

SANTIAGO VIDAURRI, NORTHERN MEXICO, AND REGIONAL IDENTITIES, 1855-1864

Brian Hamnett¹

The conflicts surrounding Vidaurri, political boss of Nuevo León and Coahuila during the Reform era, involved three crucial issues for nineteenth-century México. These were geopolitical, constitutional, and cultural. Geopolitics involved the two prevailing questions of control of territory and resources within the Republic, on the one hand, and continued pressure by the United States for further territorial cessions and transit rights across Mexico, on the other hand. Both questions impinged upon a further issue, the supposed separation of the northern tier of states in the post-1846 era to form a *República del Rio Grande* or *República de la Sierra Madre*. Many commentators believed or were prepared to argue that Vidaurri had separatist objectives, perhaps in league with the United States. No proof, however, has emerged to date. In that particular issue, regionalism, separatism and annexation to the United States converged, at least until the latter power itself disintegrated in 1860-61. The constitutional issue concerned the distribution of power within

85

¹ Universidad de Essex. Colchester, Gran Bretaña. Correo electrónico: hamnb@essex.ac.uk



the Republic, irrespective of whether it had a federal or a centralist system. This constitutional question had an underlying fiscal dimension, since the states within the federal system vied with the federal government for tax receipts. It also involved the unresolved issue of who controlled the National Guard established under the Law of 11 September 1846 -the federal government or the state governors. The latter regarded it as their instrument of defence against the incursions of central power. The cultural issue refers specifically to political culture. Essentially this reflected the relationship in post-Independence Mexico between aspirations to constitutional legality and the recurrence of armed, private power, known as *caciquismo*. The remote and relatively primitive north-east of México had already experienced the rule of Brigadier Joaquín de Arredondo, Comandante General de las Provincias Internas Orientales between 1813 and 1821 during the time of the Wars of Independence. Arredondo's *cacicazgo*, based in Monterrey, provided the antecedent for Vidaurri's rule in the next generation and for the supremacy of Jerónimo Treviño between 1867 and 1884, and finally of General Bernardo Reyes from 1885 to 1909.

86

Geo-Politics: Internal Power and External Pressure

The issue of effective control of territory had not been resolved during either the First Federal Republic (1824-36) or the Centralist Republic (1836-46). Defeat and territorial dismemberment in the War with the United States (1846-48) made this problem even worse. In some respects, both the creation of the National Guard in 1846, which was placed under the authority of the federal government, and attempts by the last regime of General Antonio López de Santa Anna (1853-55) to recreate the national army were responses to this problem from different areas of the political spectrum. The affirmation of national sovereignty in the Constitutions of 1824 and 1857 inevitably implied the definition of territoriality. The loss of the entire far north between 1836 and 1853 severely damaged the territorial claims

implicit in the national sovereignty delineated in 1824. In that sense, the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848 looked a redefinition of México's territorial extent and the balance of the powers constitutionally established within this Republic.

The idea that the northern Mexican states might separate from the Mexican Republic and reconstitute themselves as a separate sovereign entity had its origins with the Texas secession of 1835-36. The underlying issue involved the relationship of such an entity to the United States and to the far-northern territories lost by Mexico in 1846-48.² To take one example, a newspaper appeared in Matamoros on 1 June 1846, following the US occupation of this Mexican town on the south-bank of the Río Bravo. It appealed to northern Mexicans to join together in the establishment of a 'Republic of the Río Grande' consisting of the Departments of Tamaulipas, Nuevo León, Coahuila, Chihuahua, New Mexico, and Durango. This new entity would become a US protectorate. The article, appealing for support for Texas's struggle against centralism, offered North-Mexicans a choice between sinking back into the anarchy of central Mexico or leaping forward fifty years. The British Minister in México, wary of further US expansion, was sufficiently alarmed to warn his government that such a proposal might be the thin end of the wedge. Yet, he recognised the strength of regionalist sentiment in the north: "It is perfectly well-known that many persons in Chihuahua and the neighbouring Departments are prepared to submit to the protection of the United States, for they recognise in their present government nothing but tyranny and neglect; they are subjected to the most capricious and corrupt execution of the laws; the taxes are levied upon them in the most unfair and unequal manner; and when they demand protection from intestine convulsions or inroads of the wild Indians, they find the government

² See: Josefina Zoraida Vázquez, *México y el mundo. Historia de sus Relaciones Exteriores*, 2 tomos, México, Senado de la República, 1990, T. 1, pp. 118-162; Josefina Z. Vázquez, *La supuesta República del Río Grande*, Ciudad Victoria, Universidad Autónoma de Tamaulipas, 1995; Manuel Ceballos Ramírez, "La República del Río Grande. Historiografía y utilización de la Historia", in Luis Jáuregui and José Antonio Serrano Ortega (coords.), *Historia y Nación. Actas del Congreso en homenaje a Josefina Zoraida Vázquez. Tomo II, Política y diplomacia en el siglo XIX mexicano*, México, El Colegio de México, 1998, pp. 443-455.

utterly powerless and unable to take the most ordinary measures of safety and precaution". The Minister warned that advancing US forces were preparing the northern provinces for a declaration of independence from México.³

Continued US pressure for further territorial cessions and for the grant of transit rights across Mexican territory raised the question of Mexican sovereignty. This pressure continued right from the first negotiations for the treaty in 1847 to the rejection of the proposed McLane-Ocampo Treaty of December 1859 by the US Senate in the following year.⁴ Nevertheless, the policy of the United States towards Mexico became deeply influenced by the deterioration of relations within that country between the fifteen northern "free" states and the fifteen southern "slave" states. The annexation of Texas in 1845 reflected as much the southern desire to boost its representation in Washington as southern expansionist tendencies south-westwards resulting from a consciousness of relative economic backwardness.

Although the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo had omitted mention of US transit rights across México, the La Mesilla Treaty of December 1853, which provided for the Gadsden Purchase, included two routes in article VIII, the first from two points in the north to the Pacific coast and the second across the Isthmus of Tehuantepec. This Treaty did not imply any Mexican renunciation of sovereign rights, but they were poorly defined. Nevertheless, the US Government failed to secure Baja California and parts of Nuevo León and Tamaulipas, and finally recalled Gadsden in 1856 after failure to secure subsequent changes in the border. In July 1857, his successor, John Forsyth failed to secure the Tehuantepec transit and the cession of

³ Public Record Office, *Foreign Office*, 50/197, ff. 284-87, no. 89, "Charles Bankhead to Earl of Aberdeen (Foreign Secretary)", Mexico City, 29 June 1846; enclosed, *República del Río Grande y Amiga de los Pueblos*, Tomo 1, no. 1, Matamoros, 1 June 1846. The newspaper emphasised that the Río Bravo, which ran through a fertile valley, could in no way be described as a natural frontier; ff. 335-40 obv, "Bankhead to Aberdeen", Mexico, 29 August 1846.

⁴ See: Angela Moyano Pahissa, *México y Estados Unidos: Orígenes de una relación, 1819-1861*, México, Diamante, 1987, pp. 264-74; Alejandro Sobarzo, *Deber y conciencia. Nicolas Trist, el negociador norteamericano en la Guerra del 47*, México, Fondo de Cultura Económica, segunda edición, 1996, pp. 243-303; Jorge L. Tamayo, "El Tratado McLane-Ocampo", *Historia Mexicana*,

Baja California, almost all of Sonora and a segment of Chihuahua. This led the Buchanan administration to concentrate thereafter on the northern transit rights, though equally unsuccessfully. The Comonfort administration of October 1855 to January 1858 remained determined to uphold the principle contained in the Plan of Ayutla of 1854 that, after the La Mesilla Treaty there should be no further territorial cessions.⁵

A factor frequently overlooked in the literature has been the extent to which repeated action by unconquered native-American 'nations', the so-called *indios bárbaros*, impeded Spanish and Mexican control of the north. Virtually all northern governors complained that central government did not understand the gravity of this question and failed to provide resources for them to deal with it. Vidaurri, for instance, frequently protested that he needed to retain federal revenues in the north-east, in order to hold back Indian raids.⁶ During the 1840s and 1850s, decades of incessant internal conflict within México, these raids became worse and penetrated deeper. In 1843-45, the raiding parties which had attacked in New Mexico and Texas crossed into Chihuahua and Coahuila, reaching into Durango and Zacatecas. Later in the decades, Indians raided towards the environs of Monterrey, and in 1850 Lipan and Mescalero Apaches and Comanche bands attacked Coahuila and cut off communications between Chihuahua and the north-centre states. In 1852, they ravaged Zacatecas from Sombrerete in the north-west to Fresnillo and Jerez, and then as far south as Teúl and Colotlán.⁷

89

⁵ Jorge L. Tamayo (comp.), *Benito Juárez. Documentos, discursos y correspondencia*, 15 tomos, México, Secretaría del Patrimonio Nacional, 1964-72, tomo III, pp. 361-63: "Lewis Cass (Secretario de Estado) a John Forsyth", Washington, 17 de julio de 1857 y pp. 387-88: "Sebastián Lerdo de Tejada (Ministro de Relaciones Exteriores) a Forsyth", México, 12 de septiembre de 1857; Gerardo Gurza Lavalle, *La gestión diplomática de John Forsyth, 1856-1858. Las repercusiones de la crisis regional estadounidense en la política exterior hacia México*, México, Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores, 1997, pp. 45-74; Moyano Pahissa, *México y Estados Unidos*, pp. 270-74.

⁶ Mario Cerutti, *Economía de guerra y poder regional en el siglo XIX*, Monterrey, Archivo del Estado de Nuevo León, 1983, pp. 32-34.

