

On Mexican National Character

By MICHAEL MACCOBY

ABSTRACT: Mexican authors have limited their discussions of national character to the *mestizo* population of the central plateau. Their analyses are overburdened with a self-denigrative view of Mexican national character, stressing inferiority feelings stamped by the Conquest. More recently, Mexican psychoanalysts have focused on the Conquest and subsequent revolutionary upheavals as generators of conflict between the sexes, which they see as the most crucial determinant of Mexican psychopathology. The Mexican male tries to impose a patriarchal ideal, but he is constantly undermined by resentful women. Attempting to act with an authority he does not feel, the male assumes an exaggerated role of masculinity (*machismo*), but the female, especially the mother, holds the real power in the family. Although empirical study confirms the existence of this pattern, it also shows that these writers ignore the large percentage of Mexicans who are well adapted to their society and have character traits common to peasants throughout the world. Furthermore, socioeconomic factors which contribute to maladaptive character structures are underplayed. In Mexico, the clash between high ideals and the reality of a developing society intensifies feelings of inferiority, with the result that Mexicans undervalue their creative aspects and the progress they have made since the semifeudal society crumbled with the 1910 Revolution.

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BEFORE exploring Mexican national character, it is essential to be clear about what we mean by "character." For someone who has been trained in psychoanalytic theory and methods, character is not a set of behavioral or expressive traits. Rather, character implies a more precise concept: a structure of underlying motives, interrelated and relatively unchanging after childhood, or, as Erich Fromm defines it, character traits are "relatively permanent passionate strivings."¹ When these strivings are satisfied in work, in play, in relations with others, the individual feels pleasure and security; when they are frustrated, he becomes anxious and insecure.

Character must be distinguished from opinions, values, and ideology. The underlying strivings may remain hidden beneath rationalizations which allow the individual to believe he is merely responding to social pressures, to "reality," or that his behavior exemplifies an ennobling ideal. For example, psychoanalytic investigation of Mexicans often reveals a deep unconscious fixation to the mother, a need for her unconditional love and nurture that, in fact, cripples the individual's independence. Yet, because Mexican culture glorifies the mother, a man can comfortably feel that his idealization of the mother and his dependence on her signify praiseworthy filial love and devotion. Here the society supports a character force, but in another case social ideals may clash with character. A Mexican male is expected to dominate women, but many men who are weak and receptive play a role of compulsive masculinity (*machismo*), all the while

¹ Erich Fromm, "Psychoanalytic Characterology and Its Application to the Understanding of Culture," *Culture and Personality*, ed. S. Stansfeld Sargent and Marian W. Smith (New York: Viking Fund, Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research, 1949).

feeling frustrated, unaware of their wish to be fed and cared for by women. The conflict between social role and character may drive them to repeated drinking in an attempt to erase consciousness of their defeat and to satisfy their receptive longings. In these cases and in many others, the behavior is obvious, but character forces can be unearthed only by clinical study or by projective psychological techniques.

In terms of psychoanalytic theory, the concept of national character would assume that people of a nation, whatever their individual characterological differences, share a nucleus of motives, formed by common experiences and necessities. Theoretical debate among psychoanalysts still continues over the crucial determinants of character, and this is not the place to consider in detail the reasons for favoring a socioeconomic emphasis to one like Freud's, which stressed the sexual nature of character forces.² My view of Mexican national character is theoretically rooted in Erich Fromm's concept of "the social character," which he describes in terms of its functional relation to the demands of a society. Fromm writes:

Each society is structuralized and operates in certain ways which are necessitated by a number of objective conditions; such conditions are the methods of production and distribution which in turn depend upon raw material, industrial techniques, climate, etc., furthermore political and geographical factors, and cultural traditions and influences to which the society is exposed. There is no "society" in general but only specific social structures which operate in different and ascertainable ways. Although these social structures do change in the course of historical development, they are relatively fixed at any given historical period, and society can exist only by

² Sigmund Freud, "Character and Anal Eroticism" (1908), *Collected Papers* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1924), Vol. II.

operating within the framework of its particular structure. The members of the society and/or of the various classes or status groups within it have to behave in such a way as to function in the sense required by society. It is the function of the social character to shape the energies of the members of the society in such a way that their behavior is not left to conscious decisions whether or not to follow the social pattern but that *people want to act as they have to act* and at the same time find gratification in acting according to the requirements of the culture. In other words, the social character has the function of moulding human energy for the purpose of the functioning of a given society.³

How can the social character of a nation or of its various classes be charted? Since individual psychoanalytic investigation is not possible for large samples, it would be necessary to use projective tests and questionnaires on samples from different areas and classes of a nation. Such a study would set the stage for comparing character traits to socioeconomic variables, and to explain contradictions between behavior and ideals.

