"El Paso de Venus por el disco del sol": Criminality and Alcoholism in the Late Porfiriato
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Las ideas sobre criminalidad y alcoholismo fueron una parte importante de las ideas sociales de las élites porfiriánas. Alrededor de ellas se construyeron categorías que servían para distinguir y jerarquizar a los grupos sociales. Los estudiosos mexicanos buscaron las peculiaridades nacionales de esos vicios mediante la observación científica y el uso de modelos explicativos importados. Sin embargo, no llegaron a establecer un consenso sobre la forma de tratar con ambos problemas.

At the turn of the century, the Mexican elite regarded the rest of society from a comfortable perspective: peace prevailed between the different classes, and the cement of stability was the patent moral superiority of those at the top. Charles Hale has defined an important component of that sense of superiority as "scientific politics": a strong government led by Porfirio Díaz, guided by the methods of science, and an interpretation of society that viewed it as an organism. Mexico City, however, offered a landscape much more complicated than the well-to-do would have desired: The population was growing. New and old cultural influences collided in the streets, and the mechanisms for maintaining order were failing to keep up with

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the changes. Alcoholism and criminality were of special concern, posing concrete challenges to the elite belief in their moral superiority and in scientific politics. Both problems appeared in almost all settings of public and private life and affected members of all classes. After all, Mexicans were not as virtuous and obedient as expected, and the line between good and evil was not so straight and "natural" as the one that divided the wealthy from the poor, or men from women. The Porfirian elite perceived alcoholism and criminality as great dangers to the country and tried to respond by seeking convincing explanations and likely solutions.

This article describes elite perceptions of criminality and alcoholism in Mexico City and the explanations which they produced in order to ensure the continuation of order and progress. Faced with evidence of vice in society, educated groups had to adapt their cognitive divisions of society, preserving the perception of their morally superior place within it. They tried to conceptually confine the areas, the membership, the language, and the genetics of the world of alcoholism and crime. The discourse I will analyze shows the development of new instruments to understand society by setting individual physiological vice in direct relationship to larger social issues, thus creating an area where scientific politics could deal with social anomalies as "pathologies" of the social "organisms." Another recurring element of this discourse is the construction of a moral classification of society with racial implications. Morality justified the claim of Porfirian upper classes to superiority over other social groups. In their perspective, custom, education, and breeding were as important as economic considerations in defining the divisions of society.²

The discourse about social anomalies was produced by urban, educated groups who had access to the press. Religious, scientific, journalistic, administrative, and even commercial perspectives converged in the making of a scientifically and morally valid knowledge of society, involving certain discursive devices and assumptions that

² Morality was a strong component of the sense of superiority of Mexico City's wealthy elite in the late colonial period. See Pamela Voekel, "Peeing on the Palace: Bodily Resistance to Bourbon Reforms" (University of Texas at Austin, unpublished manuscript, 1991), 3. For a path-breaking study of the concern about alcoholism and the control of public areas, see Juan Pedro Viqueira Albán, ¿Relajados o reprimidos?: Diversiones públicas y vida social en la ciudad de México durante el siglo de las luces (Mexico: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1987). For studies about those concerns in the Porfirian period, see William H. Beezley, Judas at the Jockey Club and Other Episodes of Porfirian Mexico (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1987), 5-6; and William E. French, "'Peaceful and Working People': The Inculcation of the Capitalist Work Ethic in a Mexican Mining District (Hidalgo del Parral, Chihuahua, 1880-1920)" (Ph.D. diss., University of Texas at Austin, 1990), 189.
assured the legitimacy of their voices. I will point out the disagreements among them insofar as they mark the limits of a common discussion. Liberals, Roman Catholics, and positivists used and criticized the language of science. Therefore, I will not simply attempt to give an account of the viewpoints of scientists. The adjective scientific in the next pages will be an attribute of the texts, not an excluding boundary. Writers claimed the scientific validity of their assertions even if they did not originate from scientifically structured observations.

To explain the association of alcoholism and criminality, it is helpful to observe that the people who wrote and spoke about both problems shared the broader project of progress for Mexico, which was inspired by the model of capitalist development of North Atlantic industrial countries. Although some parts of that model were the object of debate, there was a general agreement regarding the essential importance of sobriety and discipline for the construction of a capitalist economy. Alcoholism, an unproductive feature of popular mores, appeared as a great obstacle to impose a work ethic. Criminality symbolized the lack of control over wide areas and dangerous groups of society, revealing the limited instruments of the Mexican elite to impose their political and social project. Alcohol and crime, and the association of both—which writers constantly stressed throughout this period—became the object of a pursuit for knowledge that had to advance with the advent of industrialization and productivity. Although I will not try to examine the practical steps taken by state and civil institutions to deal with vice and disobedience, it should be noted that authorities took measures to establish discipline during the late Porfiriato. These measures met with resistance from and faced alternatives articulated by the urban lower classes and, thus, were not always successful. To account for


this opposition, Mexican reformers made a selective use of the Euro-
pean model and sought to identify the national particularities of vice
and crime.

**Images of Mexico City**

Mexico City was the main showcase of progress and peace of the
Porfiriato, serving as a laboratory for evaluation. Statistics were the
first testimony of modernization, and the public found figures that
exhibited national growth very convincing. Local, federal, and non-
governmental institutions gathered quantitative information about the
economy and the population, especially in the last two decades of
the nineteenth century. The Dirección General de Estadística,
founded in 1882, the Sociedad Mexicana de Geografía y Estadística,
and the Consejo Superior de Salubridad were among the main pub-
lishers of population statistics. The population of the capital, judged
to be an important indication of progress, was growing rapidly,
mainly due to internal migration. In 1900, 53 percent of Mexico City
inhabitants were migrants from other states. Between 1870 and 1910,
when the number of inhabitants swelled to 471,066, the rate of
growth was 109 percent. This rate was higher than that of the nation
as a whole—65 percent during the same period.

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was inaugurated in 1900 and the penal colony of Islas Marias in 1908. Several changes
were discussed and introduced in legislation during the period. For penal and crimi-
nological debate, see Javier MacGregor Campuzano, “Historiografía sobre criminalidad
y sistema penitenciario,” *Secuencia: Revista de historia y ciencias sociales* 22 (1992):
232-34; Macedo organized an extensive revision of the legislation in Secretaría de
Justicia, *Trabajos de revisión del código penal* (Mexico: Oficina Impresora de Estam-
pillas, 1912-1914). Robert Buffington analyzes the genealogy of the discourse of
penal reform in “Revolutionary Reform: The Mexican Revolution and the Discourse
on Prison Reform,” *MS/EM* 9, no. 1 (Winter 1993):71-93. On the reorganization of
Mexico City police during the Porfiriato, see Pedro Santoni, “La policía de la ciudad de
México durante el porfiriato: Los primeros años (1876-1884),” *Historia Mexicana* 33,
no. 1 (1983):97-129; and Laurence John Rohlfes, “Police and Penal Correction in
Mexico City, 1876-1911: A Study of Order and Progress in Porfiranian Mexico” (Ph.D.
diss., Tulane University, 1983).

5. Jorge Adame Goddard, *El pensamiento político y social de los católicos
mexicanos, 1867-1914* (Mexico: Universidad Nacional Autónoma, 1980), 204; “La
estadística en 1853 y 1924,” *Boletín del Departamento de la Estadística Nacional:
Segunda época* 1, no. 11 (May 1924):23; Francisco Barrera Lavalle, “Apuntes para la
historia de la estadística en México,” *Boletín de la Sociedad Mexicana de Geografía
y Estadística de la República Mexicana* 5, no. 4 (1910):305-09. For an example of
the promotional use of statistics, see *Estadística Gráfica. Progreso de los Estados
Unidos Mexicanos* (Mexico: Empresa de Ilustraciones, 1896); for the gathering of
statistics, see *La Voz de México*, 11 September 1897, p. 3; González Navarro, *El
porfiriato*, 7 nn.4-5.

de Estadística, 1956), 73; Keith A. Davies, “Tendencias demográficas urbanas durante
Statistics also showed negative signs in Porfian society, as measured by the frequency of vice. Alcoholism and criminality occupied a prominent place in quantitative analysis of the capital. These figures, based on court records and police reports, were first published in 1890; however, they lacked continuity and methodological consistency. Carlos Roumagnac, while defining the study of criminality as a sure "thermometer" for measuring the morality of a society, questioned the validity of Mexican statistics, labeling them "useless" because of their inaccuracy. In 1896, pulque traders defended their product against accusations that it caused crime, arguing that the official statistical information, although nicely printed in tables, did not delineate the circumstances of arrests, the number of acquittals, and the population growth. They concluded that official figures failed to specify the exact number of crimes committed, and only specialists could extract meaningful information from them.

In spite of these criticisms, almost no one denied that alcoholism and criminality were rife in Mexico and were growing quickly. True, the official perception, as articulated in 1882 by a commission that was planning construction of a new penitentiary, was that criminality was not increasing in Mexico City because jobs were abundant, the population was more educated, the police and the judiciary were more effective, and political stability had curbed the demoralization caused by civil wars. This idea, however, did not last too long. In

7. Demetrio Mejía, *Estadística de la mortalidad en México*, covering the period from 1869 to 1878, quoted by Fernando Ponce in *El alcoholismo en México* (Mexico: Antigua Imprenta de Murguía, 1911), 121; Dirección General de Estadística, *Estadística del ramo criminal en la República Mexicana que comprende un período de quince años, de 1871 a 1885* (Mexico: Secretaría de Fomento, 1890); Cuadros estadísticos e informe del Procurador de Justicia concernientes a la criminalidad en el Distrito Federal y territorios (Mexico: Ministerio Público del Distrito y Territorios Federales, 1900-1904, 1908-1909).