⁷ Archivo General de la Nación, (México, DF; AGN en adelante), *Gobernación*, s/s, C265, exps. 8 and 3: "Los gobiernos de Zacatecas y Coahuila sobre invasión de los bárbaros en sus departamentos", 1843; AGN, *Gobernación*, s/s C283, exp. 8 (1): "Comunicaciones con los departamentos invadidos por los bárbaros", (1845). See also: J. Enriquez Terrazas, *Breve historia de Coahuila*, México, El Colegio de México, Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1996, pp. 164-165.

A wave of larger raids in the autumn of 1857 carried off livestock across the northern states. Between 1848 and 1870, Comanche bands attacks at least twenty-four *municipios* of Nuevo León several times. In 1861, for instance, Indians crossed over from Texas, where they had inflicted serious damage, and the Texas volunteers blamed México for harbouring them. The outbreak of the Civil War north of the Bravo led to the removal of US forces, which, in turn, further exposed Nuevo León to raids from the Lipanes and Mescaleros. When a large Comanche band invaded the state in October 1861, Vidaurri warned Juárez that he needed every revenue he could lay hands on.⁸

The Constitutional Issue - The Fiscal Dimension

90 The First Federal Republic never resolved the issue of the relative distribution of the country's tax resources between the states and the federal government. This fiscal question had a social dimension since the provincial elites remained determined to retain as much effective control as they could over the resources generated within their areas. They intended to prevent the construction of a strong, national government, which could overawe them. They saw in federal institutions their principal line of defence against what they regarded as fiscal oppression from the centre.⁹ Santa Anna in 1835 used the national army to break the militia of northern Mexico's richest state, Zacatecas, a bastion of federalism. His aim was to

⁸ Archivo Histórico de la Secretaría de la Defensa Nacional (México, DF, AHSDN en adelante), Exp. XI/481.3/8343, ff. 1-2: "Vidaurri to Minister of War", no. 7, Monterrey, 24 March 1861; Santiago Roel (ed.), *Correspondencia particular de D. Santiago Vidaurri, Gobernador de Nuevo León (1855-1864): tomo 1, Juárez-Vidaurri*, Monterrey, CCCL Aniversario de su Fundación, 1946, pp. 73-74: "Vidaurri to Juárez", Monterrey, 4 July 1861 y "Vidaurri to Juárez", Monterrey, 31 October 1861; Francois-Xavier Guerra, *Le Mexique. De l'Ancien Regime a la Revolution*, 2 vols, Paris, L'Harmattan, 1985, I, pp. 193-194; Israel Cavazos Garza, *Breve historia de Nuevo León*, México, El Colegio de México, Fondo de Cultura Económica, segunda edición, 1996, pp. 132-37.

⁹ Barbara Tenenbaum, *México en la época de los agiotistas, 1821-1857*, México, Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1986; José Antonio Serrano y Luis Jáuregui (eds.), *Hacienda y Política. Las finanzas públicas y los grupos de poder en la Primera República Federal Mexicana*, Zamora y México, El Colegio de Michoacán, Instituto Mora, 1999.

incorporate the revenues of that state into the national treasury.¹⁰ However, the Centralist regime's attempts to impose direct taxation principally after 1842 ended in failure, rebellion, and national disintegration. National governments, irrespective of ideology or form remained beset by large internal and external debts and unable to secure sufficient annual revenues to meet expenditure.¹¹

The restoration of federalism first in 1846 and then again in 1855 provided the opportunity for state governors to control those revenues originating from within their territories as they saw fit. The federal government sought to encourage acceptance of the principle that customs revenues pertained only to itself, while at the same time recognising the impossibility of enforcing this. The Comonfort administration, encountering internal opposition to Reform policies and attempting at the same time to service the external debt, could do little to coerce state governments. However, the promulgation of the Constitution of 1857 and the issue of the Reform Laws of July 1859 and after encouraged the Juárez administration to attempt a clear redefinition of the fiscal relationship between the federal government and the states. Juárez's Manifesto to the Nation, issued on 7 July 1859, revealed the thinking of Finance Minister, Miguel Lerdo de Tejada, on this prickly subject. The Liberal administration took its stand on the principle of defence of the federal Constitution of 1857 during the Civil War of Reform (1858-61). Nevertheless, the government placed the fiscal rights and requirements of the federal government above those of the states. This included revenues from properties transferred to the Nation, that is the Federation, under the Nationalisation of Ecclesiastical Property.¹²

91

¹⁰ See: Josefina Zoraida Vázquez, "La crisis y los partidos políticos, 1835-1846", in Antonio Annino, *et. al.* (eds.), *América Latina: Dallo Stato Coloniale allo Stato Nazione*, 2 vols., Milan, Franco Angeli, 1987, vol. 2, pp. 557-72.

¹¹ Barbara Tenebaum, "El poder de las finanzas y las finanzas del poder en México durante el siglo XIX, *Siglo XIX*, Año III, número 5, enero-junio de 1988, pp. 197-221.

¹² Marcello Carmagnani, *Estado y mercado. La economía pública del liberalismo mexicano, 1850-1911*, México, Fondo de Cultura Económica, El Colegio de México, 1994, pp. 62-66.1

The federal government made a clear separation between revenues due to the states and those due to the federation. Indirect taxes, namely customs revenues, the prime source of national government revenue, would pertain strictly to the federation. The underlying rationale was that only the latter had the responsibility of paying the obligations incurred by the nation, such as the servicing of the debt. These principles included the requirement that state governments finance themselves without expecting the federation to do so.¹³

This demarcation reappeared in Juárez's controversial Manifesto of 18 July 1861, which is held responsible for the Tripartite Intervention of 1861-62. The long-term context was that a considerable proportion of government revenues from indirect taxation had been set aside for the servicing of the external debt. The essential aim of this decree, rarely read in the original, was to claw back as much of these revenues as still lay until the control of state governors. The most notorious case was Vidaurri, who by 1861 controlled the customs revenues of the Río Bravo towns from Piedras Negras to Matamoros, maintaining he need them for the organisation of defence against the *indios bárbaros*. The federal government had conceded this before the Tripartite Intervention. Vidaurri regarded changed federal policies towards these revenues as a violation of his position.¹⁴

The Juárez decree looked forward to a far-reaching reform of the structure of public revenues. Until that time, the government laid down several basic principles: "desde la fecha de esta ley, el gobierno de la Unión percibirá todo el producto líquido de las rentas federales, deduciéndose tan sólo los gastos de administración de las oficinas recaudadoras, y quedando suspendidos por un término de dos años todos los pagos, incluso el de las asignaciones

¹³ Carmagnani, *Estado y mercado*, pp. 62-66.

¹⁴ Cavazos Garza, *Breve historia*, p. 152: "La nueva situación internacional requería de estos ingresos que Vidaurri se empeñaba en seguir controlando. Por lo demás, era manifiesto en él un marcado caciquismo, que no toleraba intromisión federal en su pequeño feudo". Vidaurri's 'feudo', however, was not so small, and he continually had ambitions to expand it further.

destinadas para la deuda contraída en Londres y para las convenciones extranjeras...". It went on to say, "...las aduanas marítimas y demás oficinas recaudadoras de las rentas federales enterarán todos sus productos líquidos en la Tesorería General, sujetándose exclusivamente a las órdenes del Ministerio de Hacienda". Viewed from this perspective, the decree of 1861 formed another aspect of the fiscal policy which the Juárez government had been attempting to put into practice since 1859. Article 15 explicitly terminated "todas las facultades y toda la intervención de los gobernadores y de cualesquiera otros funcionarios de los estados en las aduanas marítimas y demás rentas federales. Cualesquiera invasión en las atribuciones que la Constitución y las leyes cometen al gobierno de la Unión en la administración y distribución de sus rentas será considerada como causa grave de responsabilidad".¹⁵

These declarations were designed in the long run to challenge the appropriation of federal revenues by the states. They threatened, thereby, to undermine the independent political stance of such figures as Vidaurri in the north-east. When the Juárez government, in retreat from the French Intervention, arrived in Saltillo, the Coahuila capital, in January 1864, the President ordered Vidaurri to place customs revenues and all others pertaining to the federation at the disposition of the Ministry of Finance. The latter, however, refused on the grounds that they were needed for urgent expenditures within his own territory.¹⁶

¹⁵ Manuel Dublán y José María Lozano, *Legislación mexicana. Colección completa de las disposiciones legislativas expedidas desde la independencia de la república*, tomo XI, México, Imprenta del Comercio, Dublán y Chavez, 1878, no. 5398, pp. 243-245, Ley del Congreso: Arreglo de la Hacienda Pública, Palacio Nacional, Mexico, 17 de julio de 1861.

¹⁶ Roel, *Correspondencia particular*, p. xiii. This refusal, combined with previous opposition, precipitated the final breach between Juárez and Vidaurri, and led directly to the former's decision to break the latter's power once and for all. With the support of the remnants of the Liberal army under the command of Manuel Doblado, Juárez established the national capital in Monterrey itself from 3 April until 15 August 1864.

The *Cacicazgo*: regionalism, separatism or annexationism?