Until recently, no such studies were undertaken in Mexico. Instead, a few serious anthropological studies, some of isolated non-Spanish-speaking communities, together with a great deal of intuitive description, formed the body of observation and speculation on Mexican national character. Since the 1930's, Mexican philosophers, essayists, and, more recently, psychoanalysts, have been fascinated by the challenge of understanding the Mexican. The result, often brilliant and perceptive, mixes behavior and ideology with character, and is overly preoccupied with pathology, to the point of self-denigration.

Seven years ago, Fromm, who has

³ Fromm, *op. cit.*, see footnote 1.

lived in Mexico more than fifteen years and is director of the Mexican Institute of Psychoanalysis, began a study of social character in a Mexican village, attempting to test his theory empirically and at the same time to shed light on Mexican social character. His work, which was supported financially by the Foundations Fund for Research in Psychiatry, also stimulated two Mexican analysts, Doctor Guillermo Dávila and Doctor Alfonso Millan, to attempt parallel studies, using the same projective methods and theory, with industrial workers and hospital patients in Mexico City. While these studies are limited to small samples, they constitute the first systematic attempt to study the Mexican social character, and their findings, especially the village study which is now close to completion, illuminate the range of character types and the relationship between motives, socioeconomic factors, and pathological behavior that mistakenly strikes the literary observer as characteristic of all Mexicans, when, in fact, it is limited to definable groups with a particular character structure.⁴ Before turning to some of these findings, we shall first consider briefly some social, economic, and historical determinants of the Mexican character and, second, the Mexican intellectual's image of his national character.

DETERMINANTS OF MEXICAN CHARACTER

When considering the Mexican character, writers generally refer to the *mestizo* (mixed Spanish and Indian)

⁴ The full study of the village, including detailed methods and results, is now being written up and will be published as a book entitled, "Class and Character in a Mexican Village," by Erich Fromm, Michael Maccoby, and Theodore Schwartz. Some preliminary articles have already been published and will be cited where they are relevant to this article.

population of the central plateau. This group has shared a common history and cultural tradition. The central plateau, dominated by the Aztecs before the Conquest, became the center of Conquest culture and in succeeding centuries the main battleground for the revolutions of 1810, 1867, and finally 1910 which marked the massive upheaval that formed the modern Mexican nation. In the central states, fanning out from Mexico City to Morelos, Puebla, Mexico, Michoacan, Guanajuato, and Querétaro, the rural peasants, the townspeople, and the urban population have been formed by the experiences of conquest, exploitation, and violence. But there are also important rural-urban and class differences. The character of the peasants who, despite the recent trend toward urbanization, still make up more than half the population,⁵ has been influenced both by their mode of work, which for the most part has not changed in centuries,⁶ and, in some cases, by a history of semislavery to the prerevolutionary haciendas.⁷

While Mexico remained a semifederal society, the differences between the ur-

⁵ In 1950, 29 per cent of the Mexican population lived in towns of 10,000 or more inhabitants. In 1960, the figure was 35 per cent. The total population has grown from 25.7 million in 1950 to 34.9 million in 1960; in 1940 the population was 19.6 million. A majority of the work force remains in agriculture, mostly peasant farmers, although the percentage has dropped from 58.3 per cent in 1950 to 54 per cent in 1960. I am indebted to Sr. Julio Boltvinik of the Colegio de Mexico for compiling these statistics from the national census.

⁶ See George Foster, "Peasant Society and the Image of Limited Good," *American Anthropologist*, 67:2 (1965), pp. 293-315; also his earlier study, *Culture and Conquest* (New York: Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research, 1960).

⁷ For a description of the hacienda and its influence on the character of the peon, see Eric Wolf, *Sons of the Shaking Earth* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1959), especially chap. 10.

ban shopkeepers, bureaucrats, and artisans and the rural folk were not so striking as the changes wrought during the past twenty-five years by the beginnings of industrialization and the increasing influence of North American culture.⁸ Thus, it becomes less and less accurate to lump together the rural and urban Mexicans, despite the past which they hold in common.

