver and Guano: Commercial Policy and the State in Postindependence Peru. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1989.

\_\_\_\_\_. Imagining Development: Economic Ideas in Peru's "Fictitious Prosperity" of Guano, 1840-1880. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993.

Guardino, Peter F. Peasants, Politics, and the Formation of Mexico's National State: Guerrero, 1800-1857. Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 1996.

Guldi, Jo. Roads to Power: Britain Invents the Infrastructure State. Harvard University Press, 2012.

Guldi, Jo, and David Armitage. The History Manifesto. Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2014.

Gutiérrez Galindo, José. Y el pueblo se puso de pie; la verdad sobre el caso Guerrero. Guerrero: LOGOS, 1961.

Hale, Charles A. Mexican Liberalism in the Age of Mora, 1821-1853. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968.

Halperín Donghi, Túlio. Guerra y finanzas en los orígenes del estado argentino (1791-1850). Buenos Aires, República Argentina: Editorial de Belgrano, 1982.

Hämäläinen, Pekka. The Comanche Empire. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008.

Hämäläinen, Pekka, and Samuel Truett. "On Borderlands." *Journal of American History* 98, no. 2 (September 1, 2011): 338–61.

Harrington, Michael. The Other America: Poverty in the United States. A Pelican Book. New York: Penguin Books, 1988.

Hart, John Mason. Empire and Revolution: The Americans in Mexico since the Civil War. University of California Press, 2002.

Harvey, David, and Karl Marx. A Companion to Marx's Capital. London: Verso, 2010.

Haufler, Virginia. Dangerous Commerce: Insurance and the Management of International Risk. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997.

- Hein, Carola. *Port Cities: Dynamic Landscapes and Global Networks*. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2011.
- Herbert, Julián. *Canción de tumba*. Edición: 1. Penguin Random House Grupo Editorial, 2015.
- Herrera Canales, Inés. *El comercio exterior de México, 1821-1875*. Vol. 25. Nueva serie / Centro de Estudios Históricos ; México, D.F.: Colegio de México, 1977.
- Herrera Sipriano, Francisco. *La revolución en la montaña de Guerrero: la lucha zapatista 1910-1918. Regiones de México*. México, D.F.: Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, 2009.
- Herzog, Tamar. *Upholding Justice: Society, State, and the Penal System in Quito (1650---1750)*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2004.
- Holliday, J. S., and William Swain. *The World Rushed in: The California Gold Rush Experience*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1981.
- Holston, James. *Insurgent Citizenship: Disjunctions of Democracy and Modernity in Brazil*. Princeton University Press, 2009.
- . *The Modernist City: An Anthropological Critique of Brasilia*. University of Chicago Press, 1989.
- Hurtado, Albert L. “Empires, Frontiers, Filibusters, and Pioneers: The Transnational World of John Sutter.” *Pacific Historical Review* 77, no. 1 (2008): 19–47.
- Ibarguenoitia, Jorge. *La casa de usted y otros viajes* | Planeta de Libros. Mexico: Booket.
- Ibarra Bellón, Araceli. *El comercio y el poder en México, 1821-1864: la lucha por las fuentes financieras entre el Estado central y las regiones*. 1. ed. México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1998.
- Igler, David. *The Great Ocean: Pacific Worlds from Captain Cook to the Gold Rush*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2013.
- . “The Industrial Far West: Region and Nation in the Late Nineteenth Century.” *Pacific Historical Review* 69, no. 2 (May 1, 2000): 159–92.
- Illades, Carlos. *Breve historia de Guerrero*. México, D.F.: El Colegio de México, Fideicomiso Historia de las Américas, Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2000.
- Isard, Walter. *Location and Space-Economy; a General Theory Relating to Industrial Location, Market Areas, Land Use, Trade, and Urban Structure*. Regional Science Studies Series ; [Cambridge]: Published jointly by the Technology Press of Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Wiley, New York, 1956.

Jacobs, Ian. *Ranchero Revolt: The Mexican Revolution in Guerrero*. 1st ed. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1982.

Jenks, Karen Elizabeth. "Trading the Contract: The Roles of Entrepreneurs, Government, and Labor in the Formation of the Pacific Mail Steamship Company." Ph.D., University of California, Irvine, 2012.