Was Vidaurri the Rosas of north-east México? If so, where is nineteenth-century México's Sarmiento to provide the condemnation of private power while revealing an admiration for the primitive way of life? Like Rosas, Vidaurri had a phalanx of henchmen and proteges around him and exercised his power through them. Their names form a striking list of mid-century México's military figures: Mariano Escobedo, Ignacio Zaragoza, Jerónimo Treviño, José Silvestre Aramberri, Juan Zuazua, Francisco de Naranjo. Most of these proteges abandoned him in 1859, when defence of his own position in the north-east was revealed as Vidaurri's strategic priority in the Civil War of Reform. Colonel Julián Quiroga, a notorious and ambiguous lesser *cacique*, however, still remained with Vidaurri. If one adds Evaristo Madero, resident at that time near Piedras Negras, to the list of allies and beneficiaries, and the body of Monterrey merchants who sustained his authority, then a broad picture emerges of a regional *cacicazgo* with political, military and economic dimensions. Appropriation of federal revenues along with those of the two states of Nuevo León and Coahuila, control of the circulation and export of money and precious metals, the ability to raise cash loans from the merchants, and close relations with the commercial houses of Monterrey enabled Vidaurri's survival in power. The flourishing cross-border trade through Laredo and Piedras Negras and in the port of Matamoros after the outbreak of the American Civil War in 1861 further nourished these sinews of power.¹⁷

All of the fighting men surrounding Vidaurri had gained their first experience of warfare in the struggle against the *indios bárbaros* across the north-east. Zuazua was chief of volunteer forces against the Indians, and, like Escobedo, fought in the War with the United States and in the bitterly contested defence of Monterrey on 20-24 September 1846.¹⁸ By a remarkable turn of events, their subsequent

¹⁷ Cerutti, *Economía de guerra*, pp. 136-139, 147-149, 159-160, 170.

¹⁸ See: Miguel A. González Quiroga, "Nuevo León ocupado: el gobierno de Nuevo León durante la Guerra entre México y Estados Unidos", in Josefina Z. Vázquez (coord.), *México al tiempo de su guerra con Estados Unidos (1846-1848)*, México, Fondo de Cultura Económica,

Conservative opponent, General Tomás Mejía also gained early experience in the wars against the frontier Indians, since suspicious local commanders wanted to remove him from his home base in the sierra of Querétaro during the early 1840s. Mejía also fought in the defence of Monterrey against the invading forces.

Vidaurri was born in 1808 in the presidio of Lampazos, out on the exposed and dusty plains of north-west Nuevo León. Today this town is known not as Lampazos de Vidaurri but Lampazos de Naranjo, after the protegee who, as a *juarista*, helped to destroy Vidaurri's power in 1864. The future *cacique's* parents appear to have come from Coahuila. It was said that he was the illegitimate son of "Pedro el Negro", a prisoner in the Presidio of Santa Rosa, and a Taracahuense Indian woman. This story also says that he became a stone-mason. However, in 1837, we find him as an *oficial mayor* in Monterrey in the administration of the Department Governor, Joaquín García. Under federalism, he rose to become secretary to various state governors, and secretary again in 1854-55 under centralism. During the Revolution of Ayutla, he established contact with the Liberal-exiles' Brownsville Junta in 1855. Together with his close associate, Zuazua (1812-60), also from Lampazos, Vidaurri launched the revolution against the Santa Anna regime in Nuevo León.¹⁹

95

The revolutionaries took Monterrey on 23 May 1855, where they counted on substantial popular support. The Plan of Monterrey reclaimed the state sovereignty of Nuevo León, abolished by Santa Anna in 1853, until a Constituent Assembly in the national capital should establish a legitimate political structure. Vidaurri argued that no legitimate constitutional authority existed in the Republic at that time. The revolutionaries then proceeded to organise a National Guard as the basis for an "Army of the North". In this way, Vidaurri laid the basis for his political power.²⁰

segunda edicion, 1998, pp. 333-359.

¹⁹ AHSDN, Exp. XI/481.3/5211, ff. 41-41v: "Gen. Gerónimo Cardona to Minister of War", no. 67, Monterrey, 15 April 1855; Roel, *Correspondencia particular*, p. vii; Cavazos Garza, *Breve historia*, pp. 138-147, 151, 153.

²⁰ AHSDN, Exp. XI/481.3/5208, ff. 8: Vidaurri "Circular", Monterrey, 23 May 1855.

The French Consul in Tampico, in a retrospective analysis of these events, considered that they represented a new political departure: "indica una nueva evolución, una transformación radical de la opinión pública en los estados de Coahuila, Nuevo León y Tamaulipas. Es la protesta manifiesta de la provincia libre contra los abusos de la centralización ciega que no ha logrado echar raíces en el corazón de este país...Se quiere que los empleos se reserven exclusivamente para los ciudadanos de cada estado, y sobre todo lo que las mociones administrativas ya no salgan de la capital de la república. Es esta voluntad bien decidida, o más bien, este grito de cólera de los habitantes de dichos estados lo que hace la fortuna de Vidaurri". He was correct to stress regional resentment of the abolition of state institutions and centralising attempts from the national capital. None of that, however, was exactly new, though admittedly the north-central states, such as Zacatecas and Jalisco, had been the focus of opposition during the 1820s and 1830s, rather than the border tier. The newness in the mid-1850s perhaps lay in the availability of a clear leadership. However, the ambiguity of Vidaurri's stance between regionalism, separatism or annexationism remained impenetrable. The Consul specifically drew attention to what he saw as Vidaurri's cautious tactics: "Para alcanzar sus fines con mayor seguridad, marcha con lentitud y mesura para así no comprometer su popularidad y para no echarse antes de tiempo enemigos peligrosos".²¹

Vidaurri took Saltillo on 22 July. Existing evidence does not suggest that the arrival of forces from Monterrey was at all welcomed in Saltillo. On the contrary, the out-going *santanista* commander described the Coahuilans as loyal Mexicans but denounced the *regiomontanos* as disloyal. In his view, they looked to secession from the Mexican Republic or even annexation to the United States. With respect to opinion in Coahuila, he maintained that "todos están convencidos hasta lo infinito que las miras de los rebeldes, sus principales tendencias y su único plan es el de llevar adelante la antigua

²¹ Lilia Díaz, *Versión francesa de México. Informes diplomáticos*, 5 volúmenes, México, El Colegio de México, 1963-67, vol. I (1853-58), pp. 222-223: "D' Aubroy to Secretary of Foreign Affairs (Paris)", Tampico, 8 November 1855.

idea de hacer la independencia de estos Departamentos con el nombre de 'República de la Sierra Madre', para después anexarla a nuestros ambiciosos vecinos de los Estados Unidos...cuya traición no contribuirán por cierto los coahuilenses, que aunque agobiados de grandes males y necesidades, son mexicanos antes que todo".²²

Vidaurri has no intention of relinquishing control of Coahuila, still less of the revenues of Piedras Negras, even though this was another state with identical sovereign rights to those of Nuevo León, once he had consolidated his position there. Except in so far as the province of Coahuila-Texas had formed part of the late colonial Provincias Internas Orientales, it had never before or after been subordinate to Monterrey. In that respect, Vidaurri's action violated not only Mexican constitutional precedent but also historical tradition.

His objectives in the north-east became the subject of intense speculation in Mexico City. The French Minister, Count Alexis de Gabriac, for instance, was alarmed that the rumoured secessionism there could damage México's capacity to act as the desired buffer to further US expansion. At that time, this was an axiom of Napoleon III's American policy. Gabriac feared that Vidaurri intended to establish "an independent federation" composed of Coahuila, Nuevo León and Tamaulipas, called the 'Republic of the Sierra Madre'. He saw US financial interests behind "Vidaurri's project". He commented: "Este sería el fin de México". Closer at hand, the French Consul in Tampico warned that: "Vidaurri es hoy el amo en Coahuila y Nuevo León. Concentra en su mano todopoderosa la actividad y los recursos de esos dos estados...y emplea alternativamente intrigas y amenazas para atraer a su causa a Matamoros y Tampico, únicas ciudades del estado de Tamaulipas que hasta ahora se ha mantenido fuera de su influencia". In the following year, Gabriac went as far as to suggest that the "desmembramiento" of México might

²² AHSDN, Exp. XI/3/5210, ff. 6-7v: "Valentín Cruz to Minister of War", no. 1, Saltillo, 9 May 1855; AHSDN, Exp. XI/481.3/5211, ff. 75-78: "Mariano Morett (ex-comandante general de Nuevo Leon) to minister of War", no.1, Saltillo, 31 May 1855; AHSDN, Exp. XI/481.3/5209: "Cruz to War", Hacienda de la Encarnación, 29 May 1855.

extend, with US support, to Sonora and Baja California in the west and to Matamoros in the east.²³

The suspicion prevailing in the national capital appeared to be confirmed when on 19 February 1856 Vidaurri decreed the annexation of Coahuila to Nuevo León.²⁴ The Comonfort administration viewed this action as an outrage, but it was powerless to reverse it. Vidaurri acted in the north-east against the background of the deepening crisis in Puebla, in which the national government became embroiled after December 1855. Opposition to the *Ley Juárez* (November 1855) in Puebla and the pro-clerical Rebellion of Zacapoaxtla were followed by the seizure of the state capital by Conservative leaders on 23 January 1856. These events have generally been seen exclusively within the context of the Liberal administration's conflicts with the clerical opposition or within that of Puebla regional history. Accordingly, a wider, geopolitical dimension -the bearing these events had on the rest of the Republic- has been lost. Comonfort's decision to concentrate a large federal army on the repression of Puebla dissidents meant that the government was in no position to curb Vidaurri in the north-east. It could be argued that Vidaurri presented an even more serious problem than Puebla.