On the edges of Mexico, away from the influences of the central region, and in the islands of indigenous-speaking communities, important cultural differences make it necessary to consider very different factors in character formation. According to the census of 1960, some 10 per cent of the Mexicans over the age of five speak an indigenous language only or a combination of Spanish and an indigenous language. Although, in absolute numbers, the indigenous-speaking population has risen during the past ten years with the alarmingly high birth rate, the relative percentage has, nevertheless, fallen slightly because of urbanization and acculturation.⁹ Most of the indigenous-speaking people live in small, self-contained communities, cemented socially by traditional customs and a syncretistic Catholicism, and isolated from the influence of the Mexican national culture. Due to the careful work of anthropologists like Robert Redfield and his students, we know more about some of these little communities than about *mestizo* culture, both urban and rural.

⁸ For a discussion of the growing United States influence in Mexico, see Oscar Lewis, "Mexico since Cárdenas," in Richard N. Adams *et al.*, *Social Change in Latin America Today* (New York: Vintage Books, 1961). Lewis also cites interesting facts on industrialization and gives a concise picture of Mexico at the beginning of the 1960's.

⁹ The population speaking either an indigenous language only or Spanish combined with an indigenous language fell from 11.2 per cent in 1950 to 10.4 per cent in 1960.

The Mexican attitude toward the "Indians" is ambivalent. The indigenous culture is seen as inferior and less civilized, but it serves an ideological function. In an attempt to find a national identity and to throw off the sense of inferiority that Mexican intellectuals feel was imprinted by the Spanish Conquest, Indian traditions, heroes such as Cuauhtémoc who suffered torture and death rather than submit to the conquerors, and pre-Columbian themes in art and literature have been idealized and often employed with great beauty.¹⁰

For different reasons, the culture of Yucatan, which is rooted in the Mayan rather than the Aztec, and of the northern states including Nuevo Leon, where United States influence has loomed larger, cannot be considered culturally equivalent to that of the central plateau.

Mexican authors limit their discussions of national character to the central region and to the *mestizo*, a centrist tendency which blurs socioeconomic as well as geographical difference. What are their conclusions about the Mexican character?

MEXICANS VIEW THEIR NATIONAL CHARACTER

When Mexican intellectuals describe their national character, they almost invariably see themselves as a nation of liars, destructive power-seekers, suffering, resentful women, and boasting pre-

¹⁰ Examples include the murals and decorative themes at the National University and at the impressive Social Security housing development, Unidad Independencia. The great Mexican revolutionary artists such as Rivera and Orozco are famous for their use of indigenous themes and their glorification of the Indian over the Spanish conquerors. Still, it is noteworthy that *mestizo* peasants commonly blame their violent behavior and vengeful feelings on their "Indian blood," despite the fact that many indigenous communities in Mexico are more peaceful and better integrated than *mestizo* villages.

datory men. Yet Mexico is also a land where creative talent abounds, where despite a high prevalence of alcoholism,¹¹ the majority of men are sober and hard-working, and where, despite poverty combined with a history of exploitation and violence, both men and women seek liberty and a peaceful life. Mexicans feel proud of institutions such as the social security and *ejido* (peasant landowning) programs which are the fruits of the Revolution of 1910.¹² They complain, however, about themselves and their one-party government, for the gap looms large between revolutionary ideals and reality. Corruption and exploitation have not dissolved, and few Mexicans can believe that any authority figure will ever place the people before his own self-interest. But how different is this fatalism and passive resignation from that of other peasant societies,

¹¹ According to a report by the Pan-American Sanitary Office, the prevalence of alcoholism in Mexico is the third highest in the world, second only to Chile in Latin America. Since Chile and Mexico are also among the most accurate data-collectors in Latin America, the relative position must be taken with caution, even though Mexico clearly suffers from a high prevalence of alcoholism. See *Seminario Latinoamericano sobre Alcoholismo*, Oficina Sanitaria Panamericana, Oficina Regional de la Organización Mundial de la Salud, con la colaboración del Servicio Nacional del Salud, Santiago, Chile, 1961.