John, Rachel St. *Line in the Sand: A History of the Western U.S.-Mexico Border*. Princeton University Press, 2011.

Joseph, G. M. *Revolution from without: Yucatán, Mexico, and the United States, 1880-1924*. Cambridge [Cambridgeshire]: Cambridge University Press, 1982.

Joseph, G. M., and Timothy J. Henderson. *The Mexico Reader: History, Culture, Politics*. The Latin America Readers. Durham: Duke University Press, 2002.

Joseph, G. M., and Daniel Nugent. *Everyday Forms of State Formation: Revolution and the Negotiation of Rule in Modern Mexico*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1994.

Joseph, Gilbert M., Anne Rubenstein, Emily S. Rosenberg, and Eric Zolov. *Fragments of a Golden Age: The Politics of Culture in Mexico Since 1940*. Duke University Press, 2001.

Joseph, Luz de Guadalupe. *En el viejo Acapulco*, n.d.

Kaplan, Wendy. *Design in California and Mexico, 1915-1985: Found in Translation*. Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 2017.

Kemble, John Haskell. "Pacific Mail Service between Panama and San Francisco, 1849-1851." *Pacific Historical Review* 2, no. 4 (1933): 405–17.

———. "The Panama Route, 1848-1869." University of California Press, 1943.

———. "The Panamá Route to the Pacific Coast, 1848-1869." *Pacific Historical Review* 7, no. 1 (1938): 1–13.

———. "The Transpacific Railroads, 1869-1915." *Pacific Historical Review* 18, no. 3 (1949): 331–43.

Kim, Jessica. "Destiny of the West: The International Pacific Highway and the Pacific Borderlands, 1929–1957." *Western Historical Quarterly* 46, no. 3 (August 1, 2015): 311–33.

Knight, Alan. *The Mexican Revolution*. Cambridge [Cambridgeshire]: Cambridge University Press, 1986.

———. *The Mexican Revolution: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford University Press, 2016.

———. "The Working Class and the Mexican Revolution, c. 1900-1920." *Journal of Latin American Studies* 16, no. 1 (1984): 51–79.

Knight, Franklin W., and Peggy K. Liss. *Atlantic Port Cities: Economy, Culture, and Society in the Atlantic World, 1650-1850*. Univ. of Tennessee Press, 1991.

Kourí, Emilio. *A Pueblo Divided: Business, Property, and Community in Papantla, Mexico*. Stanford University Press, 2004.

\_\_\_\_\_. “Interpreting the Expropriation of Indian Pueblo Lands in Porfirian Mexico: The Unexamined Legacies of Andrés Molina Enríquez.” *Hispanic American Historical Review* 82, no. 1 (February 1, 2002): 69–118.

Krugman, Paul. “First Nature, Second Nature, and Metropolitan Location.” *Journal of Regional Science* 33, no. 2 (May 1, 1993): 129–44.

\_\_\_\_\_. “Increasing Returns and Economic Geography.” *Journal of Political Economy* 99, no. 3 (June 1, 1991): 483–99.

Kwass, Michael. *Contraband: Louis Mandrin and the Making of a Global Underground*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2014.

León, Martha. *Puertos del aire: historia, estadística y geografía de los aeropuertos y la aviación en México*. México, D.F.: Sector Comunicaciones y Transportes : Aeropuertos y Servicios Auxiliares, 1997.

Lerdo de Tejada, Miguel. *Comercio exterior de México, desde la conquista hasta hoy*. México: Banco Nacional de Comercio Exterior, 1967.

Lewis, Oscar. *The Children of Sánchez: Autobiography of a Mexican Family*. Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 2011.

Lira Vásquez, Carlos., and Ariel Rodríguez Kuri. *Ciudades Mexicanas del siglo XX: siete estudios históricos*. 1. ed. México, D.F.: Colegio de México, 2009.

Lomnitz-Adler, Claudio. *The Return of Comrade Ricardo Flores Magón*. Brooklyn, NY: Zone Books, 2014.

López Portillo, José. *Mis tiempos: biografía y testimonio político*. México, D.F.: Fernández, 1988.