8. Carlos Roumagnac, *La estadística criminal en México* (Mexico: García Cubas, 1907), 5. Roumagnac (1869-1937) was born in Madrid and, in 1897, was working as a journalist for *El Universal*. See *La Voz de México*, 6 October 1897, p. 3. He was the most prolific criminologist during the period. In 1939, Quiroz Cuarón mentioned Roumagnac as one of the first "technical policemen" who died "in poverty" and whose contributions to science were still neglected. Alfonso Quiroz C., *Tendencia y ritmo de la criminalidad en México* (Mexico: Instituto de Investigaciones Estadísticas, 1939), 129. For an assessment of Roumagnac's influence, see MacGregor Campuzano, "Historiografía sobre criminalidad," 221-57.

9. Junta General del Ramo de Pulques, *Dictamen que presenta la comisión nombrada por la... al señor Gobernador del Distrito*; Impugnando el vulgar error de que el consumo de esta bebida nacional es causa de la criminalidad en México, y en el que se exponen las razones legales con que se combaten las medidas restrictivas que atacan la libertad de este comercio (Mexico: Tipografía Artística, 1896), 3, 8.

1890, correctional judges in Mexico City complained that arrests were exceeding the capacity of their courts. In 1896, 29,729 scandalous drunkards, 94 beggars, and 910 prostitutes were arrested. The public attorney stated that in 1897, 8,108 individuals were convicted; in 1909, that figure had grown to 16,318. Figures showed the violent nature of most recorded crimes: 78.2 percent of crimes committed between 1885 and 1895 were against individuals. Homicide increased from 179 presumed murderers arrested in 1891, to 481 in 1895. The prevailing perception during the late Porfiriato was that of a continuous growth in the figures of criminality with periods of significant increase.11

Alcoholism had been considered a widespread vice in Mexico City, but official optimism in the early Porfiriato anticipated future decline. In the case of crime, however, concern grew with an increase in information. In 1896, the Federal District had 16 distilleries and breweries, 458 stores that sold alcohol, and 1,761 pulque outlets—one establishment for every 149 inhabitants.12 Large quantities of pulque entered the city daily, and it was the main cause of cases of alcoholic intoxication noted by the Juárez public hospital.13 Trinidad Sánchez Santos estimated that the frequency of pathologies related to alcohol in Mexico City was worse than in Europe. Statistics seemed to link alcoholism and crime beyond any doubt. In 1905, 37 percent of convicted criminals were drunk at the moment of perpetrating the offense.14 In 1907, the police made 132,918 arrests for "scandalous drunkenness."15

11. La Voz de México, 18 January 1890, p. 2; Miguel Macedo, La criminalidad en México: Medios de combatirla (Mexico: Secretaría de Fomento, 1897), 5 n, 17, 43; Cuadros estadísticos, 1900, p. 122-123; ibid., 1909, p. 5. Macedo was a member of the científicos, advocates of the idea that politics had to obey science. Daniel Cosío Villegas, El porfiriato: Vida política interior, vol. 8 of Historia moderna de México (Mexico: Hermes, 1972), 851.


13. Junta General del Ramo de Pulques, Dictamen que presenta la comisión, 10; La Voz de México, 9 August 1897, p. 2.

14. Trinidad Sánchez Santos, El alcoholismo en la República Mexicana. Discurso pronunciado en la sesión solemne que celebraron las Sociedades Científicas y Literarias de la Nación, el día 5 de junio de 1896 y en el salón de sesiones de la Cámara de Diputados (Mexico: Imprenta del Sagrado Corazón de Jesús, 1897), 8-9, 80; González Navarro, El porfiriato, 419. Trinidad Sánchez Santos (1859-1912) was a layman journalist who expressed the concerns of the Catholic church about alcoholism in several publications and on the pages of El Heraldo, Diario Católico (which he owned) and La Voz de México. José Ángel Ceniceros, Tres estudios de criminología: El Código Penal Mexicano, la escuela Positiva y su influencia en la legislación penal mexicana, los sustitutivos de las penas cortas de privación de la libertad (Mexico: Cuadernos Criminaria, 1941), 52. Sánchez Santos adopted the use of scientific instruments (like statistics) to support Catholic opinions. See, for an example, La Voz de México, 11 September 1897, p. 2.

Images of Mexico City also exhibited, perhaps with more accuracy than statistics, the embarrassing side of progress. The streets of the capital were a picture of modernization with new pavement, new buildings, and busy street traffic. Yet, in the eyes of Porfirian observers, some changes related to modernization were less encouraging: the city suffered from deforestation, desiccation of the lakes, and fetid smells. Some areas, especially working-class settlements, displayed the worst effects of rapid growth. Popular housing offered an image of wretchedness, contrasting with the “comfort” of progress. According to Miguel Macedo, the “lower classes” dwelled in unhealthy places, humid and without ventilation; the petate (matting) was the table during the day and the bed at night; the same blanket that offered protection from the rain or cold, covered sleep and sexual intercourse. In the streets, the dirty and emaciated bodies of the poor were as evident as the clouds in the clear skies of the city. They were also frequent victims of the modern trolleys. An article published by El Hijo del Abutzote indicated the importance of visual signs of vice to the educated elite. In October 1897, gendarmes arrested a drunken woman of the lower classes (una mujer del pueblo), causing a disturbance. As she forcibly resisted arrest, the gendarmes grabbed her and, in the struggle, completely stripped her. Naked, with her feet tied “like a pig,” she was transported to the police station causing “general embarrassment.” The problem, according to the article, was not the procedures used to control the woman, but the outrageous display of her body.

Visual images of the poor people, particularly in public places, added considerably to knowledge of alcoholism and criminality since personal observations provided the specificity that statistics lacked. In 1911, Dr. Fernando Ponce evinced the nude and hungry alcoholics lying in the streets as a central argument against alcoholism. Newspapers frequently published articles about the “plague” of thieves that was invading respectable areas: one Sunday at noon, a thief snatched a golden pin from a lady leaving the cathedral. Santa, a widely read novel by Federico Gamboa published in 1903, depicted morbid im-

16. Gaceta de Policía 1, no. 2 (19 October 1905):3; Federico Gamboa, Santa (1904; reprint, Mexico: Eusebio Gómez de la Puente, 1922), 331-32. In 1904, for example, a health inspector described the lack of sanitation in Guerrero and Santa María la Ribera districts: The sewage of the houses ran into the open street and people used vacant lots as latrines and garbage dumps. The streets were destroyed by holes during the rainy season. “Informe del inspector Sanitario del Cuartel No. 7,” in Consejo Superior de Salubridad, Memoria (Mexico: n.p., 1905), 102.

17. Macedo, La criminalidad en México, 14-15; Guerrero, La génesis del crimen, 53; Gaceta de Policía 1, no. 9 (17 December 1905):6.


19. Fernando Ponce was a physician and director of the Hospital of Tulancingo. Ponce, El alcoholismo en México, 4.
ages of the life and physical condition of a Mexico City prostitute.20

The press focused on crime and alcoholism. In the *Gaceta de Policía*, local police news occupied most pages, one incident always being targeted as the main story. *El Imparcial*, a vehicle for the opinions of powerful científicos, devoted a considerable portion of its space to crime, suicides, and quarrels.21 Even the respectable *La Voz de México*, organ of the Catholic church, often reported petty criminal incidents. To report criminality, newspapers basically used narratives, but also included diagrams, photographs, drawings or engravings, summaries of trial debates and testimonies, and often editorialized.22 When dealing with alcoholism, newspapers and magazines echoed scientific discoveries or expressed opinions about its moral and social effects.

Newspapers’ treatment of police news was criticized from several different perspectives. Administrative authorities denounced their exaggeration of the “quantitative and qualitative” increase of criminality.23 The liberal *El Hijo del Abuztote* attacked *El Imparcial* for preferring to deal with frivolities like high society’s dances and gruesome killings, than with real problems.24 *El Bien Social* claimed that the sensationalist press encouraged wrongdoing by its “sick” and “greedy” coverage of some stories, claiming that reports of homicides in the upper class inspired new crimes.25 *Don Cucufate* mocked the “impacialadas” in its doggerel: “Twenty-five crushed / and a lot of


21. The *Gaceta* claimed to sell eleven thousand copies. *Gaceta de Policía* 1, no. 9 (17 December 1905):9. Several local police chiefs, majors, and *jefes políticos* from places like Veracruz, Chalco, and Campeche appeared as overdue subscribers of the *Gaceta*. *Gaceta de Policía* 1, no. 26 (6 May 1906):8; ibid. 1, no. 43 (9 September 1906):3. The part devoted to police news in *El Imparcial* seems to have increased during the 1900s: by 1906, approximately 20 percent of the space, including part of the first page, was devoted to police news, and there were regular sections on Belem and the various police stations. *El Imparcial*, 23 January 1906, p. 1, col. 4–6.


suicides / ... That's how they enlighten the mob, / with gossip and dirty lies."26 Despite the reproaches of some, public opinion acknowledged both criminality and alcoholism as real problems, and the coverage by the press did not overstate their importance in the eyes of readers.