The national government condemned Vidaurri's annexation and severely reprimanded his insubordination on 5 June 1856. The letter sent to him was in strong terms: "el estado de inobediencia en que se halla VE para con el Superior Gobierno de la Nación, y que se confirma por el lenguaje irrespectivo que usa en sus comunicaciones oficiales y las negativas que ellas contienen, no da lugar a proporcionar a VE recursos que sin duda serían contrarios a la causa nacional y al orden que está resuelto el Señor Presidente a sostener a todo trance".²⁵ At the same time, agents of the national government

²³ Díaz, *Versión francesa de México*, I, pp. 193-196: "Gabriac to Secretary of Foreign Affairs (Paris)", México, 25 August 1855; pp. 244-245: "Gabriac to Secretary of Foreign Affairs", México, 31 December 1855; pp. 200-201: "De Ambroy to Secretary of Foreign Affairs", Tampico, 11 September 1855; pp. 316-318: "Gabriac to Secretary of Foreign Affairs", México, 25 August 1856.

²⁴ Roel, *Correspondencia particular*, p. ix.

²⁵ AHSDN, Exp. XI/481.3/6865, ff. 11-11v: "Soto to Vidaurri", México, 5 June 1856.

were reporting suspicious arms shipments across the Río Bravo under Zuazua's supervision for the government in Monterrey. They also reported the hostility of the Bravo towns, such as Camargo and Laredo, to Vidaurri's perceived activities.²⁶

Vidaurri had also been attempting to secure control of the state of Tamaulipas. The national government, however, had authorised Governor Juan José de la Garza, in cooperation with forces from San Luis Potosí, to invade Nuevo León and remove Vidaurri. Both governors failed in their purpose, although Vidaurri seized the Bravo port of Camargo, the highest point of navigation on the river, on 28 September 1856. The matter of the annexation of Coahuila was resolved by the compromise Treaty of Cuesta de los Montes on 18 November. Vidaurri formally recognised the Comonfort government and agreed to submit the annexation to a popular vote, which resulted in favour by 4,056 votes to 260. The National Constituent Assembly then ratified this by 60 votes to 20. Consequently, the Comonfort administration offered the Nuevo Leon-Coahuila government a monthly contribution of 8,000 pesos towards its struggles to fend off the incursions of the *indios bárbaros*.²⁷

Madero, who originated from Coahuila, was a strong supporter of the union of the two states and wrote to Vidaurri from Río Grande on 26 September 1855 and 26 July 1856 to say so. The second letter expressed a belief in the power of the union in face of outside opposition: "mientras permanezcamos tan unidos como hoy y sigamos recibiendo su más alta benevolencia, seremos invencibles... el amor que tenemos a la causa que se defiende, y las grandes simpatías hacia Usted como a Nuevo León en general nos hacen fuertes: el amor hace prodigios...sin temor a equivocarme podría jurar a Usted que a cuatrocientos hombres de esta frontera, bien equipados de todo, no serían bastantes 4,000 del interior para quitarles el coraje, dejándolos pelear a su modo...si, le aseguro a Usted que tanto yo

²⁶ AHSDN, Exp. XI/481.3/6865, ff. 1-2v: "Luis de la Rosa (Minister of External Affairs) to Minister of War", no. 1 reservada, México, 19 July 1856; ff. 3: "Minister of War to Governor of Tamaulipas Juan José de la Garza", México, 22 July 1856; ff. 4-5: "Rosa to War", reservada, México, 11 June 1856.

²⁷ Cerutti, *Economía de guerra*, pp. 32-34; Cavazos Garza, *Breve historia*, pp. 148-149.

como los habitantes de este pueblo estamos resueltos a sostener la unión de Coahuila y Nuevo León con nuestra existencia, lo mismo con nuestras libertades públicas, y a no dejarnos engañar más de todos los gobiernos tiranos, que no desean más que sacarnos el fruto de que somos susceptibles y gobernarlos como a manadas de salvajes".²⁸ Coahuila remained under Vidaurri's control until February 1864, when Juárez nullified the 1856 decree of annexation, restored the state's separate institutions, and placed Nuevo León under martial law.

100 While it is true that Juárez administered the final blow which finished off the *cacicazgo* of Vidaurri, the origins of his fall lay much earlier in September 1859. They arose from a double challenge to the *cacique's* position from within his own military command and from the state congress of Nuevo León-Coahuila. These conflicts have not been closely studied and the issues remain unclear. Documentation in the Mexican Defence Ministry Archive suggests that the leading commanders of the Northern Division -Zaragoza, Escobedo, Aramberri and Naranjo- broke with Vidaurri as a result of the latter's decision to pull northern troops out of the conflict with Conservative forces in San Luis Potosí, in order to protect his own base of power. The efficacy with which Miramón, Mejía, and Osollo checked the expansion of Vidaurri's power during the Civil War has also passed largely unnoticed, given the general historical focus on the Liberal cause. There is also the possibility that Vidaurri's commanders suspected that he might be intending to come to some arrangement with Miramón, in accordance with which northern forces would remain neutral thereafter, if the Conservatives refrained from advancing beyond San Luis. These events resulted in the state congress abandoning Monterrey and moving to the safety of Galeana, which was Escobedo's home town. The conflict between governor and congress weakened the *cacique's* position and undermined his claim of legitimacy. An examination of the strategic

²⁸ José Vasconcelos, *Evaristo Madero, Biografía de un patricio*, (coord. por Manuel Guerra de Luna, con introd. de Enrique Krauze), México, Litografía Turmex S.A., segunda edición, 1997, pp. 116-117.

issues in that sector during the War of Reform will show how this conflict came about.

The War of the Reform (1858-61)

The removal of Comonfort by Conservative military leaders in January 1858 provided state governors with the type of conflict they relished. Confronting a Conservative regime in the national capital, they repudiated the central government, reclaimed the sovereignty of their states, and organised for the defence of the Constitution of 1857 and the federal system.

Viewed from the north-eastern perspective, Monterrey and Saltillo controlled access southwards through the Sierra Madre Oriental into the inner tier of states, principally Zacatecas and San Luis Potosí. Given the strong base of Liberal support in Zacatecas, which dated from the federalist movement of 1823, the key strategic position was the state of San Luis Potosí. This state was vigorously contested by Conservative and Liberal forces. Two of the decisive battles of the era of Reform and Intervention were fought within this state -Aqualulco on 29 September 1859 and Matehuala on 17 May 1864. Both were Liberal defeats. During the War of Reform, Liberal forces were divided between units based in Zacatecas, or at times in Jalisco or the Bajío, and Vidaurri's forces in Nuevo León-Coahuila. For this reason, San Luis Potosí swiftly became not only a principal source of contention between Conservative and Liberal armies, but also between rival sections of the Liberal cause. Within the state -and more especially within the capital- the Conservative position was relatively strong but under constant challenge from the Liberals. Consequently, the city oscillated between both bands, in accordance with which army gained the ascendant in the region. Potosino leaders, irrespective of affiliation, strongly resented outside interference within their territory. Their principal bugbear was Vidaurri, since it was widely believed in San Luis Potosí that the cacique of Nuevo León-Coahuila intended to expand his power to include that state, and both local Conservatives and the Liberal

administration in Veracruz feared that his ulterior motive was separation from México and the creation of a greater northern state ruled from Monterrey. Vidaurri's designs were particularly objectionable in San Luis, since the Intendancy of San Luis Potosí had exercised jurisdiction in the late colonial period over a vast area of the north-east, which included Coahuila and Texas.

Vidaurri, in effect, made two attempts to establish control over San Luis Potosí -in March-September 1858 and January-May 1859. Miramon's victory at Salamanca in the western Bajío on 10 March opened the Conservative route into Jalisco, where the rival Juárez administration was based, but left San Luis vulnerable to Liberal attack from the north. Six days earlier, Vidaurri's forces under Martin Zayas and Zuazua, had already left Saltillo for the campaign against San Luis. The Conservative Governor, J.M. Alfaro, viewed this northern forces with disdain and appealed to General Luis Osollo, who was not far distant, for assistance: "para expeler de los límites del estado esas hordas de bandidos entre los cuales vienen considerable número de norteamericanos". He suspected Vidaurri's army of intending the annexation of the northern pueblos of San Luis Potosí to the state of Nuevo León. The Conservatives in San Luis Potosí took up without compunction the notion that Vidaurri was a secret separatist or even annexationist. Alfaro believed that Vidaurri had received the sum of 500,000 pesos from contrabandists north of the Bravo "con la condición de franquear hasta San Luis Potosí la introducción de mercancías. Y de todo esto resulta que no es una simple cuestión política la que vienen a sostener los soldados de Santiago Vidaurri, sino otra y muy vital para la república, la de la integridad de su territorio que juzgo altamente amenazada." At the same time, Alfaro expressed the general Conservative belief that the United States was "vecino y pérfido".²⁹

The Conservative commander in Zacatecas, where the Liberals still held on to the state capital, warned that Vidaurri had sent 400 rifles to relieve the city. His perception of events corroborated that of Alfaro. "De aquella ciudad me informa una persona fidedigna,

²⁹ AHSDN, Exp. XI/481.3/6835, ff. 3-4v: "Alfaro to Osollo", San Luis Potosí, 14 March 1858.

que es casi arreglado el infame proyecto de declarar o proclamar República de la Sierra Madre a los estados de Zacatecas, Nuevo León, Coahuila y Tamaulipas, de acuerdo por supuesto con los 'yankees'. No dudo ni un momento de tan atroz empresa, porque conozco a las personas que por desgracia intervienen en los negocios públicos. Los anexionistas se han quitado la careta de una manera terminante..." Alfaro endorsed those comments for the benefit of the Ministry of War.³⁰

The advance of a northern force of 2,000 men with six pieces of artillery towards the city of San Luis Potosí brought Miramón and Osollo in that direction with the object of dispersing them. Mejía's rapid advance from the Sierra Gorda across the Huasteca enabled the relief of Tampico on 12 May, which Liberal forces had besieged for forty-five days. Mejía's role in preventing the expansion of Vidaurri's power had generally been overlooked, as attention has focussed on conflicts within the Liberal camp, and, more specifically, between Vidaurri and Juárez. Effective action by Mejía, usually operating from his base area in the Sierra Gorda and across southern San Luis Potosí by way of Rio Verde, repeatedly outflanked Vidaurri's forces. Late in June the Conservative commander in San Luis reported the advance of 3,000 "facciosos de Nuevo León", accompanied by "chusma" along the way. On the same day, Governor Jose Othon, fearful of a military collapse in the city following Osollo's premature death, warned of the parallel advance of 3,500 men from Zacatecas. Finally, on 29 September, combined Conservative forces routed Vidaurri's army at Ahualulco, and terminated the first northern attempt to control San Luis.³¹

103

³⁰ AHSDN, Exp. XI/481.3/6835, ff. 9-10v: "Gen. Fernando A. Velasco to Francisco Gallegos (Aguascalientes)", Villanueva, 2 April 1858; ff. 7-7v, no. 23: "Alfaro to War", San Luis Potosí, 4 April 1858.