López, Ruth Mandujano. “From Sail to Steam: Coastal Mexico and the Reconfiguration of the Pacific in the Nineteenth Century.” *International Journal of Maritime History* 22, no. 2 (December 1, 2010): 247–75.

Lösch, August. *The Economics of Location*. New York: Science Editions, 1967.

Lurtz, Casey Marina. “Exporting from Eden: Coffee, Migration, and the Development of the Soconusco, Mexico, 1867-1920.” Ph.D., The University of Chicago, 2014.

Mallon, Florencia E. Peasant and Nation: The Making of Postcolonial Mexico and Peru. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995.

María del Carmen Yuste López y Guadalupe Pinzón Ríos (coords.). A 500 años del hallazgo del Pacífico. La presencia novohispana en el Mar del Sur. (Serie Historia General, 33). Mexico: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, Instituto de Investigaciones Históricas, 2016.

Marler, Scott P. “‘A Monument to Commercial Isolation’: Merchants and the Economic Decline of Post- Civil War New Orleans.” *Journal of Urban History* 36, no. 4 (July 1, 2010): 507–27.

Márquez, Graciela. Claves de la historia económica de México: El desempeño de largo plazo (siglos XVI-XXI). Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2015.

\_\_\_\_\_. Monopolio y comercio en América Latina, siglos XVI-XVII. Centro de Estudios Económicos, El Colegio de México, 2001.

Martínez Carbajal, Alejandro. Acapulco. Barrios históricos. Vol. I. Acapulco, Gro.: Talleres Gráficos, Comisión Editorial Municipal H. Ayuntamiento de Acapulco, 1993.

\_\_\_\_\_. Juan Escudero y Amadeo Vidales. Editorial Revolución, 1961.

Martinez Figueroa, Paulina. “Hoteles de la Ciudad de México: cultura, empresa y sociedad en un espacio moderno (1936-1968).” P.h.D diss. El Colegio de México, 2015.

Martínez, María Antonia. El despegue constructivo de la revolución: sociedad y política en el alemanismo. 1. ed. México: H. Camara de Diputados, LIX Legislatura, 2004.

Massey, Douglas S., Joaquin Arango, Graeme Hugo, Ali Kouaouci, and Adela Pellegrino. Worlds in Motion: Understanding International Migration at the End of the Millennium: Understanding International Migration at the End of the Millennium. Clarendon Press, 1999.

Matsuda, Matt K. “The Pacific.” *American Historical Review* 111, no. 3 (June 2006): 758.

Mayo, John. Commerce and Contraband on Mexico’s West Coast in the Era of Barron, Forbes & Co., 1821-1859. Peter Lang, 2006.

\_\_\_\_\_. “Consuls and Silver Contraband on Mexico’s West Coast in the Era of Santa Anna.” *Journal of Latin American Studies* 19, no. 2 (1987): 389–411.

McCrossen, Alexis. Land of Necessity: Consumer Culture in the United States-Mexico Borderlands. Durham [N.C.]: Duke University Press, 2009.

McGowan, Gerald L. La separación del sur o cómo Juan Álvarez creó su estado. 1a ed. Fuentes para la historia del Estado de México; Zinacantepec, Estado de México: El Colegio Mexiquense, 2004.

McGuinness, Aims. Path of Empire: Panama and the California Gold Rush. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008.

McKeown, Adam. *Melancholy Order: Asian Migration and the Globalization of Borders*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2008.

Melón Jiménez, Miguel Ángel. *Los tentáculos de la hidra: contrabando y militarización del orden público en España (1784-1800)*. Sílex Universidad. Madrid: Sílex, 2009.

Mercado, Monina Allarey. *Antipolo, a Shrine to Our Lady*. Published for Aletheia Foundation by Craftnotes, 1980.

Meyer, Jean A. *Esperando a Lozada*. México: El Colegio de Michoacán, 1984.

Miranda Arrieta, Eduardo. *Economía y comunicaciones en el estado de Guerrero, 1877-1910*. Morelia, Michoacán, México: Universidad Michoacana de San Nicolás de Hidalgo, Instituto de Investigaciones Históricas, Departamento de Historia de México, 1994.

Morse, Richard M. "Trends and Patterns of Latin American Urbanization, 1750-1920." *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 16, no. 4 (1974): 416–47.