Mexican scientists placed great importance on images in their study of social diseases. In 1897, Macedo based his analysis of national criminality on personal observations rather than on the limited statistics available. To learn about Mexicans' "degree of culture and morality, and the[ir] economic situation," and to make conjectures as to guilt or innocence in criminal cases, Macedo considered it sufficient to look at their clothes.27 In his study of crime, Julio Guerrero placed emphasis, not only methodological but also explicative, on the visual: the thin and pure atmosphere of the Mexico City highlands made sight more acute, the views of the degradation and misery more precise, and people less restrained.28

The Porfirian elite tried to limit the disturbing impact of criminality and alcoholism by giving a scientific basis to social hierarchies. Scientists and journalists together constructed a discourse about social diseases that conceptually isolated the illness from the "good" or "high" parts of Mexican society, thus linking class and morality. According to Macedo, the Mexican ruling class felt a sense of personal security regardless of the fact that the homicide rate in Mexico was thirteen times higher than in Corsica. In his opinion, members of the lower classes committed crimes against their peers because their morality was "the lowest," in contrast to upper class morality which was "elevated." The separation between the two classes was distinct: wealth, intelligence, and mores divided them. The only link between the two were the relations expressed by the adage of "to command and to obey, to serve and to be served." This separation corresponded to a visual classification of Mexicans. Society was divided into three groups: individuals wearing plain shirts composed the lowest class; people with jackets were members of the middle class; and, at the top of the scale, the upper class donned frock coats.29 The identification of the groups participating in criminality

27. Macedo, La criminalidad en México, 4 n, 20, 16.
28. Guerrero, La génesis del crimen, 46–53.
relied on racial elements: "pure Indian" and "predominantly Indian" formed the "delinquent classes." 30 Macedo even identified the public places where crime occurred in Mexico City: cantinas, *pulquerías* (pulque bars), gambling houses, brothels, and the sites of public dances and popular religious celebrations, like those held on December 12, day of the Virgin of Guadalupe. 31

Porfirian observers tried to justify their belief in the anomalous character of alcoholism and crime by condemning, on moral and aesthetic grounds, the cultural context where drinking and transgressions took place. During the exceptionally low temperatures of January 1906, philanthropists distributed blankets to the homeless in the streets. Days later, they found that some of the frozen victims of the cold had sold their blankets to buy food or alcohol. *El Imparcial* deemed it "outrageous" that anybody could be hungry in Mexico City when industry still needed labor, even for the "humblest and crudest" tasks. 32 Furthermore, people who exchanged blankets for alcohol were ignorant because they attributed curative and heating effects to the drink. Taste also sustained the disdain for popular culture: pulque was obnoxious, pulquerías were "nauseating" places, and most Mexican prostitutes were "ugly." 33 Sánchez Santos denied that religion inspired the thieves who were found using a religious medal for protection; they were only "imbeciles." 34 By distancing themselves from popular culture, the *gente decente* also pushed away their fears of crime and alcoholism.

The elite refused to grant rational sense to lower-class practices, even when they mirrored those of the upper class. Respectable practices of the well-to-do, like duels, became absurd when performed by the lower classes. In January 1906, *El Imparcial* reported the case of two women, forty and sixty years of age, who engaged in a duel using knives to end a protracted dispute over some chickens. They and their witnesses met on the road to La Piedad and followed the dictates of the "code of honor." One died, and the other was arrested shortly afterwards. The newspaper depicted the arrangement of the duel in an ironic tone, but described the fight itself as a "quarrel." 35 Traditional curing systems, outside Western medicine, "damaged the spirit without healing the flesh," according to

34. *La Voz de México*, 9 January 1897, p. 2.
35. The police saw no trouble in the case: it would be easy to sentence the survivor and the witnesses. *El Imparcial*, 12 January 1906, p. 4, col. 1–2. Duels
Gamboa. To these incomprehensible practices, the educated groups opposed the "modern" knowledge coming from abroad.

Porfirian positivists were particularly willing to interpret their perceptions according to foreign models. Since science offered the basic format for social order, it had to give reasons for anomalies and attempt to organize the information about them. Criminology, a relatively new discipline, systematized the main theoretical and methodological premises of the study of criminality and alcoholism. As an additional appeal, it combined older ideas about anatomy and behavior (derived from occult sciences and phrenology) with modern notions of European positivist sociology. In the final decades of the nineteenth century, the writings of Italian criminologists were read in Mexico, mainly through French translations. Names like Lombroso, Ferri, and Garofalo appear frequently in Mexican texts dealing with crime and alcoholism, providing them with the prestige of scientific authority.

The adoption of criminology in Mexico did not have a defining moment and a single emissary, as positivism did with Gabino Barreda, and it somewhat evaded the academic structures that sanctioned the introduction of scientific knowledge. The científicos, foremost rep-

involved with the higher classes, although rarer each day, were not considered so easy to punish. Angel Escudero, El duelo en México: Recopilación de los desafíos habidos en nuestra República, precedidos de la historia de la esgrima en México y de los duelos más famosos verificados en el mundo desde los juicios de Dios hasta nuestros días, por el maestro de armas (Mexico: Mundial, 1936) reports several cases. After a particularly sensational one in 1894 involving a congressman and a high administrative officer, the Chamber of Deputies decreed an amnesty for duellists. Ibid., 231-38.

36. Gamboa, Santa, 291; also see Eduardo Menéndez, Morir de alcohol: Saber y begemontia médica (Mexico: Alianza-Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes, 1990), 83–84.

37. As a magisterial foundation, these authors offered the possibility of a methodic grasp of the growing social diseases in the capital. Cesare Lombroso (called "the father of criminology," 1836–1909) defined the theories of atavism (individual retrogression to the features of ancient races), the taxonomy of criminal types (born, occasional, emotional), and the notion that criminals were visually evident, even to the eyes of the ignorant. Closely related to Lombroso, Enrico Ferri (1856–1929) linked criminology with the sociological ideas of positivism and proposed a manifold study of the causes of crime: anthropological, physical, and social. Against the traditional notions of penal responsibility, Ferri explained that some kinds of criminals (habitual, occasional, born, and emotional) were victims of several internal and external influences. Raffaello Garofalo (1852–1934) was also known for his studies about the juridical applications of criminology. Bernaldo de Quirós, Modern Theories of Criminality, trans. Alfonso de Salvio (Boston: Little, Brown, and Co. 1912), 3, 6–7, 13, 16, 19–22. As an example of the rhetorical use of scientific authorities, see Sánchez Santos, El alcoholismo en la República Mexicana, 26 n.

38. As Hale shows, although Barreda is the "generally acknowledged progenitor," the process of the introduction of Comtean positivism in Mexico was more complicated than that. Hale, Transformation of Liberalism, 140–41.
resentatives of Comtean positivism in Mexico, did not place emphasis on the treatment of social diseases during their early discussions about Mexican society and its progress. Discussion of such problems was initiated by the new generation of lawyers and physicians educated under positivism during the last decade of the nineteenth century. The first public discussions of the Italian positivist school took place in the 1890s, in Macedo’s class on criminal law at the School of Jurisprudence. Although the teacher was aware of the new theories, he had been reluctant to include them earlier in his course because they did not harmonize with the “classic” tenets of the Mexican penal code of 1871. Questions from students Manuel Calero, Jorge Vera Estañol, and Jesús Urueta prompted Macedo to talk about criminology. In an informal fashion, the group continued with the study of the Italian masters. Initial interest in criminology was not restricted to specialists. About that time, during an academic trip to Italy, Urueta approached Ferri with an introductory letter from his teacher Justo Sierra, the most influential writer among the científicos.

Although Mexican study of the field of criminology was not organized around a single academic institution or scholar, it manifested certain coherence around the search for Mexican particularities and a tendency to emphasize social aspects. According to a Spanish author, criminology advanced in Mexico with some “important contributions” to the science: Estudios de antropología criminal, by Francisco Martínez Baca and Manuel Vergara, published in Puebla in 1892; Macedo’s La criminalidad en México, in 1897; Guerrero’s La génesis del crimen en México, 1900; Roumagnac, Los criminales de México, 1904 and Crímenes sexuales y pasionales.

39. Education and foreign colonization had a greater weight in these discussions. Hale, Transformation of Liberalism, chap. 7. This changed by the end of the century when Sierra, Macedo, and Francisco Díaz Covarrubias established the treatment of crime and other social problems as important themes in the synthesis of the regime’s achievements. Justo Sierra, México: Su evolución social (Mexico: Ballescá, 1900), especially vol. 1, chap. 8.

40. Carlos Roumagnac, Los criminales en México: Ensayo de psicología criminal. Seguido de dos casos de hermafrodismo observado por los señores doctores Ricardo Egea...Ignacio Ocampo (1904; reprint, Mexico: Tipografía El Fénix, 1912), 32.

41. Ceniceros, Tres estudios de criminología, 50–51; Rosa del Olmo, América Latina y su criminología (Mexico: Siglo Veintiuno, 1981), 136, dates these discussions as having occurred in 1889.


43. Bernaldo de Quirós, Modern Theories, 120–21; also Ceniceros, Tres estudios de criminología, 52–53.
1906; and Luis Lara y Pardo’s *La prostitución en México*, 1908. Mexican criminologists moved from strictly anatomical research toward approaches that underlined the social causes of crime. In 1892, Martínez Baca and Vergara published a study based on the analysis of the crania of criminals stored in the museum of the penitentiary in Puebla City. Their goal was to establish the physiological knowledge of the soul in order to correct deviations. However, their undertaking did not have a great impact. By 1904, Roumagnac considered Lombroso’s ideas about atavism and the physiognomy of criminals exaggerated because research on the connection between crime and anatomy had not produced exact results. However, the data available in Mexico was still “very rich” and unexplored, and required a specifically national approach. Authors argued that Mexican specialists had to descend to the horrifying depths of crime and vice of the underworld to provide national explanations and solutions.