¹² According to an empirical study comparing Mexican attitudes with those in four other nations, by Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba, Mexicans feel more pride in their economic institutions and in the physical beauty of their country than in their government. Yet more Mexicans (30 per cent) are proud of their political institutions than Italians (3 per cent) or Germans (7 per cent). While Mexicans criticize lack of fair treatment by authorities and feel impotent to influence politics, the Almond-Verba study also implies that their feelings of impotence are, in part, conditioned by the contrast between very high ideals and reality. See *The Civic Culture: Political Attitudes and Democracy in Five Nations* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1963).

such as those of Southern Europe, the Near East, or Southeast Asia, which cannot even boast of progressive institutions such as Mexico's and which have also lacked the slow evolution of democratic institutions and individual rights under law?

But the intellectual's criticism goes beyond the passivity, suspicion, and distrust that characterize peasant societies throughout the world. Gordon W. Hewes, in his review of the Mexican literature on national character up until the early 1950's, describes how Mexicans focus on the traits of the most downtrodden members of the society as the symbol for the whole nation.¹³ To Samuel Ramos, whose *El Perfil del Hombre y la Cultura en Mexico*¹⁴ was the first major speculation on Mexican character, the Mexican is symbolized by the *pelado*, the "plucked chicken," the nobody, whose deep feelings of inferiority are partially buried beneath bluff and whose resentment and vengefulness explode against any threat to his fragile pride. Ramos, Emilio Uranga, and others who build their constructs of the Mexican around the idea of inferiority or "insufficiency" traced its origin to the Conquest, to the crushing of indigenous culture, to humiliation by foreigners, and to *malinchismo*, the tendency to betrayal, to imitate conquering overlords. Malinche, Cortes' mistress and interpreter, set a pattern, according to these writers, of deepening the wounds of inferiority by imitating the powerful, first the Spanish, then the French, and more recently the North Americans.¹⁵ The result is a

¹³ Gordon W. Hewes, "Mexicans in Search of the 'Mexican,'" *The American Journal of Economics and Sociology*, 13 (1953-1954), pp. 209-223.

¹⁴ Samuel Ramos, *El Perfil del Hombre y la Cultura en Mexico* (Mexico, D.F.: Imprenta Mundial, 1934).

¹⁵ I have the feeling that the Mexican authors underestimate the effects on feelings

combination of servility, mixed with hostility and disloyalty, and a wish to erase the sense of humiliation by brutally dominating those more defenseless, such as wives and children, or in the case of government officials, anyone weak and powerless.

Since Hewes' review, more studies, especially by psychoanalysts, have supported this denigrative view, but have changed the emphasis of its origins from the Conquest as a total psychic trauma of defeat to its effects on the relationship between men and women. The value of these studies, by Aniceto Aramoni, Francisco González Pineda, and Santiago Ramirez¹⁶ is that they come to grips with a social reality that has an obvious and pathogenic effect on Mexican character—the intense conflict between the sexes. Many families in Mexico lack fathers, and children are raised by women who have either been abandoned by their husbands or who have thrown out men not able to support the family and who try to as-

of inferiority of living in the shadow of the United States, with its overwhelming and military superiority, which has aggrandized huge chunks of Mexican territory. Most Mexicans still resent not only their loss of land, but also United States intervention in the Revolution of 1910. On the other hand, they are in awe of North American wealth, and peasants who have worked as *braceros* in the United States are very conscious of the contrast between the two nations. These feelings are partly revenged by stereotyping North Americans as cold, overly concerned with the material aspects of life, and emotionally naïve. The Mexican government's policy of no intervention in the affairs of Latin America finds a deep support in the Mexican people.

¹⁶ Aniceto Aramoni, *Psicoanálisis de la Dinámica de un Pueblo* (Mexico, D.F.: UNAM, 1961); Francisco González Pineda, *El Mexicano, Psicología de su Destructividad* (Mexico, D.F.: Editorial Pax-Mexico, S.A., 1961); Santiago Ramirez, *El Mexicano, Psicología de sus Motivaciones* (Mexico, D.F.: Editorial Pax-Mexico, S.A., 1959).

sert their masculinity by brute force. In other families, men maintain their dominance over women with the club of economic power, but there is little love or affection. Men often betray their wives, even to the point of setting up supplementary households (the *casa chica*).¹⁷ The woman may take her revenge by undermining the father's relationship to his children, by making them her agents in the war between the sexes, and by raising boys who lack a firm sense of manliness and feel traitors to their sex and girls who distrust all men.