Muñoz, Laura. "Los Puertos Mexicanos Del Golfo Durante Los Primeros Años Del México Independiente: Fuentes Para Su Estudio." *América Latina En La Historia Económica. Boletín de Fuentes*, Instituto Mora, Núm. 21, January-June, 2004, p. 70., n.d.

Namier, Lewis Bernstein. *The Structure of Politics at the Accession of George III*. London: Macmillan and Co., Limited, 1929.

Nash, Gary B. *The Urban Crucible: Social Change, Political Consciousness, and the Origins of the American Revolution*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1979.

Ngai, Mae M. "Chinese Gold Miners and the 'Chinese Question' in Nineteenth-Century California and Victoria." *Journal of American History* 101, no. 4 (March 1, 2015): 1082–1105.

Niblo, Stephen R. *Mexico in the 1940s: Modernity, Politics, and Corruption*. Latin American Silhouettes: Studies in History and Culture. Wilmington, Del.: SR Books, 1999.

Niblo, Stephen R., and Diane M. Niblo. "Acapulco in Dreams and Reality." *Mexican Studies/Estudios Mexicanos* 24, no. 1 (2008): 31–51.

O'Gorman, Edmundo. *Seis estudios históricos de tema mexicano*. Vol. 7. Biblioteca de la Facultad de Filosofía y Letras,. Xalapa: Universidad Veracruzana, 1960.

Olivera, Luis. *Fondo Juan Álvarez*. 1. ed. Serie Guías (Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México. Instituto de Investigaciones Bibliográficas). México: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1995.

Olveda, Jaime., and Juan Carlos. Reyes G. *Los Puertos noroccidentales de México*. 1. ed. Zapopan, Jalisco: Colegio de Jalisco, 1994.

Ortiz, Gabriel. "Agua Potable Para La Ciudad de Acapulco, Guerrero." *Ingeniería Hidráulica En México* 12, no. 2 (1958).

Oteiza Iriarte, Tomás. *Acapulco, la ciudad de las naos de Oriente y de las sirenas modernas: historia.* Editorial Diana, 1973.

Pani, Alberto J. *Tres monografías: I. Revolucionarios y reaccionarios.-II. La política hacendaria del nuevo régimen.-III. La industria nacional del turismo.* México, D.F.: [Talleres de la Editorial "Cvltvra"], 1941.

Paxman, Andrew. "Maximino Ávila Camacho: El Narciso que se creía Centauro." In *Los Gobernadores: Caciques del pasado y del presente*, edited by Andrew Paxman. Mexico: Grijalbo, 2018.

Peloso, Vincent C., and Barbara A. Tenenbaum. *Liberals, Politics, and Power: State Formation in Nineteenth-Century Latin America.* Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1996.

Peña, Moisés T. de la. *Guerrero económico /Volume I and II.* Chilpancingo,Gro.: Gobierno del Estado de Guerrero, 1949.

Pérez, Louis A. *On Becoming Cuban: Identity, Nationality and Culture.* Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999.

Piketty, Thomas. *Capital in the Twenty-First Century.* Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2017.

Pletcher, David M. "A Prospecting Expedition across Central Mexico, 1856-1857." *Pacific Historical Review* 21, no. 1 (1952): 21–41.

Polanyi, Karl. "Ports of Trade in Early Societies." *The Journal of Economic History* 23, no. 1 (1963): 30–45.

Popp, Richard K. *The Holiday Makers: Magazines, Advertising, and Mass Tourism in Postwar America.* LSU Press, 2012.

Portilla, Anselmo de la. *Historia de la revolución de México contra la dictadura del General Santa-Anna, 1853-1855.* Facsímil de la ed. mexicana de 1856. Clásicos de la historia de México. México D.F.: Biblioteca de México, Fundación Miguel Alemán, 1993.

Potash, Robert A. *Mexican Government and Industrial Development in the Early Republic the Banco de Avio.* Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1983.

Prieto, Guillermo. *Instrucción pública, crítica literaria, ensayos.* Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes, 1997.

Ramírez Bravo, Margarita. ““El Desarrollo Urbano en Acapulco. La normatividad para su ordenamiento y sus efectos en la Zona Diamante,”” 2012.