**Between Science and Fear**

Perceptions and theories converged on the problems of alcoholism and criminality, revealing a central ambiguity in the Porfirian elite’s view of Mexican society. On the one hand, the statistics and images of crime and vice in the capital were impressive, but their meaning was not yet precise and required an explanation. On the other hand, criminality and alcoholism had to remain alien to the upper classes’ own world for fear they would defy the elite’s moral superiority. The undertaking had, thus, two phases. First, scientists, public officers, and journalists identified, defined, and illustrated crime and vice. They tackled anomalies as problems of the whole society, but tried to separate the areas of good and bad behavior. In a second phase, they reconciled scientific method with publicity, combining moral condemnation with the scientific explanation of social phenomena. Because of the elite’s ambivalence toward scien-

44. Francisco Martínez Baca and Manuel Vergara, *Estudios de antropología criminal: Memoria que por disposición del Superior Gobierno del Estado de Puebla presentan…* (Puebla: Benjamín Lara, 1892), 2.


scientific interest and social fear, these two phases did not follow a logical sequence, and at times their assertions were difficult to reconcile. The discourse about social anomalies provided a flexible, eclectic framework in which to combine science and prejudice. When defining who was an alcoholic or a criminal, Porfriano elite sought to link the individual mechanisms of vice with social consequences, looking for the relationship between the individual and “dangerous” collectivities.

The producers of this discourse tried to formulate a legitimate knowledge about the internal physiological and psychological processes that turned an anonymous citizen into an anomalous individual. The explanations of alcoholism and criminality that qualified as scientific were premised on the somatic origins of human behavior—“the philosophical importance of anatomy,” as Roumagnac put it. At the same time, writers tried to confine criminality and alcoholism to the world of the city’s lower classes, adding a moral dimension to class distinctions. However, they had to deal with evidence that vice and crime crossed the lines that separated classes, appearing in areas of the city associated with progressive and elite groups. This created a tension between everyday perceptions and scientific explanations about public alcohol consumption and crimes of passion.

Alcoholism was indeed difficult to grasp. It was simultaneously an individual and a collective transgression, a pathological process and a cause of public concern. Although medicine and psychiatry had shown interest in alcoholism throughout the latter half of the nineteenth century, by the late Porfriano the definition of the problem itself was still fairly loose. Sánchez Santos included under alcoholism addiction to various substances like cocaine, marijuana, and morphine. The relationship of alcoholism to mental disease was uncertain. Opinions differed as to whether alcoholism could be attributed to daily consumption of large quantities of pulque or only to the use of other beverages more violent in their effects.

Beyond individual pathology, Mexican alcohol consumption seemed to show clear particularities. Alcohol was dangerous in the high altitudes of Mexico because it stayed in the organism longer, making misbehavior more likely. Guerrero described alcoholism as an inevitable need: the Mexican diet was insufficient and spicy; water

47. Roumagnac, Los criminales en México, 32.
48. Menéndez, Morir de alcohol, 118; Sánchez Santos, El alcoholismo en la República Mexicana, 9–10.
49. Román Ramírez, Resumen de medicina legal y ciencias conexas para uso de los estudiantes de las escuelas de derecho (Mexico: Tipografía de Fomento, 1901), 162–63; Ponce, El alcoholismo en México, 51; Junta General del Ramo de Pulques, Dictamen que presenta la comisión, 11, 14–15.
was scarce and dirty; misery and frequent festivities required a cheering complement. He defined a "national psychiatric type": the drinker of tequila who begins by being quick-tempered, then shows the physical signs of shattered health, and ends up as a "domestic tyrant."51 In a debate that attracted much public attention during these years, defendants of pulque consumption produced chemical analyses that demonstrated the nutritious and tonic effects of moderate use and its value as a healthy complement in the Mexican diet, while analyses done by opponents emphasized its damaging consequences.52

Although the nutritional value of pulque could be debated, metropolitan gente decente generally despised every aspect of pulque consumption, isolating it in an enclosed and abject world. Journalists described ox carts that brought the liquid from the pulque haciendas, ruining the modern asphalt and defiling the image of the city with their dripping barrels. The spectacle was more offensive because of the low quality of the product and its successive adulterations before reaching urban consumers. Pulquerías insulted the senses: Their acrid stench was a combination of the still-fermenting pulque and the urine and spit of the patrons.53 The walls were painted with extravagant scenes. They bore absurd names that underscored the contrast with the "civilized" world—El Paso de Venus por el disco del Sol (referring to an expedition of Mexican astronomers to Japan in 1874–75), La Diosa Euterpe, El Sueño de Amor, Templo de Morfeo.54

Pulque drinkers were perceived as the clearest example of the shameful consequences of vice. They drank for hours, emitting unpleasant odors from long shifts of hard work. Stephen Crane described an image that was all too familiar for Mexicans: "Indians" with

52. O’Gorman and Allen, Examen general y analítico del pulque que se expende en la ciudad de México: Que a petición de la Asociación de Pulques hicieron los Sres.... ensayadores químicos (Mexico: Antigua de Murguía, 1909); Junta General del Ramo de Pulques, Dictamen que presenta la comisión; José G. Lobato, Estudio químico-industrial de los varios productos del maguey mexicano y análisis químico del aguamiel y el pulque (Mexico: Secretaría de Fomento, 1884), v; for a negative interpretation of pulque, Gaceta de Policía 1, no. 16 (11 February 1906):2; for the economical background of this discussion, see Juan Felipe Leal and Mario Huacuja Rountree, Economía y sistema de haciendas en México: La hacienda pulquera en el cambio: Siglos XVIII, XIX y XX (Mexico: Ediciones Era, 1982).
54. El Imparcial, 4 January 1897, p. 2, col. 1; O’Gorman and Allen, Examen general y analítico, 15; see also the contest of pulquerías in La Guacamaya 3, no. 26 (10 September 1904):3. For a list of extravagant names in the nineteenth century, see William B. Taylor, Drinking, Homicide, and Rebellion, 66 n.
dirty shirts and trousers, with ragged hats and dull faces, drinking from large glasses for long hours, chatting and fraternally hugging each other. A genre of humorous texts in the popular press used the pulquería as the scene for pulque drinkers’ dialogue that utilized albugres (puns) and commented on the day’s events. As with the names of pulquerías, a humorous device was the contrast between the rudeness of the speakers and the “lofty” themes they touched upon. These texts indicated how foreign the environment of pulque consumption was to the gente decente.

Nevertheless, the Porfirian upper classes could not pretend to be alien to collective drinking. Well-to-do customers spent a considerable part of their social life crowding into cantinas like the Tivoli Central, enjoying danzón in the company of courtesans. Consequently, writers and journalists stressed the differences between pulquerías and cantinas, and tried to formalize and make acceptable social drinking in the latter. The first difference noted was the type of beverage: pulque offended good taste and denoted Indian ethnicity; cantinas, on the other hand, served imported drinks—wine, cognac, sherry, absinthe, anisette. Cantinas were decorated in a European style and included private rooms, called reservados, where customers could avoid public exposure. Publications that were usually critical of alcoholism, like the Gaceta de Policía, publicized these amenities in paid advertisements. Inebriation also became more respectable in the company of art. The “bohemian life” combined in acceptable fashion the poverty and youth expected of artists and the excesses of alcohol consumption in the environment of cantinas. Foreigners, particularly Spanish matadores and prostitutes, frequented cantinas. The contrast with pulquerías could not be greater: Spaniards, who since colonial times preferred their Spanish wines, were not usually seen there, where pulque, the “national drink,” was the beverage of choice.

56. El Imparcial, although more inclined to criticize alcohol, published a humorous text that imagined the reaction of pulque aficionados to a closing of the pulquerías, El Imparcial, 25 September 1897, p. 2, col. 5.
57. Gamboa, Santa, 96–103; “La embriaguez en México,” 72–73. For a benign view of the attributes of pulquerías, see José Guadalupe Posada’s advertisement for the pulque outlet of San Nicolás el Grande hacienda, José Guadalupe Posada: Ilustrador de la vida mexicana (Mexico: Fondo Editorial de la Plástica Mexicana, 1963), 117.
58. “Déjame a solas,” a poem by Ignacio Borrego, conveyed the poet’s joyous “inebriation” of “aroma and harmony” and the following disappointment; in the end, he only wanted to be left alone “with my absinthe and my roses.” Diario del Hogar, 6 June 1907, p. 1, col. 2.
59. Carlos Quirós, Nick Carter et al., Crímenes célebres desde el Chalequero hasta Gallegos: La delincuencia en México (Mexico: El Gráfico, 1932), 199; Gamboa, Santa, 79, 98. For the argument of wine against pulque, see Junta General del Ramo de Pulques, Dictamen que presenta la comisión, 11.
Figure 1: The struggle between bottled alcohol and pulque. “El motín del tinacal, y lamentos de un maguey,” El hijo del Ahuitzote 17, no. 794 (19 January 1902): 1048. Photo courtesy of the Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas at Austin.
While contrasting perceptions of collective alcohol consumption separated pulquerías and cantinas, the problem of alcoholism was larger than the mere identification of a place designed to accommodate it and contravened the segmentation of Porfirian society. According to Ponce, the upper and middle classes were also victims of alcoholism, although they tried harder to hide it than artisans and industrial workers.\(^60\) Vice, declared \textit{El Bien Social}, was no longer confined to places that \textit{la gente de bien} could avoid.\(^61\) The privacy of the home was also invaded by alcoholism, where alcoholic parents destroyed chances for peaceful coexistence and transmitted the vice to their children.\(^62\) The Porfirian elite were particularly sensitive to alcoholism in public places because it served as visual evidence of the problem and contrasted with the image of modernization they preferred. The \textit{Gaceta de Policía} considered drunkards in the streets “repulsive” and “irrational” and supported stricter laws, forcing drinkers to stay at home.\(^63\) Moreover, alcohol contributed to traffic accidents. Stories of lower-class drunkards falling under the wheels of trolleys were common in the newspapers. The death of Mr. Parsons, an American diplomat who died in an accident caused by his drunk coach driver, was treated altogether differently.\(^64\) The event was portrayed as the epitome of problems of respectable Porfirian society with alcoholism: it was ruining the city’s landscape, escaping from areas perceived as its “natural” environment, seizing members of all classes and genders and now, on top of it all, killing a United States’ consul.