³¹ AHSDN, Exp. XI/481.3/6835, f. 11: "Alfaro to Minister of War", no. 23, San Luis Potosí, 6 April 1858; ff. 12-12v: "Alfaro al Ministro de Guerra y Marina", no. 27, San Luis Potosí, 17 de abril de 1858; 13-13v: "Ministro de Guerra y Marina a Miramón", México, 12 April 1858; ff. 15: "Othón al Ministro de Guerra y Marina", reservada, San Luis Potosí, 18 de junio de 1858; f. 16: "Gen. Joaquín Solórzano al Ministro de Guerra y Marina", San Luis Potosí, 24 de junio de 1858; ff. 17-17v: "Othón al Ministro de Guerra y Marina", San Luis Potosí, 24 de junio de

The second battle for San Luis Potosí opened in January 1859, when Vidaurri and De la Garza formed a joint plan of operations for the defence of the states of Nuevo León-Coahuila and Tamaulipas. Their immediate objective was control of the city of San Luis. The intention was to form a force of up to 6,000 men, with the expectation of cooperation from the National Guards of San Luis Potosí, Zacatecas, Durango and Chihuahua. In theory, this force would operate in coordination with the Supreme Commander of the Liberal Army, Santos Degollado, appointed on 7 April 1858. Such a statement, however, implied in reality no subordination to Degollado's central command. Once again, the perennial problem hinged on resources. Both state governors formally requested the federal government to allocate the necessary funds from the Customs Houses of Tampico and the Río Bravo towns. This formality, however, did not conceal the fact that such funds were already being used for state purposes. Since Vidaurri's army was the principal force left in the field, the Juárez administration in Veracruz had no option but to appoint him commander of the Nuevo León and San Luis Potosí forces. Vidaurri appointed Zaragoza Colonel-in-chief of the Vanguard Division of the 'Army of the North'. The first victory was the fall of Aguascalientes to Zaragoza, operating in conjunction with Quiroga, early in February. He urged the importance of pressing on to San Luis as the prelude for the final elimination of the Conservative regime, now that Miramón was preoccupied with the siege of Veracruz. Zaragoza's forces consisted of 3,000 men and nine artillery pieces.³²

The Conservative response was the appointment of Mejía, already outflanking Vidaurri's forces from his position in the Bajío, to the command of a newly constituted *División del Centro* on 4 June.

³² AHSDN, Exp. XI/481.3/6239, ff. 1-3: "Copia del plan de operaciones formulado por Juan José de la Garza y Santiago Vidaurri para la defensa de los estados de Nuevo León, Coahuila y Tamaulipas", 2 de enero de 1859; f. 7: "Melchor Ocampo a Vidaurri", Veracruz, 31 de enero de 1859; AHSDN, Exp. XI/481.3/6905, ff. 8-9: "Zaragoza a Vidaurri", Aguascalientes, 16 de febrero de 1859, (copia, Monterrey, 21 de febrero de 1859); ff. 5-6: "Zaragoza a Vidaurri", Aguascalientes, 16 de febrero de 1859.

³³ AHSDN, Exp. XI/481.3/7443, ff. 31-31v: "Mejía al ministro de Guerra y Marina", Querétaro, 9 de junio de 1859.

Mejía's actions clearly pointed to a second failure by Vidaurri to secure control over the state of San Luis Potosí.³³

Facing the prospect of another rout on the scale of Ahualulco and the consequent collapse of his position in the north-east, Vidaurri took the controversial decision to order the withdrawal of his forces from the San Luis theatre and their reconcentration within the home territory. His decree of 5 September 1859 to that effect precipitated a crisis within the command. Zaragoza, Escobedo, Aramberri, and Naranjo broke definitively with Vidaurri and thereafter cooperated with the Veracruz administration's efforts to bring him down. Only Zuazua and Quiroga still supported him. The Juárez administration argued that the *Division del Norte* formed part of the general Liberal army and as such fell under its own authority - especially since it was being funded from the *rentas generales*. Santos Degollado denounced this decree as more detrimental to the constitutionalist cause than even the Plan of Tacubaya had been: "se abrió una ancha puerta a la insubordinación; se rompió criminalmente el pacto federal, y se violaron la Constitución en la parte en que obliga a los estados a poner su Guardia Nacional a disposición del gobierno de la Unión". The administration placed Nuevo León-Coahuila under a state of siege, thereby removing Vidaurri from office "para ser enjuiciado", and appointed Aramberri Military Commander with full exercise of the civil power.³⁴

A bitter conflict followed between the state congress and the deposed state governor, but the historical literature offers us little explanation. According to Degollado, congress had opposed Zuazua's proposal for an agreement with Miramón on the basis of the neutrality of the northern states, if they withdrew from the war. Congress had responded by removing Zuazua from his command, pending court martial. He had thereupon encouraged his troops to

³⁴ AHSDN, Exp. XI/481.3/7754, ff. 1-16: "Degollado al Ministro de Guerra (Veracruz)", Tampico, 10 de abril de 1860. On 24 September 1859, Zaragoza forced Vidaurri from Monterrey; the latter took refuge in Saltillo. Cavazos Garza, *Breve historia*, p. 150.

desert and by disbanding National Guard contingents in Lampazos and Bustamante. Zuazua had prevented combined operations with Degollado's forces.³⁵

During this civil war within a Civil War, Conservative forces defeated the Liberals at León on 30 September 1859 and Miramón won another outstanding victory at Estancia de las Vacas in the environs of Querétaro in November, which thwarted Liberal plans for a sudden thrust against the national capital. The Conservatives regained control of the Bajío, San Luis Potosí and Zacatecas, benefitting from the turmoil in the north-east. In the gubernatorial elections of 1860 in Nuevo León, Vidaurri, who wrongly believed that the Veracruz administration was on the point of collapse, regained office but continued to face opposition from the Galeana congress, protected by Escobedo and Aramberri and loyal to the Juárez regime. Zuazua was killed in a surprise attack by pro-congress forces on 30 July 1860.³⁶

106 Santos Degollado intervened directly in the affairs of the north-east after arriving at Tampico on 29 March 1860. His report to the War Minister concentrated on the situation in Nuevo León. Degollado's intention was to assert the political supremacy of the federal government. Accordingly, he rejected Vidaurri's contention that, since the Conservative coup d'état in January 1858, the Republic was without a constitutional head, and that, as a result, Nuevo León-Coahuila had legitimately reclaimed its sovereignty. He made the point that Juárez had been nominated as head of government in Guanajuato on 19 January 1858 and had taken his stand on defence of the Constitution of 1857 and the federal system. Consequently, Degollado argued, Nuevo León owed allegiance to the federal government and had no basis for insisting on the reversion of sovereignty. The Juárez administration in Veracruz, furthermore, had been recognised by the United States and had held out against Miramón's two sieges of the port city. In language which clearly expressed the Juárez position, Degollado warned Vidaurri that: "nin-

³⁵ AHSDN, Exp. XI/481.3/7754, ff. 1-16: "Degollado al Ministro de Guerra (Veracruz)", Tampico, 10 de abril de 1860.

³⁶ Roel, *Correspondencia particular*, pp. xi-xii y 39; Cavazos Garza, *Breve historia*, p. 150.

gún estado es libre para romper a la hora que le parece el pacto federativo, como lo prueba la prohibición constitucional que todos tienen de formar coaliciones, si no son los estados fronterizos, que pueden coligarse solamente para la guerra contra los [indios] bárbaros".³⁷

Degollado condemned Vidaurri's interference in the states of San Luis Potosí, Zacatecas, Aguascalientes, Durango and Chihuahua. He poured scorn on Vidaurri's self-attributed titles, which, he pointed out, the national government had tolerated only out of prudence. Such titles derived from the time of the Revolution of Ayutla, when Vidaurri had organised what he described as the "Ejército del Norte", with himself as General en Jefe. The national government had made no such military appointment. However, as a result of this title, Vidaurri considered himself to be the military commander in the north-east, when, in reality, his forces were subordinate to the federal government. In the latter's view, no state government had the right to withdraw National Guard forces from the combat zone, as it saw fit. Vidaurri's decree of 5 September 1859 had been "un acto positivo de rebelión". Degollado rejected as a total travesty Vidaurri's claim that the states had been abandoned by the Veracruz regime and left to their own devices, and that the defeat at Ahualulco was the consequence of that. If anything, he countered, Veracruz had been abandoned by the states with the exception of Tamaulipas and Oaxaca, and had certainly received no revenues from Nuevo León during the entire course of the civil war. Furthermore, only Nuevo León-Coahuila had rejected his own authority as supreme commander of all Liberal forces. Degollado warned that "debe llegar la época en que el gobierno general tenga que marchar sus huestes para reducir por la fuerza de las armas a los rebeldes de Nuevo León-Coahuila".³⁸

Vidaurri had been removed from office between late September 1859 and April 1860. In spite of its strong words, however, the position of the Veracruz administration did not improve in the north-

³⁷ AHSDN, Exp. XI/481.3/7754, ff. 1-16: "Degollado al Ministro de Guerra (Veracruz)", Tampico, 10 de abril de 1860.