Ramírez Sáiz, Juan Manuel. Turismo y medio ambiente: el caso de Acapulco. México, D.F.: Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana, Unidad Xochimilco, División de Ciencias y Artes para el Diseño, Depto. Teoría y Análisis, 1986.

Rawls, James J., Richard J. Orsi, and Marlene Smith-Baranzini. A Golden State Mining and Economic Development in Gold Rush California. Vol. 2. California History Sesquicentennial Series ; Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1999.

Reina, Leticia. Las rebeliones campesinas en México, 1819-1906. 1a. ed. Vol. 28. Colección América nuestra. Caminos de liberación ; México, D.F.: Siglo Veintiuno Editores, 1980.

Robles, Vito Alessio. Acapulco, Saltillo y Monterrey: en la historia y en la leyenda. Editorial Porrúa, 1978.

Rohrbough, Malcolm J. Rush to Gold: The French and the California Gold Rush, 1848-1854. The Lamar Series in Western History. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013.

Roncayolo, Marcel. L'Imaginaire de Marseille: port, ville, pôle. Vol. tome 5. Histoire du commerce et de l'industrie de Marseille : XIXe-XXe siècle ; Marseille: Chambre de commerce et d'industrie de Marseille, 1990.

Ross, Michael L. "How Do Natural Resources Influence Civil War? Evidence from Thirteen Cases." International Organization 58, no. 1 (2004): 35–67.

Rydell, Robert W. All the World's a Fair: Visions of Empire at American International Expositions, 1876-1916. University of Chicago Press, 2013.

Sackett, Andrew. "Fun in Acapulco? The Politics of Development on the Mexican Riviera." In Holiday in Mexico, edited by Dina Berger, Andrew Grant Wood, Gilbert M. Joseph, and Emily S. Rosenberg, 161–82. Duke University Press, 2009.

\_\_\_\_\_. "The Making of Acapulco: People, Land and the State in the Development of the Mexican Riviera, 1927-1973." Ph.D., Yale University, 2009.

\_\_\_\_\_. "The Two Faces of Acapulco," in Revolution from without: Yucatán, Mexico, and the United States, 1880-1924. Edited by Gilbert M. Joseph, Cambridge [Cambridgeshire]: Cambridge University Press, 1982.

Salazar Adame, Jaime. Juan Alvarez Hurtado: cuatro ensayos. 1. ed. México: Gobierno del Estado de Guerrero : Asociación de Historiadores de Guerrero : M.A. Porrúa, 1999.

Samaniego, Marco Antonio. Breve historia de Baja California. UABC, 2006.

Sánchez Hidalgo Hernández, Dora Cecilia. "Building a Modern Port: Urban Space, Local Government and Social Change in Veracruz, Mexico, 1872-1914." Ph.D., The University of Chicago, 2014.

- Sejas, Tatiana. *Asian Slaves in Colonial Mexico: From Chinos to Indians*. Vol. 100. Cambridge Latin American Studies ; New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2014.
- . “Inns, Mules, and Hardtack for the Voyage: The Local Economy of the Manila Galleon in Mexico.” *Colonial Latin American Review* 25, no. 1 (January 2, 2016): 56–76.
- Semple, Ellen Churchill, and Friedrich Ratzel. *Influences of Geographic Environment, on the Basis of Ratzel’s System of Anthropo-Geography*. H. Holt and Co., 1911.
- Sheller, Mimi, and John Urry. “The New Mobilities Paradigm.” *Environment and Planning A* 38, no. 2 (February 1, 2006): 207–26.
- . *Tourism Mobilities: Places to Play, Places in Play*. 1 edition. London ; New York: Routledge, 2004.
- Shulman, Peter A. *Coal and Empire: The Birth of Energy Security in Industrial America*. JHU Press, 2015.
- Sinkin, Richard N. *The Mexican Reform, 1855-1876: A Study in Liberal Nation-Building*. Vol. no. 49. Latin American Monographs ; No. 49. Austin: Institute of Latin American Studies, University of Texas at Austin: distributed by University of Texas Press, 1979.
- Skinner, Quentin. *Visions of Politics*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2002.
- Soto, Hernando de. *The Other Path: The Economic Answer to Terrorism*. New York: Basic Books, 2002.
- Spate, O. H. K. *The Spanish Lake*. Vol. v. 1. Spate, O. H. K. (Oskar Hermann Khristian), 1911- The Pacific since Magellan ; Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1979.
- Spector, Luis Unikel, Crescencio Ruiz Chiapetto, and Omar Lazcano. “Factores de rechazo en la migración rural en México : 1950-1960.” *Estudios Demográficos y Urbanos* 7, no. 01 (January 1, 1973): 24–57.
- Spota, Luis. *Casi el paraíso*. Penguin Random House Grupo Editorial, 2017.
- Stevens, Donald Fithian. *Origins of Instability in Early Republican Mexico*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1991.
- Stout, Joseph Allen. *Schemers and Dreamers: Filibustering in Mexico, 1848-1921*. Fort Worth: Texas Christian University Press, 2002.
- Sugrue, Thomas J. *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit*. Princeton University Press, 2005.
- Sutter, John Augustus, and Allan R. Ottley. *The Sutter Family and the Origins of Gold-Rush Sacramento*. Red River Books ed. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2002.