\textbf{Crime and Class}

Violence against persons and property, another frequent occurrence in Mexico City, contradicted the regime’s pride for the people’s respect of law and order and prompted the conceptual linking of morality and class. Elite perceptions of criminality in Mexico City shared the basic presumptions of alcoholism: crime had its designated areas and was easily linked to certain social classes. According to Macedo, violence belonged almost exclusively to the lower classes; upper classes committed nonviolent fraud, swindles, and slander. Only crimes against property, he noted, “built a bridge”

\(^{60}\) Ponce, \textit{El alcoholismo en México}, 52.
\(^{64}\) \textit{Gaceta de Policía} 1, no. 9 (17 December 1905):3. For street accidents, ibid. 1, no. 26 (6 May 1906):2–3.
Figure 2: Death as a tramway. “La muerte en forma de eléctrico,” La Guacamaya 2, no. 36 (31 December 1903): 1. Photo courtesy of the Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas at Austin.
between classes. However, criminality exhibited even better than alcoholism the inability of enlightened Porfirians to understand the life of urban masses. Journalists used demeaning terms to stress the collective nature of crime. To refer to thieves, they used words like *plague, epidemic, and rata* (rat) or *ratero* (pickpocket); names like *sons of Gestas* or *sons of Caco*, also used by journalists, referred to ancient and obscure families of thieves. Newspapers reporting fights or traffic accidents seldom mentioned the names of offenders and victims, rather using generic terms like *una mujer del pueblo* (a woman of the people) or *una indita* (a little Indian woman). According to the editors of the *Gaceta Policía*, if a man of the lower classes killed his lover and attempted suicide, the event would be buried in a small article on the back pages of the paper. However, if the people involved happened to be Manuel Algara y Terreros and actress María Reig, the event would be sensationalized on the front page.

The elite had a place where they could focus on and organize the complex landscape of criminality: the overpopulated jail of Belem, a former convent, where convicts and suspects endured prison terms ranging from one night to twenty years. Criminal courts, where the general public attended jury trials, resided in the same building. In 1895, Heriberto Frías painted a grim picture of Belem: there was an outbreak of typhus, dirt was everywhere, sick prisoners were ignored, violence occurred between inmates, and children were abandoned. In spite of this apparent disorganization, Porfirian upper classes saw in Belem a certain coherence that further isolated the criminal world from their conception of order. In the eyes of observers, prisoners established an internal world of power and loyalties. In the minors’ section, quasi-military hierarchies structured discipline. Food and commerce inside the jail were under prisoners’ control, and conjugal relationships were formally established and respected—even when both spouses were of the same sex. It was these closely knit personal relationships—sometimes sanctioned with religious

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66. *La Voz de México*, 10 October 1897, p. 3; ibid., 12 January 1890, p. 3; *Gaceta de Policía* 1, no. 14 (28 January 1906): 7. For the vocabulary used to designate thieves, see *El Imparcial*, 1 April 1897, p. 2, col. 2.
links—that made the world of Belem seem more dangerous.69 After all, the critics claimed, prisoners "enjoyed" the company of their peers, sometimes even more than the society of civilized people outside the prison.70 The world of crime quickly absorbed the few innocents in Belem; while they endured long months before the beginning of their trials, they learned all the secrets of the profession.71 Belem, the elite concluded, was an enclosed space for the re-creation of criminality rather than a place for punishment or rehabilitation.72

Like alcoholism, crime posed the conceptual problem of the links between the individual and society: although they were easy to identify as a class, criminals formed an anonymous and elusive population. Scientists tended to focus on the social side of the problem. In his study of "criminal anthropology," Roumagnac used many pages to explore the various theories of crime that espoused external or internal causes — causes in the environment or within the individual's psyche. He chose to limit the "internal" causes of crime to the "influence of race," transmitted by heredity.73 Guerrero opted to study criminality as a social problem, where individual phenomena were evidence of a general condition.74 In choosing a social approach, both authors acknowledged prevailing attitudes toward criminals. Elite perceptions of crime in Mexico City tended to avoid the internal aspect of the problem because identification and isolation of the criminal were themselves problematic.

Due in part to the demographic growth of the city, identification of criminals became a central problem for Mexican criminologists and police. Either criminals did not have names, or the criminals all had the same name. In 1889, for example, the name Antonio Hernández entered the records of Belem jail twenty-three times; José Hernández,

69. For an approach to the enclosed world of Belem, see Ignacio Fernández Ortigoza, Identificación científica de los reos: Memoria escrita por... (Mexico: Sagrado Corazón de Jesús, 1892), 18–20. For the rules of internal discipline and marriages between inmates, see Roumagnac, Los criminales en México, 88, 126–27, 136; and Frías, "Crónicas desde la cárcel," 47–71. For commerce, La Voz de México, 14 October 1897, p. 3. Although journalists were often incarcerated by the Díaz regime, they occupied special separated cells because they did not belong to the criminal world. La Voz de México, 8 October 1897, p. 3.

70. Macedo, La criminalidad en México, 34; Gaceta de Policía 1, no. 20 (11 March 1906): 2–3; Gamboa, La llaga, 38.

71. Diario del Hogar, 23 November 1907, p. 1, col. 2; ibid., 19 November 1907, p. 1, col. 2.

72. This criticism developed together with modern ideas about prison. Michel Foucault, Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison (New York: Vintage, 1979), 265.


74. Guerrero, La génesis del crimen, x.
seventeen. Offenders usually escaped the enforcers of the law, and even repeated their deeds several times before being captured. According to a judge in the Supreme Court of the Federal District, recidivism was punished perhaps only once in three hundred cases because of the system's inability to identify criminals and because of the latter's mendacity.\textsuperscript{75} In a letter to author Ignacio Fernández Ortigoza, Judge Manuel F. de la Hoz explained that identification of criminals in Mexico was difficult because the majority of them belonged to the indigenous race who, like the Chinese, possessed "a uniform pattern" in their features.\textsuperscript{76}

This perceived similarity nullified the method used by Mexican police, which was based on declarations of the prisoners and superficial observation, and prompted the technique of scrutinizing the body to identify a criminal. Fernández Ortigoza promoted the use of the identification system devised in France by Alphonse Bertillon based on the measurement of criminals' bodies and more accurate use of photography. Since Bertillon's method used a classification of small, medium, and large sizes of various parts of the body, Fernández Ortigoza personally measured the heads, feet, ears, hands, and arms of eight hundred criminals in Mexico to calculate a "national" standard.\textsuperscript{77} Criminal files supported the assumption that criminal acts, as with any other vice, always left their marks on the body. In criminal trials, judges used the suspect's identification card to establish his previous offenses which suggested his present culpability. The scars on the body, precisely recorded on the card, demonstrated the suspect's disposition to fighting. If the accused denied the existence of the scars, he was forced to show the part of his body that bore the marks. Amid the public and the jury's laughter, the exhibition proved two things: that the suspect pretended to defy science with lies, and that he \textit{was} a criminal because guilt was written on his body.\textsuperscript{78}

Since all these methods for identifying criminals were still weak, those groups linked with the practical aspects of criminality preferred to view crime as an activity confined to a segment of society and criminals as a professional group. Statistics might suggest that

\textsuperscript{75} Fernández Ortigoza, \textit{Identificación científica de los reos}, 8, 20.

\textsuperscript{76} In ibid., 11. Fernández Ortigoza studied the use of Bertillon's system in Paris. Murderers could be at large as long as they wanted, sometimes appearing in the newspapers before being caught by the police. Roumagnac, \textit{Los criminales en México}, 235, 360; El Imparcial, 1 July 1897, p. 1, col. 1.


criminality was expanding continuously, but police officers and store owners assumed that there existed a core of professional, well-known, expert thieves. The *Gaceta de Policía* published a “black page” with police archive portraits of criminals, giving each a name, alias, and modus operandi. The information, the *Gaceta* claimed, was useful for police officers, travelers, storekeepers, the general public in Mexico City, and the railroads.\(^79\)

However, the limit between the respectable and the criminal population was not as clear as desired. In the perspective of Porfirian observers, falsehood and dexterity were the hallmarks of criminality as a trade. Roumagnac compiled a roster of the jargon used by inmates to refer to criminal actions. The *Gaceta de Policía* listed and explained the favorite tricks used in the streets of the city. These tricks required an additional virtue that newspapers always mentioned in their descriptions: professional thieves passed as honest people, being well-dressed and having good manners. Sometimes defrauders went so far as to pretend to be plainclothes policemen or health inspectors.\(^80\) Macedo likened criminals to *léperos*—lower-class individuals whose contacts with the cultured classes had allowed them to “refine the Indian’s astuteness.”\(^81\) Criminals reached, in the perception of Porfirian ruling classes, two extremes of anonymity: the indistinct masses, with no names and uniform faces on one side; shrewd and well-dressed individuals, hidden among respectable people on the other.

Homicides attracted the attention of public opinion because they escaped the divisions that equated class with morality and defied male oriented notions of honor. The crimes that provoked greatest attention from the press were those called crimes of passion. Ferri had typified “passionate” criminals as those otherwise normal persons who committed the crime in an isolated rapture of rage. Crimes of passion, suggested Gamboa, were universal and hard to explain, perhaps the product of hidden and ancient morbidity.\(^82\) Roumagnac, who devoted a study to this “perfectly defined” kind of crime, considered that Mexican cases never reached the “monstrosity” of those

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79. *Gaceta de Policía* 1, no. 9 (17 December 1905):9; ibid. 1, no. 10 (24 December 1905):2. The *Gaceta* emphasized the use of photography for identification purposes.