The analysts' accounts are not pure speculation, for they have been struck by the number of Mexican patients whose analyses reveal identical dynamics—men whose compulsive masculinity hides dependence on the mother and feelings of both sexual castration and creative impotence and women who cannot love men. But by generalizing from the clinic to the whole nation, their description of the Mexican is overweighted toward psychopathology. Furthermore, their interpretation of the origins of the conflict between the sexes remains vague and overdependent on historical rather than current social factors. González, who bases his evidence on vignettes, stresses the role of the Revolution of 1910 in breaking up the family and increasing the mother's power and influence over the children, while separating the father

¹⁷ For example, see Oscar Lewis, *Five Families* (New York: Basic Books, 1959), especially the Sánchez family. Lewis is a perceptive and dedicated observer of Mexican life, aware of the conflict between the sexes and its role in Mexican culture. But why did he choose the Sánchez family for a more detailed study of Mexican family life, when this is one of the rare families headed by a male and without the strong influence of a mother? The opposite is more common, and in our village study, we find 20 per cent of the families are headed by women without husbands.

from his family. Ramirez emphasizes the Conquest, when the Spanish conquerors took Indian women for wives or concubines and left the Indian male displaced and impotent. The *mestizo* offspring of the union would ambivalently idealize and resent the Spanish father, next to whom he felt inferior, and would both depend on and denigrate his Indian mother. The origin of the Mexican male's glorification of the mother but predatory domination of women, according to Ramirez, is the *mestizo's* compulsive attempt to imitate the powerful Spaniards while at the same time preserving his only real affective link, with his mother.

Aramoni and González, more than Ramirez, try to interpret the psychology of the women as well as that of the men. The female experience of membership in an exploited class, of being treated as property while at the same time expected to give lovingly, have provoked the urge for revenge. The female's destructive response has been to rebel passively, to undermine the father's authority, and, as Aramoni points out, to demand that the male either live up to his *machismo* image or suffer castrating ridicule. Aramoni differs from the others in attempting to trace the conflict between the sexes to a pre-Columbian battle between matriarchal and patriarchal systems in Mexico. While he does not sufficiently support this hypothesis, he does call attention to the fact that the Aztecs, more successfully than the *mestizo*, forced women into an inferior role.¹⁸ More than the others, Aramoni is aware that the Mexican patriarchal ideology en-

¹⁸ For a description of the male's domination over women which, significantly, went along with strict prohibitions against drinking, see Jacques Soustelle, *The Daily Life of the Aztecs* (London: George Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1961).

counters a constant challenge from an underlying structure of female strength, represented not only by the mother's frequent dominance within the family, but also symbolically by the ascendance of the Virgin of Guadalupe in the religious pantheon and the quasi-religious importance of Mother's Day in Mexico.

A review of the most recent descriptions of Mexican national character would not be complete without citing *El Laberinto de la Soledad*, by Octavio Paz, a poet and diplomat.¹⁹ This book has influenced many of the psychoanalytic commentators and, in my opinion, is the most perceptive and certainly the best-written intuitive analysis of Mexican character. Although Paz, too, is interested in Mexican psychopathology, his rich sensitivity, his sympathy for the Mexican's self-imposed isolation, and his concern to understand contradictions in the Mexican character do not leave the impression either of apology or belittling, or of pseudo-scientific speculation.

The composite characterological portrait of the Mexican that emerges from these studies shows the male as receptive and exploitative, tied to the mother, isolated from intimacy with others, and narcissistically protected by a self-image of masculine self-sufficiency and strength. As Paz writes:

We do not support the presence of our companions. Enclosed in ourselves, when not torn apart and alienated, we isolate ourselves without reference to a redeemer somewhere out there or a creator right here. We oscillate between intimacy and reserve,

¹⁹ Octavio Paz, *El Laberinto de la Soledad* (Mexico, D.F.: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1959). Mention should also be made of the Mexican genius for caricature, combining criticism and drawing, which flowers in the cartoons of Abel Quezada and Rius, whose weekly comic book, *Los Supermachos*, is eagerly read by Mexican intellectuals for its devastating lampoons of the Mexican character and of political institutions.

between shouts and silence, between the fiesta and the funeral vigil, without ever fully committing ourselves.²⁰

The Mexican woman is outwardly submissive and masochistic, but also closed, hoarding her love, and passively rebellious against male domination and lack of love. The male's sadism, Paz writes, "begins as vengeance for the feminine frigidity or as a despairing attempt to obtain a response from a body we fear is totally insensitive."²¹ The Mexican male fears the woman, but in his isolation he finds her an unanswerable enigma and a dangerous power. He knows no way to relate to her other than by force, and the vicious circle turns.