³⁸ AHSDN, Exp. XI/481.3/7754, ff. 1-16: "Degollado al Ministro de Guerra (Veracruz)", Tampico, 10 de abril de 1860.

east. Furthermore, the situation in that area considerably worsened, when a war of words between the governors of Nuevo León and San Luis Potosí threatened to escalate into armed conflict between these two states within the Liberal zone. The Civil War between Liberals and Conservatives, in the meantime, still continued. Between April and October 1860, the Veracruz administration viewed with deepening alarm the prospect of an even graver conflict within its nominal sphere of influence than that which had broken out between the congress and executive within Nuevo León itself. Vidaurri warned Governor Vicente Chico Sein on 29 August 1860 that he was only restraining his armed forces' eagerness to chastise the press in San Luis Potosí for its attacks on his government through expectation of imminent apology. The problem was that the San Luis government had taken the side of the Galeana congress - described by Vidaurri as "los facciosos de Galeana" - and was giving refuge and support to his political enemies, among whom was Aramberri. Vidaurri wanted to know whether it was true that the government of San Luis had authorised Aramberri to make use of revenues from the districts of Matehuala, El Cedral, and Catorce, in his struggle to remove him. If so, then Vidaurri would view this as an hostile act towards the government of Nuevo León.³⁹

Chico Sein on 6 September described Vidaurri's conduct as a scandal and denounced "sus violentas reclamaciones". He refused to silence the San Luis Potosí press and to hand over the political refugees from Nuevo León so that, as he said, Vidaurri could have them killed. Responding in kind to Vidaurri's language, he declared: "ni debo ni quiero ni puedo permitir que VE insulte al estado de San Luis Potosí como un tirano de la más baja especie". He expressed his full support for Zaragoza and Aramberri, and warned Vidaurri that San Luis Potosí would resist any armed incursion from Nuevo León. In his view, Vidaurri's regime was an "odioso despotismo" and he condemned "la tiranía torpe y repugnante de VE". As for his ally, Quiroga, he was "un salteador que dispone de las víctimas a

³⁹ AHSDN, Exp. XI/481.3/7738, ff. 3-5 (copia): "Vidaurri a Chico Sein", Monterrey, 29 de agosto de 1860; AHSDN, Exp. XI/481.3/7737, ff. 1-2: "Chico Sein al Ministro de Guerra (Veracruz)", no. 10, San Luis Potosí, 30 de agosto de 1860.

quienes asalta". The Veracruz administration warned Vidaurri to desist. The Minister of War sternly advised him that Juárez would hold him responsible for any outbreak of conflict with San Luis, when the Liberal priority was victory in the war against the Conservatives. Shortly afterwards, it ordered Escobedo to take up position on the border between the two states, in order to prevent an armed clash.⁴⁰

North-eastern Mexico and the Civil War in the United States

The Liberal victory in the Mexican Civil War of Reform and the recovery of the national capital in January 1861 coincided with the disintegration of the United States into warring entities. The implications of secession north of the Bravo for México were by no means clear at the beginning. It was unclear whether the Confederacy, formed in February 1861, intended to continue the traditional southern expansionism at the expense of México or seek out Mexican support in its struggle against the Union. In particular, Texas which had seceded from México in 1836 seceded a second time, from the United States, in 1861. Although Texas formed part of the Confederacy, its new position left unexplained what the relationship of this former Mexican province would be to México.

Initially, Matías Romero, appointed Mexican Minister in Washington DC by Juárez, thought that secessionism could result in the formation of several new entities out of the former United States. On 9 December 1860, for instance, he believed that the Pacific states and Washington Territory might also secede taking with them the New Mexico Territory.⁴¹

⁴⁰ AHSDN, Exp. XI/481.3/7738, ff. 6-8, (copia): "Chico Sein a Vidaurri", San Luis Potosí, 6 de septiembre de 1860; ff. 9-11v: "Ministro de Guerra a Chico Sein", Veracruz, 8 de octubre de 1860; AHSDN, Exp. XI/481.3/7740, f. 2: "Ampudia (Guerra) a Vidaurri", Veracruz, 19 de septiembre de 1860.

⁴¹ Matías Romero (ed.), *Correspondencia de la Legación mexicana en Washington durante la Intervención extranjera, 1860-1868*, 10 vols., México, José M. Sandoval, 1870-92, vol. 1, pp. 151-153, 161-164; cf. James M. McPherson, *Battle Cry for Freedom. The American Civil War*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1988, p. 247: "some Americans were already speculating

The escalation of events north of the Bravo threatened whatever stability existed in northern México. This, in turn, placed national integrity in jeopardy. At this point, much of the historical literature focusses on the external debt question, worsening relations between the Juárez administration and the three European Powers affected, and the subsequent Tripartite Intervention. As a result, the significance of issues along the northern border in 1860-64 has largely been overlooked. The fragmentation of the United States deepened the problem of the relationship between the Mexico City government and the frontier states. Vidaurri's position remained as ambiguous as ever. Furthermore, from April 1861, he was actively courted by Confederate agents. The association between Nuevo León-Coahuila and the Confederacy became closer after the Union blockade of Confederate ports made Matamoros the principal port of exit for southern cotton. This and thriving cross-border trade greatly increased the customs revenues which sustained the Vidaurri regime.⁴²

110

The secession of Texas from the Union also sharpened the edge of the perennial question of the "Republic of the Sierra Madre". In February 1861, for instance, a newspaper in Austin, 'The Southern Intelligencer', published an article written on 27 December 1860 by a Mexican from Nuevo León. The author broached the explosive subject of the "Republic of the Sierra Madre". This he saw as a union of the Mexican north-eastern states of Nuevo León, Coahuila and Tamaulipas with Texas, a state with a strong Mexican inheritance which was on the point of resuming its "nationality" as an independent republic. The "new nation" formed out of this combination of states would then become a pole of attraction for New Mexico, Arizona, Sonora, Sinaloa, Chihuahua and Durango. In the judgement of this writer, the new nation would possess

about a division of the country into three or four 'confederacies' with an independent Pacific coast republic thrown in for good measure. Several New York merchants and Democrats with ties to the South were talking of setting up as a free city".

⁴² See: Mario Cerutti y Miguel A. González Quiroga (comps.), *Frontera e historia económica. Texas y el norte de México, (1850-1865)*, México, Instituto Mora, UAM, 1993.

enormous material resources, which the construction of railroads could effectively exploit. It would also control the ports of Tampico, Guaymas and Mazatlán.⁴³

In spite of the ambiguous position of Vidaurri, other political and military authorities in the north opposed such schemes. De la Garza opposed both the idea of secession from México and domination of Tamaulipas by Monterrey. He warned the Ministry of War of suspicious Southern manoeuvrings on the north bank of the Bravo and that the specific aim of Texas, on the point of secession, would be: "formando una nación independiente con estos estados (fronterizos), cuya idea no ha dejado de proclamarse mucho tiempo ha, y tanto por los datos que se tienen del estado de Texas, como por las noticias que vienen de la frontera, parece que esta idea tiene fuertes apoyos en los estados fronterizos". He pointed to the activities of a society called the "Círculo de Oro", which existed for the purpose of promoting the idea of a secessionist republic in the north: "no sería extraño, y por si casi seguro, que una vez que se hubiesen apoderado las fuerzas tejanas del litoral izquierdo del Bravo, intentasen llevar a cabo su idea en unión de los que favorecen su propósito en los estados fronterizos". The Governor of Tamaulipas suspected collusion within Nuevo León: "lo que a muchos ha sorprendido es que algunas personas que hasta hoy habían servido fielmente a las órdenes de Santiago Vidaurri, estén complicadas en esos motines cuyo objeto se ignora". At the same time, De la Garza complained of Mejía's incursions into the state from the San Luis Potosí Huasteca, in spite of Doblado's campaign into the Sierra Gorda.⁴⁴

These fears were confirmed by those of Pedro Hinojosa, Military Commander of Chihuahua, in the following month. He feared an incursion of *filibusteros* from across the border and warned the national government that: "muy de temerse es, que los estados del Sur de la Unión Americana al pretender su emancipación intenten

⁴³ AHSDN, Exp. XI/481.3/8535, f. 4, Alcance al no. 25 del "Progresista", Matamoros, 18 de febrero de 1861.