Taibo, Paco Ignacio, and Rogelio Vizcaíno A. *El socialismo en un solo puerto: (Acapulco 1919-1923)*. Extemporáneos, 1983.

Tejedo del Castillo, Humberto. *400 años de periodismo en Acapulco 1583-1983*. [Mexico?]: [publisher not identified], H. Ayuntamiento Constitucional de Acapulco), 1983.

Tenenbaum, Barbara A. *The Politics of Penury: Debts and Taxes in Mexico, 1821-1856*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1986.

Tenorio-Trillo, Mauricio. *I Speak of the City: Mexico City at the Turn of the Twentieth Century*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2012.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Mexico at the World's Fairs: Crafting a Modern Nation*. Vol. 35. *The New Historicism*; Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996.

Thomson, Guy P. C. "Popular Aspects of Liberalism in Mexico, 1848-1888." *Bulletin of Latin American Research* 10, no. 3 (1991): 265-92.

Thünen, Johann Heinrich von. *Isolated State; an English Edition of Der Isolierte Staat*. [1st ed.]. Oxford, New York: Pergamon Press, 1966.

Tilly, Charles, and Gabriel Ardant. *The Formation of National States in Western Europe*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1975.

Toro Rosales, Salvador del. *Testimonios*. Sindicato de Trabajadores de la Universidad Autónoma de Nuevo León, 1996.

Torres, Rebecca. "Linkages between Tourism and Agriculture in Mexico." *Annals of Tourism Research* 30, no. 3 (2003): 546-566.

Tremml-Werner, Birgit. *Spain, China, and Japan in Manila, 1571-1644: Local Comparisons and Global Connections*. Vol. 1. *Emerging Asia*; Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2015.

Tutino, John. *From Insurrection to Revolution in Mexico: Social Bases of Agrarian Violence, 1750-1940*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1986.

Vázquez Garzón, Emilio. *El ciudadano Jorge Joseph*. Mexico: Author's edition, 1962.

Vázquez Mantecón, Carmen. *Santa Anna y la encrucijada del Estado: la dictadura, 1853-1855*. 1a ed. México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1986.

Viqueira, Pedro. "Cuando no florecen las ciudades." In *Ciudades mexicanas del siglo XX. Siete estudios históricos*, edited by Lira Vásquez, Carlos y Rodríguez Kuri Ariel, 57-178. México: COLMEX UAM, 2009.

Walshok, Mary. *Invention and Reinvention: The Evolution of San Diego's Innovation Economy*. 1 edition. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2013.

Womack, John. "The Spoils of the Mexican Revolution." Foreign Affairs Volume 48, Number 4 (July 1970).

\_\_\_\_\_. Zapata and the Mexican Revolution. Vol. V-627. A Vintage Book,. New York: Vintage Books, 1970.

Wood, Andrew, and James A. Baer. "Strength in Numbers: Urban Rent Strikes and Political Transformation in the Americas, 1904-1925." Journal of Urban History, August 18, 2016.

Zamacois, Niceto de. Vindicación de México: antología. UNAM, 2007.

Zollinger, James Peter. Sutter; the Man and *his Empire*. P. Smith, 1967.