Figure 3: Portraits of criminals. “Pagina Negra,” Gaceta de Policía 1, no. 41 (16 August 1906):15. Photo courtesy of the Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas at Austin.
committed in “more civilized nations.” The cases of premeditated homicide within families, compared with the outbursts of rage and attacks on women, were scarce in statistics and exceptional for the press. The triggering emotion typically was jealousy, resulting in scenes of unusual cruelty and bloodshed. The killer sometimes committed suicide afterwards or surrendered himself to the police. The disturbing aspect of this kind of crime was the similarity of the pattern as compared to the variety of the actors. These attacks were frequent among the lower classes, observed the *Gaceta de Policía*, but also occurred in the upper classes. According to Roumagnac, they were common to all classes, ages, and eras.

Crimes of passion also defied the traditional conceptions about male honor which “protected” women from violence. Cases like the homicide of María Reig by Algar, mentioned earlier, or “the tragedy of Amargura street” received great attention from the press. Some editorial opinions considered attacks on women particularly disturbing, a sign of a “lack of social equilibrium,” deserving harsh and swift punishment. However, these cases also provoked reactions in defense of male honor. The same *Gaceta de Policía* suggested that women took advantage of the protection of the law to insult men in public places. Nothing, it claimed, could be worse for a man than to be mocked by a woman in front of the eyes of the public. Satiric poems and stories reminded one that being cheated (symbolized with horns in the man’s forehead) was the most humiliating mark. Questions of honor attenuated the culpability of homicides. Cleofas Nájera, a “peaceful man” from Coyoacán, had no legal resource to make his wife come back home, so he killed her. The prosecutors agreed with Nájera’s defense that the crime was not a premeditated homicide and reduced the sentence from twelve to eight years.


86. Arnulfo Villegas killed Carlota Mauri, both employees in small commerce establishments. The writer despised the “selfishness of braggarts” who demanded abject submission from the woman. *Gaceta de Policía* 1, no. 2 (29 October 1905):7–10.


88. *El Imparcial*, 13 September 1897, p. 1, col. 2–3. With good behavior in jail, Cleofas might have been released in a fraction of that time. A criticism of abusive women is in *Gaceta de Policía*, 1, no. 34 (1 July 1906):11. For a satiric poem, see *Don Cucufate* 1, no. 7 (10 September 1906):4.
Crime and alcoholism trespassed traditional gender roles, adding to the fascination of these problems. Roumagnac’s first volume of his exploration into “The World of Crime” concluded with an illustrated appendix about two Mexican cases of hermaphroditism. More frequently, observers focused on the domestic sphere where gender roles and the relationship between each member of the family seemed altered by social diseases. Regarding women, criminologists noted that the pathological effects of alcohol attacked the central traits of femininity. Alcohol caused women to be jealous, to suffer physical and moral pain, and to bear bastard children. Women of the lower classes were particularly weak and, therefore, more inclined to alcoholism because society imposed less control over them. Alcohol drove them to prostitution, abortion, and the contraction of venereal diseases. To the surprise of scientists and journalists, women could also be agents of transgression. The fact that two women engaged in the duel referred to above made it doubly strange; after all, the confrontations of men of lower classes outside pulquerías were commonplace, even though they were never called duels. The famous case of María Villa (a.k.a. la Chiquita), who killed a fellow prostitute, received great attention because it involved a woman using a gun to shoot another woman and involved a man from a higher class.

Disrupting gender divisions and moral roles, social diseases encapsulated the attraction and the limits of elite scrutiny of lower-class life. Santa, the prostitute in Gamboa’s novel, experienced all possible transgressions and diseases in Porfrián society: She came from the countryside to the metropolis, where she served wealthy individuals and anonymous léperos. She loved handsome and ugly men, witnessed a crime and testified in Belem, and was sexually approached by another woman. She finally fell from youthful health to alcoholism and cancer. The literate public read Santa with the same interest which it devoted to crimes of passion. Although such images seemed clear and were shared by a broad public, the Porfrián elite still confronted the task of explaining vice as a social problem while preserving the moral and scientific legitimacy of social hierarchy. This tension was an important element of the public interest created by

89. Roumagnac, Los criminales en México.
90. Sánchez Santos, El alcohólismo en la República Mexicana, 25, 30; Ponce, El alcohólismo en México, 53, 76.
91. See, for example, El Imparcial, 1-31 January 1987.
92. Roumagnac, Los criminales en México, 117; see also Posada’s leaflet about the crime, Posada: Ilustrador de la vida mexicana, 237.
Porfirian studies of the darker side of the city. These studies echoed the combination of scientific language and sexual adventure of middle-class explorations of Victorian London as studied by Judith Walkowitz. Mexican observers were less willing than their British counterparts to play with their ability to cross to the dangerous places. They stressed the privileges of their gaze, a product of the gender- and class-specific authority of science. In both cases, the difficulties in establishing a "totalizing vision" of the city became insuperable.94

Social Disease and Mexican Society

Despite the attempts to organize the perceptions of transgressions reviewed above, alcoholism and criminality were difficult to locate in a particular gender, class, or professional group. Moreover, both problems posed the question of how the anomalous behavior of individuals multiplied to become larger social issues. Although the Porfirian elite believed that class divisions corresponded to certain patterns of behavior, it was still impossible for them to define alcoholism and criminality as exclusive features of the lower classes. Therefore, different groups answered these questions with explanations that varied according to their agendas and perceptions of society at large. Liberals and Catholics chose to see alcoholism and criminality as moral problems, as vice related to the individual's will. Scientific opinions defined by the tenets of positivism emphasized the influence of the environment and heredity and, as Robert Buffington shows, stressed the subordination of a disciplinary system to their project of economic development.95 In this regard, Mexican positivists distinguished themselves from liberals and Catholics, with whom they shared a general concern for the discipline of Mexicans. All emphasized the threat that criminality and alcoholism posed to the Mexican nation.

Liberals claimed that the alcoholic automatically suffered the social consequences of his vice: failure in business, unemployment, and oppression.96 In the liberal press aimed at the working class, alcoholism received greater attention than crime. The reasons for this emphasis rest in the discourse about social anomalies. First, the

94. For the "epistemological crisis" of London observers, Walkowitz, City of Dreadful Delight, 38–39.
95. Buffington, "Revolutionary Reform," 78–79.
96. For a description of the social effects of alcoholism, see Ponce, El alcobolismo en México, 92–93. Although the label liberal can be applied to a great variety of tendencies, I will use it here to refer to those that appealed to the values of nineteenth-century Mexican liberalism and opposed certain policies of Díaz's regime, particularly its conciliatory policies with the Catholic church.
“professional” definition of criminals, described above, separated them from industrial workers and artisans. Opposition publications emphasized hard work, steady effort, and discipline but also reflected the importance of alcohol as part of workers’ recreation.97 Criminals, on the contrary, led a “dissipated” life and “worked” sporadically. Second, one of the main targets of the penny press, as María Elena Díaz observed, was the official newspapers’ depiction of workers as “debased” and the double standard among journalists and gendarmes regarding workers and gente decente.98 Alcohol, on the contrary, was a problem because it penetrated the daily life of workers and attacked the sense of respect that was the foundation of their individual and collective strength. According to Arrebol Social, published by the carpenter’s league, exploitation induced workers to alcoholism and the destruction of their families, thus adding economic disadvantage to humiliation. The Diario del Hogar exposed the incompatibility of alcohol and industrial action. If workers wanted to strike to defend their interests, said the Diario, they had “to declare war against alcohol.” The only way to gain respect was to respect oneself, one’s family, and one’s coworkers. Strikers could not ask for better pay if they were destroying their faculties with alcohol.99 Liberals, such as Protestant journalist Simón Loza, correlated tyranny, Catholicism, and alcoholism as the obstacles to the creation of new citizens.100

97. The penny press’s idea about vice were not a transparent translation of the actual workers’ opinions. The attitudes of writers and editors varied widely. Publications like San Lunes clearly aimed at moral correction of the workers’ mores and even tried to infuse respect for gendarmes. San Lunes 1, no. 2 (4 September 1907):3. On the opposite side, La Guacamaya announced without shame that its publication was interrupted one week because the director had had so stupendous a binge that he had “a loose bolt” in the head and was locked up in jail. La Guacamaya 1, no. 17 (29 September 1902):3. Editors kept an ambivalent stance regarding a severe solution for this vice that could alienate its public. La Guacamaya, which supported the prohibition of public drunkenness in 1907, had earlier run a column in which two pulque drinkers expressed editorial opinions with lower-class language. El Hijo del Fandango promised to fight against alcoholism, but also used alcohol for humorous purposes and advertised cantinas and pulquerías. See El Hijo del Fandango 1, no. 15 (21 October 1901):3. For the double standard of La Guacamaya, see La Guacamaya 6, no. 2 (21 November 1907).


Figure 4: Police inefficacy. “La seguridad en México. Eficacia de la policía,” El hijo del Abuzote 16, no. 1746 [?](17 February 1901):76. Photo courtesy of the Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas at Austin.
Catholic writers shared with liberals the perception of alcoholism and criminality as essentially moral issues but placed their solution beyond the reach of science. They emphasized the effects of vice on the family. Drunkard fathers disrupted the harmonious coexistence of the household.101 Sánchez Santos proposed special punishment to mothers who induced their children to drink alcohol—an all too common practice among lower classes.102 Catholic newspapers reporting on crime portrayed it as corruption and dishonesty requiring Christian expiation. Immorality, more than race or physiology, was the cause of crime and the degeneration of nations. The criminologists’ attempts to analyze criminals’ brains, asserted La Voz de México, were chimerical: the true virus of crime were the free thinking ideas of Martin Luther and François-Marie Arouet Voltaire.103

Catholics contended that Mexicans had advanced too fast materially, outdistancing their moral progress. This belief accounted for their reservation about the project of scientific politics. As a result, they were vocal regarding social issues, publishing El Heraldo and La Voz de México and using public functions to make their points.104 Catholic congresses denounced the authorities’ indifference toward haciendas that encouraged alcoholism by selling beverages to the peones. The increasing “demoralization of the masses,” in their view, caused illicit unions, alcoholism, prostitution, and pornography.105 Alcoholism and criminality were important elements in Catholic criticism of the secular project of scientific politics: material progress without morality promoted vice.