⁴⁴ AHSDN, Exp. XI/481.3/8535, ff. 5-8v: "Juan José de la Garza al Ministro de Guerra y Marina", no. 3, Tampico, 26 de febrero de 1861.

ensanchar sus límites con nuestra frontera, y estando como está este Estado exhausto de recursos y sin fuerzas para su defensa, es muy posible que pretendan ocuparlo". The Chihuahua government intended to send 100 men to the Villa del Paso del Norte to strengthen its defences. Governor Luis Terrazas forwarded to Mexico City the suspicions of the *jefe político* of El Paso del Norte that Texan forces were preparing a military expedition against Nuevo León, Chihuahua and Sonora for the purpose of acquiring territory and thereby strengthening the Southern, pro-slavery party. As Terrazas saw it, their ultimate goal was the creation of a "Republic of the Sierra Madre".⁴⁵

112 Within the cabinet, Zarco, then *Secretario de Gobernación*, discussed with Zaragoza, Minister of War, the dangerous situation on the north-east frontier in the light of Southern secession. Brownsville had fallen into Confederate hands and the government was worried in case secessionism should spread to the Mexican frontier states as well. The sympathies of the Juárez administration remained with the Lincoln government in Washington and opposed the defence of slavery by the Confederates. Romero warned that the latter had not abandoned any of the previous southern designs on Mexican territory: "la Confederación del Sur podía aparentar ahora muy buenos sentimientos y disposición hacia nosotros y mucho respeto por los derechos de la República, pero sólo sería mientras se sistema sobre bases sólidas, pues su objeto constante y su deseo más ardiente que tratara de llevar a cabo más o menos tarde, es...tomarse todo el territorio que pueda de nosotros para establecer en él la esclavitud". The national government feared the adherence of Chihuahua to the Confederacy and the loss of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, which had been a southern objective since the 1840s.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ AHSDN, Exp. IX/481.3/8535, ff. 10-10v: "Terrazas al Ministro de Guerra y Marina", no. 7, Chihuahua, 26 de marzo de 1861; ff. 12-12v: "Hinojosa al ministro de Guerra y Marina", Chihuahua, 26 de marzo de 1861.

⁴⁶ AHSDN, Exp. XI/481.3/8535, ff. 43-44v: "Zarco a Zaragoza", reservada, México, 10 de abril de 1861; f. 41: "Zarco a Zaragoza", México, 18 de abril de 1861; ff. 1-1v: "Zarco a Zaragoza", México, 23 de abril de 1861; ff. 3-3v: "Zarco a Zaragoza", México, 24 de abril de 1861.

Civil war broke out between rival political factions in the state of Tamaulipas at a time of rampant secessionism across the Bravo and the imminence of Tripartite Intervention from Europe. The Juárez government had no alternative but to appoint Vidaurri to be Military Commander of the state early in January 1862, in the hope that this would impose a strong power above the contending factions. Vidaurri sent Quiroga into the state with 600 *rifleros* and instructions to take control of Matamoros. This latter had always been one of Vidaurri's principal objectives.⁴⁷

Vidaurri, Juárez, and the French Intervention

The Tripartite Intervention, followed by the unilateral French intervention after April 1862, again left the Juárez government with no choice but to rely on Vidaurri for the defence of the north-east. Relations between the two authorities, however, deteriorated rapidly. Throughout 1861, 1862 and 1863, Vidaurri complained of the hostility of the Juárez administration towards him. At the same time, he remained determined to hold on to federal revenues in the north-east and retain there any armaments purchased over the border. On 4 May 1861, for instance, he accused the Juárez cabinet of supporting his enemies, and on 5 and 19 August 1862, Vidaurri complained that the federal government continued to be oblivious to the defensive needs of the north against the *indios bárbaros* and the high cost of maintaining its own armed forces.⁴⁸

Between July and October 1861, the issue of Comonfort's return to México deepened the conflict with Juárez. In spite of the conflicts of 1856 between Vidaurri and former President over the annexation

⁴⁷ AHSDN, Exp. XI/481.3/8256, ff. 16-16v: "Vidaurri al Ministro de Guerra", Monterrey, 14 de enero de 1862; ff. 18-18v: "Vidaurri al Ministro de Guerra", Monterrey, 21 de enero de 1862; f. 19: "Ministro de Guerra a Vidaurri", México 28 de enero de 1862.

⁴⁸ Roel, *Correspondencia particular*, pp. 45-46, 52-54, 57-59, 133, 135-36, 141-43, 176, 191-93, 195-97, 217-18; Centro de Estudios de Historia de México (CONDUMEX en adelante), Fondo LX-1, 2 carpetas (1849-63), carpeta 1, no. 65: "Vidaurri a Comonfort", Monterrey, 5 de agosto de 1862; no. 94: "Vidaurri al Ministro de Hacienda", Monterrey, 19 de agosto de 1862.

of Coahuila, Comonfort chose Nuevo León as his place of refuge after returning from exile in New York. Vidaurri appealed to the government to permit him to remain there but Juárez ordered Comonfort's arrest on 15 July 1861. In Juárez's view, Comonfort was guilty of violating the Constitution under the terms of the law which his own government had passed on 6 December 1856. He should be brought to trial in the capital for having dissolved Congress and nullified the Constitution. Vidaurri took no notice. Juárez, under pressure from a radical Congress, then complained that Vidaurri had no authorisation to protect Comonfort and that no competent judicial authority had absolved him of his crimes. Vidaurri argued that Comonfort was needed at a time of national emergency.⁴⁹

Juárez made his own rapprochement with Comonfort, which bound the latter closely to the national government at a time when the French Army was regrouping after the defeat at Puebla on 5 May 1862. In response to Comonfort's offer to place himself at the disposition of the military command, Juárez replied on 19 June: "Mi estimado amigo: con mucho gusto he leído tu carta duplicada de 1 de abril, que hasta hoy recibí, y en la que me manifiestas el deseo de reanudar las relaciones de nuestra antigua amistad. Corresponde a tan noble deseo diciéndote que soy tu amigo de siempre, y debes contar conmigo con todo lo que me creas útil, en el concepto de que esta manifestación no es de pura fórmula sino leal y sincera. ¿Estás resuelto a servir a nuestra patria en estos momentos solemnes, defendiendo su independencia y sus libertades? Pues, esto basta para que me considere honrado con tu amistad". The tone of this letter speaks for itself. The objective was two-fold: to respond to a national emergency, on the one hand, but also, further to undermine Vidaurri's position, on the other hand, by prising apart his alliance with Comonfort.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ Roel, *Correspondencia particular*, pp. 73-74: "Vidaurri a Juárez", Monterrey, 4 de julio de 1861; pp. 77-79: "Vidaurri a Juárez", Monterrey, 9 de agosto de 1861; pp. 80-82: "Vidaurri a Juárez", Monterrey, 29 de septiembre de 1861; pp. 85-89: "Juárez a Vidaurri", México, 16 de octubre de 1861; pp. 90-92: "Vidaurri a Juárez", Monterrey, 31 de octubre de 1861.

⁵⁰ CONDUMEX, Fondo LX-1, carpeta 1, no. 5: "Juárez a Comonfort", México, 10 de junio de 1862.

The radicals in the national Congress and cabinet strongly opposed the return of Comonfort. They had not forgiven him for the debacle of 1857, and feared his close association with Vidaurri. It is possible that they also feared some type of collusion between them and Sebastián Lerdo de Tejada and Doblado, with the intention of putting the administration on a different basis. Juárez also may have suspected some such design, especially since he had never trusted Doblado. In the short term, Juárez's aim was to drive a wedge between Comonfort and Vidaurri, and thereby isolate the latter.

Juárez ignored Vidaurri and authorised Comonfort to dispose of the federal revenues of the states of Nuevo León, Tamaulipas, Zacatecas, San Luis Potosí and Aguascalientes on 2 September 1862, as part of the national government's campaign to hold back the renewed French advance. The President told Comonfort that he had written on the same day to Vidaurri, instructing him to come to an arrangement concerning how the revenues of his state were to be dispatched. He expressed his disapproval to Comonfort of Vidaurri's retention of federal revenues for the maintenance of 2,000 families of men on active service - "lo que no me parece bien". Juárez insisted that federal revenues should be for national purposes only: "te suplico que así lo indiques al Sr. Vidaurri".⁵¹

115

During the six months following the defeat at Puebla, the French had not remained inactive. Mejía, furthermore, maintained his strong position in the Sierra Gorda, which Doblado had not managed to undermine. On 10 July 1862, Mejía's cooperation enabled the French to seize Tuxpan, as a preliminary for the capture of Tampico. Mejía operated across the Huasteca, enabling the city's fall to French forces on 23 November. Although the republicans regained the port on 13 January 1863, Tampico would remain in Imperial hands from 5 July 1863 until its final capitulation on 7 August 1866. In this way, San Luis Potosí was outflanked, and the position of the Juárez government, which sought refuge there between July and December

⁵¹ CONDUMEX, Fondo LX-1, no. 112: "Juárez a Comonfort", México, 2 de septiembre de 1862; no. 115: "Comonfort a Juárez", San Luis Potosí, 4 de septiembre de 1862; no. 132: "Vidaurri a Comonfort", Monterrey, 14 de septiembre de 1862.

1863 after the fall of Mexico City, became untenable. Mejía occupied San Luis on 24 December. Juárez retreated to Saltillo, that is, into Vidaurri's realm. In January 1864, Juárez ordered Vidaurri to place federal and customs revenues under the jurisdiction of the Minister of Finance. When, on grounds of local necessity, Vidaurri refused, the stage was set for the final act in Juárez's determination to destroy Vidaurri's power. On 12 February, Doblado's force of 1,500 men accompanied Juárez to Monterrey, but Vidaurri refused to treat with Juárez until he sent that force out of the city. When they finally met, the discussion of outstanding issues broke up ten minutes without resolution. Accordingly, Juárez withdrew to Saltillo and on 26 February decreed the separation of Coahuila from Nuevo León, and, using his extraordinary powers, placed Nuevo León under a state of siege on the following day.⁵²

Juárez's forces returned to Monterrey on 3 April in order to enforce these measures, and Vidaurri, who had been declared a traitor, sought refuge over the Texas border. The *juarista* victory, however, was undermined by Mejía's rout of Doblado's army at Matehuala on 17 May, which left the republicans without a major fighting force. Juárez sought refuge in Chihuahua and the entire north-east fell under French control. Mejía, in the meantime, took possession of the key revenue-earning port of Matamoros on 26 September and held it until 23 June 1866.