EMPIRICAL VERIFICATION AND AMPLIFICATION

In our study of a Mexican *mestizo* village in the State of Morelos, we have confirmed the observation that conflict between the sexes, which distinguishes Mexico from peasant societies such as that of southern Italy with centuries of unbroken patriarchal dominance, is the result and generator of both characterization and emotional disturbance.²² But by studying practically all of the adults in a village of 900 inhabitants, rather than merely a sample, with projective questionnaires, the Rorschach Test, the Thematic Apperception Test, as well as participant observation, we have been able to determine that the unproductive character traits cited by Mexican authors do not describe the

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 58, my translation.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 60, my translation.

²² See M. Maccoby, "La Guerra entre Los Sexos en una Comunidad Campesina," *Revista de Psicoanálisis, Psiquiatría y Psicología*, 2:1, 1966. Also, for a discussion of the development of hostility between the sexes in children, see M. Maccoby, Nancy Modiano, and Patricia Lander, "Games and Social Character in a Mexican Village," *Psychiatry*, 26:2 (1964), pp. 150-162.

majority of Mexican villagers, even though they do accurately picture a sizable minority. For example, only 11 per cent of the men have the extreme traits of *machismo*, and another 30 per cent express these traits to a lesser degree. In turn, *machismo* is correlated with two more deeply rooted character factors: intense dependence on the mother and the authoritarian-exploitative syndrome.

In contrast, we have also encountered villagers who are loving and productive, interested in their families and their work.²³ They express their untutored concepts of love with a richness of language and understanding that reflects the best qualities of the Mexican. In the words of a village woman aged fifty, who never attended school:

Love is very sacred, because without love there would not be the world we would have if we loved each other, because even though there is friendship, it is not enough. One must love. Beginning with love of parents, of sweethearts, love of a husband, love of children, love of a good friendship; even to raise an animal one must love. It is incomparable, because people even commit suicide if they do not know how to love. The love of a father is eternal. One retains the love of friends even when they are absent. Love of God one must have also, for God sends us love in the form of understanding.

The hardest-working and most economically successful of the peasants have the hoarding motives that characterize peasants throughout the world. As George Foster points out, the economic reality of peasant society favors the attitudes of "limited good," suspicious individualism, and of self-isolation behind psychological and material walls. The peasant's attitudes toward love, friendship, and health are strongly pat-

terned by his experience with an economy largely unchanged for centuries, where only a finite amount of wealth is produced, and "no amount of extra hard work will significantly change the figure."²⁴ Foster's analysis of the attitudes that follow from "limited good" describes a character which fits closely with Fromm's description of the hoarding orientation:

This orientation makes people have little faith in anything new they might get from the outside world; their security is based on hoarding and saving, while spending is felt to be a threat. They have surrounded themselves, as it were, with a protective wall, and their main aim is to bring as much as possible into this fortified position and to let as little as possible out of it.²⁵

If the hoarding peasants are also more productive, active, and interested than the average, they not only adapt well to the demands of their work, but also they seek cultural stimulation in religion and in whatever few opportunities are offered them in the peasant world. The productive women raise children who can achieve independence and who are least alienated from their fathers. Even in fatherless families, highly productive women succeed in raising productive sons and daughters. The productive men by their responsibility and care live up to the patriarchal ideal and also participate actively in community affairs.

The least productive villagers have passive and receptive, rather than hoarding orientations. The high prevalence of the receptive orientation in the village (43 per cent are dominantly receptive), despite its maladaptive effects, may be a legacy of the hacienda.

²⁴ George Foster, *op. cit.*, see footnote 6. Foster will soon publish a more extensive analysis of "limited good" and its relationship to the attitudes and behavior of peasants.

²⁵ See Erich Fromm, *Man for Himself* (New York: Rinehart, 1947), p. 65.