In spite of the strength of moral considerations, scientific explanations had greater impact on the discourse about criminality and alcoholism in part because they addressed the social causes of vice. Scientific news was published in newspapers of all affiliations, and public administration boasted of its scientific character. It would be misleading, therefore, to oppose a scientific approach to that of Catholics and liberals. Nonscientific writers accepted science as truth and used ideas and instruments borrowed from science. El Periquillo Sarniento, addressed to the popular readers of Mexico City, for example, published an “odd-looking romance like those of doctor Lombroso” about three pregnant señoritas.106 The scientific quality of

102. Sánchez Santos, El alcoholismo en la República Mexicana, 92.
103. La Voz de México, 9 September 1897, p. 2.
104. Ibid., 3 September 1897, p. 2. Sánchez Santos spoke in 1897 about alcoholism to Porfirio Díaz and the scientific societies of the country. Sánchez Santos, El alcoholismo en la República Mexicana, 6-8.
knowledge functioned more like a rhetorical adjective than a clear mechanism to exclude "nonscientific" writers. Criminologists themselves felt free to slip moral judgments into their research.

A common presumption of the scientific knowledge about alcoholism was the existence of certain precise rules that governed the condition of alcohol intoxication. The process of becoming drunk exemplified the relationship between the body functions (digestion, circulation, secretion) and the moral regions of behavior. Intoxication always began with excitement, followed immediately by sleepiness and insensitivity.\(^\text{107}\) Sometimes the process reached delirium tremens, and it always concluded with a painful aftermath. Gamboa described the trajectory of alcohol inside the body and its emergence as hilarity, optimism, and lust, concluding, of course, with a homicide.\(^\text{108}\) The results were always bad for the vicious. The study of the alcoholic demonstrated the objective and penetrating gaze of science that causally related internal processes with external appearances and behavior. The physiology of the drunkard was understood as a metaphor of his moral debasement; therefore, the insight into physiological processes authorized moral judgments. Writers wondered about the reason for the persistence of the vice; the alcoholic, it seemed, was not capable of perceiving the relationship between cause and effect.\(^\text{109}\)

Scientists described criminality and alcoholism by linking individual pathologies to collective transgressions and underlining the social determinations that led to vice. Roumagnac believed that the influence of society was the main cause of crime. Guerrero declared that crime was a complex social phenomenon, "the individual manifestation of a general phenomenon of dissolution" that reached all members of society. Guerrero looked at the individual life of the criminal in the context of "coexisting phenomena of society." Sánchez Santos pledged to embrace all the aspects of alcoholism and divided his study into the pathological basis, the statistical verification of the social damages, and the solution to the problem.\(^\text{110}\) When applied to the control of anomalies, however, this approach did not always lead to a more in-depth study of society.

For government officials, it was more important to identify and

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isolate the agents of transgression than to explain the social causes of crime and alcoholism. Miguel Macedo sought to adapt the new penitentiary system to existing class and moral divisions of Mexican society. If criminals were cut off from the rest of the population, criminality would no longer be a cause of public concern.\textsuperscript{111} The institution that best linked punishment and isolation was the new penitentiary, inaugurated in 1900. At the inauguration of the building, Macedo celebrated the beginning of “the reign of silence and solitude” for criminals.\textsuperscript{112} As the statistics suggested, however, punitive measures did not result in an effective control of the problem. Neither did the repeated attempts by the city government to control access to pulquerías, which discriminated against lower-class drinkers.\textsuperscript{113}

Strict moral classifications, although used as the rationale for punishment, were not satisfactory for other scientific observers. Guerrero undertook a far-reaching explanation of Mexican criminality, introducing consideration of geography, psychology, political instability, and even private life. He shared Macedo’s perception of a deep separation between classes but did not consider it so simple (“high and low” or “people, middle class, and aristocracy”) or obvious (“shirt, jacket, and frock coats”). Instead, he based his classification on the features of private life as manifested by customs and characters.\textsuperscript{114} The basic rule for Guerrero’s division was the character of conjugal relationships: at the bottom were the groups dominated by sexual promiscuity, above them those where polygamy still survived, concluding with groups where unions were monogamous and definitive. Industrial workers were in the middle of the scale: they had just started to acquire discipline but still needed close supervision of their behavior to prevent theft. At the top of his classification, almost as an ideal model, Guerrero placed the Creole middle- and upper-class woman, \textit{la señora decente}, sum of all moral virtues. This “exquisite ...psychical variety of the human kind” had inherited the virtues of

\textsuperscript{111} Macedo, \textit{La criminalidad en México}, 6, 10. See Hale, \textit{Transformation of Liberalism}, 216 n. For the importance of the centralized penitentiary regime in the Porfirián reform of Mexicans’ behavior, see Buffington, “Revolutionary Reform,” 83, 92.


\textsuperscript{114} Guerrero, \textit{La génesis del crimen}, 111, 157–58.
the colonial period and strengthened them during the “bloody” age of civil wars. Although the model belonged to the urban, educated groups of central Mexico ("our directing classes"), Guerrero avoided establishing a causal relationship between virtue and class, basing his construction on a gender and moral division.

In Roumagnac's *Los criminales de México* and *Crimenes sexuales y pasionales*, the sociological exploration was coupled with the need to know the identity of criminals and the truth behind their language. Although he showed acquaintance with the "realm of theory," he yielded to the wealth of information contained in Mexican jails. The goal of his project was twofold: to help prevention and punishment and to expose individual cases before they became "units of criminal statistics." He based both books on interviews with inmates of Belem that followed a basic structure of questions and answers. Through reiteration, the questionnaire aimed at linking the individual cases with the social dimension of criminality. Roumagnac also explored the practices of the prison world and the intricacies of criminals' language. He pointed out when the inmate seemed to be lying, displaying "endless verbosity," or just using "obscene" expressions. Roumagnac did not reproduce obscene words but compiled a small dictionary of the criminal argot.

The study of language linked the criminologists' research with the problem of the cultural codes associated with the reproduction of crime and alcoholism. As shown above, criminality and alcoholism appeared within a particular set of cultural values and references that promoted their persistence. In *La llaga*, Gamboa referred to the criminals' vocabulary, which "tortures...and steals" everyday language without becoming a language by itself. Because of "prison decorum," inmates seldom referred to the crimes of their fellow prisoners. The humoristic dialogue of the press recorded the obscure complexity of popular language, particularly in situations related to alcohol consumption. However, this did not reduce the strength of the bio-

115. Ibid., 158-82.
117. Ibid., 11, 24.
118. Ibid., 69-72. Fragments of la Chiquita's personal diary are included in ibid., 104-23. The interviews followed a questionnaire: the author asked the criminal his or her name, asked for a narration of the crime and its sequel; inquired as to what were the criminal's family antecedents and previous incarcerations; and, sometimes, asked for the inmate's definitions of morality and truthfulness. The criminal's photograph and his or her measurements were also included.
120. Gamboa, *La llaga*, 36, 58. For a good example of this use of language, see *El Diablito Bromista* 1, no. 17 (10 October 1907), 3.
logical explanations and metaphors of the discourse. Asserting the universality of crime, Roumagnac wrote: Crime is common to "all kind [especie] of men—I was going to write animals."

Scientists addressed the causes of criminality and alcoholism using the notion of "contagion" that involved culture but preserved the priority of biological mechanisms. In his classification of criminals, Roumagnac identified one of his three categories as "criminals by influence of the environment," that is, those who received bad influences through a nongenetic vehicle. Macedo proposed that the state rescue the orphans who roamed the streets from the "nursery" of crime. To guarantee their regeneration, the state should not amass them in shelters since that would allow further transmission of the knowledge of vice. Instead, Macedo suggested spreading them among families willing to adopt them. Eduwigis R., a frequent guest of Belem interviewed by Roumagnac, had had her future behavior molded when she entered Morelos hospital, at eleven, in the company of prostitutes. Belem, as I mentioned, was another vehicle of contagion: the "criminal population" of the old convent shared information about vice and then went out to spread "the disease of typhus and the disease of crime." Also, newspapers could disseminate information about methods of crime: criminals read about the deeds of their colleagues, finding inspiration and valuable techniques to imitate.