Subsequent events are relatively familiar. The impending military collapse of the Confederacy left Vidaurri isolated in the north-east. However, the advance of French Intervention forces into the north-east in the Spring of 1864 provided Vidaurri with an opportunity to regain his position through a change of allegiance. Marshall Bazaine, however, kept Vidaurri away from his former base of power. The general suspicion within the Imperial camp was that he had not abandoned his Liberal ideas when he swore allegiance to the Empire. Maximilian appointed him to the Council of State, while the north-east was controlled by Mejía, who occupied Matamoros from 1864 to 1866. When the Empire collapsed in May and

⁵² Roel, *Correspondencia particular*, xiii.

June 1867, Vidaurri was trapped in Mexico City, unable to escape abroad as Márquez had done. Betrayed, he was summarily shot in the back as a traitor (without trial) on 9 July 1867 in the Plaza de Santo Domingo for not having presented himself within twenty-four hours of the fall of the city to Porfirio Díaz. Was he shot because he had served the Empire, as had Mejía and Miramón, who had been executed (after trial) at Querétaro with Maximilian? Vidaurri's Liberal past evidently did not save him. Or was he shot because he had put defence of his north-eastern *cacicazgo* above the interests of the federation in the period from 1855 to 1864? If this were the case, then many others in the Liberal camp were also guilty? Or was Vidaurri shot because it was widely rumoured that he was planning to separate the northern states from México and establish an independent federation, possibly linked to or subsequently (like Texas in 1845) annexed by the United States? What, then, was the real nature of the charge of treason to which he was found culpable?

Vidaurri's career has generally been interpreted in Mexican historiography from the perspective of the triumphant *juarista* cause. Like Mejía and Miramón, he has been expunged from the course of history. Yet, a number of salient points should be made. In the first place, Mexican territorial losses of 1836-53 from the War of Texas Secession to the Treaty of La Mesilla radically altered the geographical structure of the Republic created in 1824. The balance of power on the North American sub-continent altered in favour of the United States. After the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848, the new northern neighbour on the Bravo increased its pressure on México for further territorial cessions and transit rights. Within the Republic, the relationship between the states and the federation remained ill-defined in practical terms, particularly over fiscal questions and control of the National Guard. The northern states were faced with repeated incursions from the *indios bárbaros*, themselves defending their own territory and identity. The authorities there constantly complained of central-government indifference to their plight and inability to help them. Northern states from the 1850s to the 1870s took up the defence of federalism which

had been so strong in the previous generation in Jalisco, Zacatecas and Oaxaca. However, defence of federalism and regional sentiment, on the one hand, were different from separatism, on the other hand. Early independent México did not experience the territorial fragmentation of the former Viceroyalty of the River Plate or the former kingdom of Guatemala. Only Texas and Yucatán attempted secession. The former succeeded in breaking away, because it was a special case due to the extent of Anglo-Saxon immigration and contiguity with the southern states of the USA.

Regionalism was always strong in the north, exacerbated by the issue of Indian raids, but this was not identical to separatism. At no stage was the formation of a separate northern entity attempted, despite repeated discussion of such a project. It may be the case, as Josefina Vázquez argues, that the notion of northern separatism originated with the Texas rebels and corresponded to Southern expansionist designs at the expense of México. The diplomatic representatives of France and Great Britain, which saw in a stable and united México a buffer to further US expansionism, expressed alarm at the idea of northern separatism. The emergence of this issue from the 1830s to the 1860s corresponded to the period of greatest danger faced by independent México during the nineteenth century. It should be seen as a product of the confusion caused by México's exposed position between the United States and the European Powers during the aftermath of the military defeat of 1846-48.

In any case, the historical moment for the formation of a separate northern entity had already passed. This had been in 1776 with the creation of the *Provincias Internas*. Bernardo García Martínez has speculated that Imperial Spain might have chosen that moment to create in the north and far-north a new political entity corresponding to the Viceroyalty of the River Plate in the southern hemisphere, perhaps with its commercial focus on the Spanish-held port of New Orleans. Opposition in Mexico City and governmental divisions in Madrid contributed to the frustration of such a possibility.

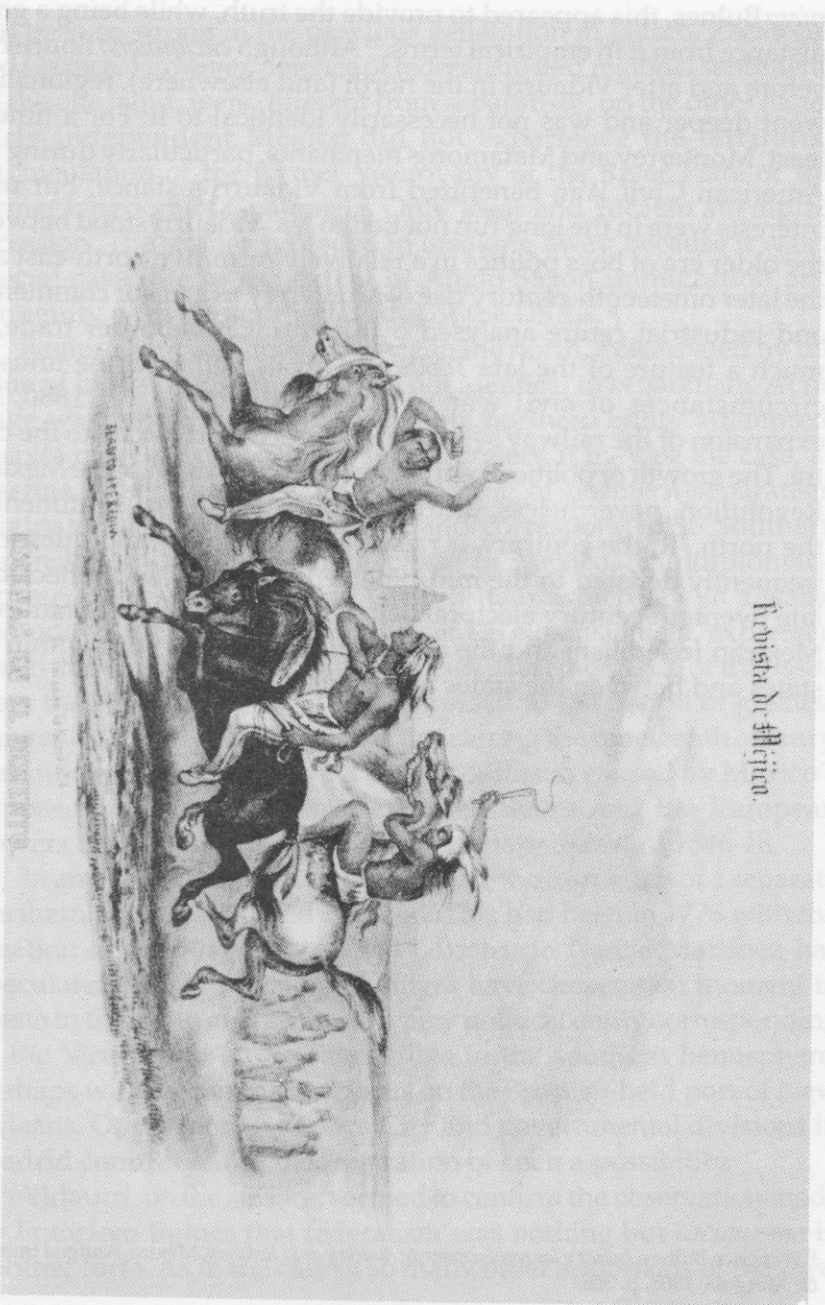
Vidaurre, on the surface, seemed to confirm the observation made by Francisco Bulnes that federalism was nothing but *caciquismo* in another form. As in the case of so many other aphorisms of the *Inge-*

niero Bulnes, this appeared to provide the truth, while being a good distance from it in empirical terms.⁵³ Although *caciquismo* flourished before and after Vidaurri in the north (and elsewhere), regionalism went deeper and was not necessarily identical to it. For a time at least, Monterrey and Matamoros merchants, particularly during the American Civil War, benefitted from Vidaurri's stance, but their interests were in the long run not tied to his. Vidaurri stood between the older era of boss politics in a relatively primitive north-east and the later nineteenth-century rise of Monterrey as a major commercial and industrial centre analysed by Cerutti. Cross-border trade, so much a feature of the late 1850s and 1860s, reflected the unusual circumstances of civil war in both countries. After 1880, the expansion of the railway system linked northern México to the centre. The growth of political centralism in the aftermath of the Mexican Revolution, nevertheless, did not eliminate regional sentiment in the north. To the contrary, it raised once again leading questions, frequently debated in the mid-nineteenth century and reflected in late twentieth-century electoral behaviour, concerning the nature of Mexican federalism and the distribution of power both within the states and between the states and the federation.



⁵³ Francisco Bulnes, *Juárez y las revoluciones de Ayutla y de la Reforma*, México, Antigua Imprenta de Murguía, 1905, p. 306.

Revista de Affrica.



Tomado de José N. Iturriaga. *Litografía y grabado en el México del XIX*, tomo II, México, Inversora Bursátil, 1994.