²³ See M. Maccoby, "Love and Authority: A Study of Mexican Villagers," *The Atlantic*, 213:3 (1964), pp. 121-126.

The experience of being free farmers, *ejidatarios*, was denied to the fathers of many peasants. In the hacienda, receptive traits, including dependence, the need to beg submissively for one's wages, were favored and rewarded, just as they were among Negro slaves in the United States. But the free peasant with a receptive-permissive character plants crops that require little attention and produce little reward, is overly dependent on middlemen who cheat him, consumes his profits, and, in general, adapts badly to his economic reality. There is some evidence, from Foster's study of Tzintzuntun and other accounts of villages which escaped the control of haciendas, that the receptive character is correspondingly less prevalent, but this hypothesis demands more systematic investigation.

Our study has also shown that social behavior cannot be explained by character alone and that factors influencing character exist in the socioeconomic reality of the present as well as in Mexican history. Knowledge of the alcoholic's receptive character and his *machismo* does not alone explain his drinking. Many men with these traits do not become alcoholics unless they marry destructive women who ridicule them or unless their form of work feeds their passivity.²⁶

The extreme dependence on the mother also is influenced by economic and social variables. Where the father achieves economic success, he can hold up his head in the family and become a model for his children. When he is a failure as a wage earner, children reject him and remain tied to the mother.

Dependence on the mother is also favored by the lack of trust within a

society's social and political institutions. When individuals feel that authority is irrational, that they cannot expect fair treatment from the police, the courts, and from administrators, the image of the mother is strengthened as the one person who loves unconditionally, who will never betray, and who will always provide protection. The mother stands for the safe haven of the home and, regressively, of the womb. The father stands for the society, for contract and structured authority. The father's ability to adapt successfully to the society is a powerful lesson for his children. If he fails, they reject not only him, but also their faith in rational authority, in law and contract.

Economic success itself is a function not only of character but also of opportunity. The landless peasant who arrived on the scene too late to receive an *ejido* remains, on the average, poorer than the *ejidatarios*, of whatever character traits. In the city, Doctor Dávila has observed an increasing dominance in the family of the mother, due to the fact that in a rapidly industrializing society, women from the countryside often have more opportunity for work in service, in light industry, and the like than do peasant men, who lack training for the industrial world. The male whose pride rests on his patriarchal role finds himself dependent on his wife, with the resulting disintegration of the family which so many Mexican writers blame on Conquest and Revolution.²⁷

The Mexican attitude toward authority also warrants more than a simple historical explanation. Traditionally,

²⁷ This same pattern occurs in other societies characterized by an emigration from small farms to the city, and is described as common among American Negroes and Arkansas sharecroppers moving to St. Louis, by Michael Harrington, *The Other America* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1963).

peasant society is structured in terms of respect and obedience to parents by children, male superiority, and a general status hierarchy. But such traditionalism does not imply authoritarianism in the deepest sense of contempt for the weak and the worship of power,²⁸ traits which characterize no more than 30 per cent of the village we studied. If the society were to change, if the Mexican could begin to trust government officials and the law, the character structure of many would support more democratic attitudes.

The range of motives in the Mexican must be charted in order to understand the Mexican national character. In Mexico, many men and women have the character structure which allows them to adapt harmoniously to a peasant so-

ciety. It is not yet possible to speak with precision about the urban population that must adapt to rapid industrialization.²⁹ The forces most crucial in causing maladaptive character and failure to achieve ideals and potential spring from the conflict between the sexes, historically rooted but fed by present-day economic trends, and the pockets of exploitation which remain despite the Revolution's destruction of the haciendas and the semifeudal society that crumbled less than sixty years ago.

²⁹ The investigation by Joseph A. Kahl of values in industrial workers in Mexico as compared with people from small towns suggests that industrialization is beginning to work changes in the Mexican, but it remains to be determined whether changes to more "modern values" reflect deep-rooted character change. I am grateful to Professor Kahl for showing me his study, "The Measurement of Modernism: A Study of Values in Brazil and Mexico, 1966," in manuscript.

²⁸ For a fuller description of the Authoritarian Character, see Erich Fromm, *Escape from Freedom* (New York: Rinehart, 1941).

²⁶ See M. Maccoby, "El Alcoholismo en una Comunidad Campesina," *Revista de Psicoanálisis, Psiquiatría y Psicología*, 1:1 (1965), pp. 38-65.