Explanations of social diseases grounded on genetic mechanisms had even greater scientific prestige than those involving contagion. Everything was transmittable from parents to children: physiognomic similarities, tastes, abilities, weaknesses, and customs. Crime and alcoholism were "epidemic" diseases, spread secretively, outside the reach of prophylactic measures, impossible to isolate because "we carry [them] inside ourselves." To delineate this process, the word degeneration was more frequent because of its double meaning: (1) it alluded to the moral condition of criminals, prostitutes, and beggars and (2) it described the effects of alcohol consumption and low morality on heredity. The discourse about social diseases placed degeneration at the center of its explanation because it linked the

121. Roumagnac, Crímenes sexuales, 5.
122. Roumagnac, Los criminales en México, 59-60; Macedo, La criminalidad en México, 29.
125. Ibid., 30 June 1905, p. 2, col. 1. Lara y Pardo referred to the "epidemics" of suicides and abductions as having no other explanation than imitation. Lara y Pardo, La prostitución en México, 118-19.
126. Ponce, El alcoholismo en México, 10-11.
individual, family, and national levels of observation. Sánchez Santos mentioned several stigmata of psychological and physiological nature transmitted by alcoholics to their descendants.128 The most disturbing aspect of alcoholic heredity was its elusive nature, even for specialists. A want of will, an excessive concern for animals, hysteria, selfishness—anything atypical could be a sign of an alcoholic descent. As a rule, degeneration caused by alcohol appeared in different forms, depending on the generation of the victim. If the first generation suffered depravity and proneness to excesses, the fourth generation would show stupidity and sterility, leading to the extinction of the family.129 Thus, degeneration was victimizing the entire society without being noticed, even by specialists. To exemplify the dangerous multiplication of alcoholism, Sánchez Santos calculated that an alcoholic could produce 640 "degenerated" descendants, populating the darker areas of the city, making each child a candidate for the penitentiary, and weighing heavily on society's economy.130

Race was a useful instrument to deal with degeneration at a social level because racial categories worked as an extension of the organic conceptions of society and politics. Macedo acknowledged the racial implications of his division of Mexican society. Martínez Baca, in Puebla, made sweeping racial generalizations basic elements of his anatomical comparisons. He contended that the brains of Indian criminals were smaller than their European equivalents because the indigenous race was "quite degenerated."131 Reasoning that race was the addition of the features of families from the same origin, Sánchez Santos declared that alcohol was degenerating the Mexican race as a whole. The indigenous race lost "beauty and vigor" after the conquest because the colonial government loosened the strict pre-Hispanic punishments against alcoholism.132 Continuing the historic process of racial decadence, civil wars in the independence era caused criminality because they relaxed the boundaries between patriotism and mere personal profit.133 The perspective for Mexico

128. Sánchez Santos, El alcoholismo en la República Mexicana, 17, 22–24. For the moral effects of prostitution, see Lara y Pardo, La prostitución en México, 108–09.
129. Ramírez, Resumen de medicina legal, 164, 183; Gaceta de Policía 1, no. 33 (24 June 1906):8. For the hereditary symptoms, see Sánchez Santos, El alcoholismo en la República Mexicana, 18–21.
130. Sánchez Santos, El alcoholismo en la República Mexicana, 28–29.
131. Martínez Baca and Vergara, Estudios de antropología criminal, 11. See also Saldaña, prólogo to ibid., ix: "All Indians are thieves," regardless of the place in which they live.
132. Sánchez Santos, El alcoholismo en la República Mexicana, 27, 55.
133. "Sobre el número y clase de presos," 34.
was grim: weak individuals formed weak races and weak nations incapable of defending themselves and prone to crime. Nations could preserve their “virility” only through temperance and virtue; otherwise, their survival was not certain.134

The mechanisms of imitation and heredity converged in the sphere of the family. In overcrowded lower-class dwellings—much as in Belem—children received the genetic seeds of their weaknesses and saw models for their future behavior. Lara y Pardo described the images of incestuous lust in claustrophobic rooms that created prostitutes. Boys saw their parents drinking and fighting. It was only natural that they would go out into the streets, try a glass of pulque—which cost only a centavo—and imitate violence and sensuality.135 This enclosed environment of contagion and its genetic counterpart rendered education, the científicos’ favorite instrument of cultural modernization, an ineffective weapon.136

Porfirian educated groups became concerned that degeneration could seize the whole country and destroy aspirations of progress. One of Roumagnac’s original motives in beginning his study of Mexican crime was to reject the idea that the Mexican population was one of the most criminal in the world. Some foreign writers had based this idea on statistics or on historical reflections about the ancient Aztecs’ blood lust.137 In Mexico, observers saw the statistics of social diseases as evidence that criminality and alcoholism were national particularities. If, in 1882, Mexican criminality was considered mostly an outcome of sudden passions, by 1900, Guerrero defined a Mexican “type” of alcoholic and pictured Mexican criminals returning to the barbarous ways of the Aztecs who needed war to satisfy their thirst for blood.138 At the end of the period examined in this article, Gamboa was able to say that “homicidal lunacy” distinguished Mexicans.139 Therefore, social diseases became a national

134. Ponce, El alcoholismo en México, 99, 100–01; La Voz de México, 30 September 1897, p. 2.
135. Lara y Pardo, La prostitución en México, 120–21; Roumagnac, Los criminales en México, 14, 11.
139. Gamboa, La llaga, 397.
risk that required the intervention of the state, even if it had to jeopardize its economic interests in the alcohol industry.\textsuperscript{140}

\textbf{Conclusion}

In spite of the new classifications of and explanations for societal behavior, scientific knowledge did not translate into greater social control. Anarchy remained a prominent image of the modern capital city. The new instruments used to look at society sought to reinforce the elite’s sense of superiority. However, the evidence suggests that traditional divisions of gender, class, and even race were weak against the inroads of vice. The results of the scientific gaze came to be perceived as uncertain and debatable. Deeper observations illuminated the tensions between the moral classifications of society and the deceptive nature of collective practices. Faced with the limitations of their moral superiority as an instrument of social hygiene, Porfirian elite tried to create a scientifically legitimate knowledge with which they could organize the fight against social diseases. Guerrero, who based his findings on the observation of private life, acknowledged that the intervention of the state was necessary to modify the practices that promoted moral degeneration. However, he observed, after the apparent demise of the Catholic church as the main moral influence on the Mexican lower classes, positivism had a difficult task in imposing a model because it opened all the secrets of knowledge without prescribing a code of morality at the same time.\textsuperscript{141} Although he praised the virtues of the ruling classes of Mexico, his book ended with the implicit acknowledgment that there were no direct ways to instill these virtues into the lower classes. The majority of the writers and journalists examined in this article were more optimistic than Guerrero. However, as a cultural history of the urban marginal groups during this period would show, theory had little effect over the discipline of the lower classes.

After all the interest devoted to social diseases, Mexican elite could not come up with a universally accepted solution. The reason for this disagreement was not ideology (not exclusively, at least) but the complex landscape of criminality and alcoholism. Scientists and journalists used several instruments to measure, question, and explain society, but no single theory or science could impose itself upon all perspectives. The result of scientific research, on the contrary, challenged the belief that alcoholism and criminality belonged


\textsuperscript{141} Guerrero, \textit{La génesis del crimen}, 316-17, 356.
exclusively to the lower classes. The tension between the desire to justify social hierarchies and the refinement of the observation of society (between classification and direct observation) marked the thinking of late Porfirian commentators. Debating among themselves within this ambiguity, they could not succeed in establishing a viable blueprint for the regeneration of Mexican society and could not translate their ideas into penal legislation. However, after the Revolution, criminologists' influence did not suffer the same violent attacks as did Comtean positivism. The unexpected political participation of urban and rural masses changed some aspects of elite perceptions of society. Knowledge about crime helped, if only as a rhetorical device, to explain collective violence. Moral and biological perceptions of alcoholism did have more influence over revolutionary programs, but the attempts to impose prohibition were not successful.142 The discussion outlined in these pages bequested many of its instruments and premises to the project of regeneration of the Mexican people, eagerlly appropriated by the revolutionary state.

In the context of the recent scholarship about modern technologies and discourses about social discipline,143 the Mexican case in-

142. For Salvador Alvarado's failure in Yucatán, see Gilbert M. Joseph, Revolution from Without: Yucatán, Mexico, and the United States, 1880-1924 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 105-06; Salvador Alvarado, La reconstrucción de México: Un mensaje a los pueblos de América (Mexico: Fondo de Cultura Económica-INEHRM, 1985). For the discussion and rejection of prohibition at the national scale in the Constitutional Convention of 1916-1917, see Diario de los Debates del Congreso Constituyente: 1916-1917 (Mexico: INEHRM, 1960), 2:936-61. Porfirian prison reform discourse was influential on revolutionary constitutional ideas about the penitentiary system, although it was limited by the political concern about excessive centralization and past abuses. Buffington, "Revolutionary Reform," 89; Pablo Piccato, "The Discourse about Alcoholism and Criminality in Mexico City, 1890-1917" (M.A. thesis, University of Texas at Austin, 1993), chap. 3.

vites a reconsideration of two points. First, the imposition of a model of discipline was not a simple exercise of top-down social engineering. The projects of modernizing elites collided with various forms of resistance from the lower classes. Furthermore, as the preceding analysis suggests, the process was more complex than a simple dichotomous confrontation along class lines. Productivity was only one of the aims of Mexican moral reformers, as the workplace was not the main scene of transgressions. Moral reform required broad cultural changes, including a redefinition of the national character and the divisions of society. Facing such ambitious goals, and starting from a different social configuration than their European inspirators, Porfrian (and later revolutionary) social reformers appealed to the intervention of the state.

The second point pertains to the complexity of the mechanisms through which Latin American elites adopted foreign ideas about social control. As previously stated, the importation of foreign models about social diseases involved a selective appropriation from a broad theoretical landscape, which included ongoing debates, and was not restricted to one country of origin. The scientific observation of Mexican society established its legitimacy through specific intellectual practices—e.g., public debate, ethnological and statistical research, popular and specialized press. However, its main claim to a scientific status was based on the observation and description of national vice and the specific tension between discipline and transgression in Mexico City. When Porfrian elite focused their gaze on the depths of society, they had to trade their comfortable perspective for an uneasy balance between objectivity and fascination. After all, they were not observing an astronomical phenomenon—Venus in front of the sun. A much closer look revealed that alcohol and crime were casting a shadow over the streets of the city—a phenomenon that foreign theories could not control nor explain.