

Policing Waters and Baths in Eighteenth-Century Mexico City

Judge Baltasar Ladrón de Guevara walked through the streets slowly but nervously, attentive to the air of tension. After several drought years water and food was scarce in the capital, and he worried that in 1785 Mexico might see the kind of social unrest that recently beset Spain. He paused frequently to ask questions of people in the street, and so that the officials who accompanied him could record his comments and note the precise geographical coordinates of the issues he encountered. Returning many times to wander the same neighborhoods, he grappled conceptually with the diversity of peoples and *castas* that formed the city's immense underclass. It was an age of revolutions, and to deal with that instability Ladrón de Guevara was taking a new approach to government. His long walks and careful social study of Mexico City were aimed at understanding and improving the underlying organization of society and its relation to the environment.

Source: De Gortari Rabiela 2012: 122–23.

Enlightenment reformers like Diego Ladrón de Guevara were struck by the amorphous, variegated character of Mexico's underclass—the *plebe*—and its disorderliness caused them to worry. Mexico City official Hipólito Villaroel, for example, described this underclass as a “monster of many species.” By 1785 the heterogeneity of colonial society overflowed existing legal, political, and socioeconomic institutions and concepts, prompting Ladrón de Guevara and Villaroel to engage in a systematic effort to comprehend it and order it anew. After a long period

of careful fieldwork, Ladrón de Guevara designed a new administrative geography for Mexico City that he hoped would address social tensions. This was a new understanding of society and approach to governance that spread throughout Europe and the Americas in the eighteenth century and was known as “Police.”

In this chapter I analyze ideas about Police in eighteenth-century Mexico City, and the implementation of those ideas to govern waters, baths, and bathing. Early modern treatises on government used the concept of Police to describe the discursive and institutional regulation of territory and population.¹ In a sense of the word that we would recognize today, Police was an institutional apparatus that operated in a prohibitive fashion to ensure security. Just as important, however, was another meaning: the wide, positive effort at civilized urban ordering that focused on aspects of the well-being of the population such as public health, the provisioning of food and water, and the maintenance of infrastructure. Surely the actions and ideas of Police were concentrated in the educated, usually European-born elite that occupied the heights of government in New Spain, but over time they shaped hydraulic infrastructure and were unevenly internalized and enacted by everyday people.

Ladrón de Guevara and Villaroel recognized that their ideas and practices of Police formed part of a material social field that included the environment as well as the environmental ideas and practices of the varied social groups they were tasked with regulating. As the eighteenth century advanced, new social groups emerged and consolidated in Mexico around socioeconomic activity, creole/national identity, liberalism, and science. I suggest we treat these intergroup relations as dynamics of class, and that we can see them in everyday conflicts over waters and bathing.² The history of these relations between “rulers and ruled” reveals that the policing of waters was always partial, selective, contested, and incomplete.

POLICING THE ENVIRONMENT

There was never enough potable water for the growing urban population in Mexico City. Beginning in 1548, the Spaniards rebuilt the aqueduct from the Chapultepec springs to the city center a number of times, and extended it to bring water from the springs at Santa Fe, high in the western mountains. This urban hydraulic system served the city as the principal source of clean freshwater for the next 350 years, and while the government carried out an enormous effort to drain the Valley of Mexico, the freshwater supply remained relatively constant. *Mercedes* (concessions) of water for houses and buildings were costly and hard to come by, especially as the city grew in the eighteenth century, and most people received water from the system of public fountains that were also served by the water distribution system. Water sellers, or *aguadores*, used these fountains to fill wagon-borne barrels and large jugs slung across their backs, and sold the liquid door to door.

The relative difficulty and costliness of delivering water made bathing by immersion at home impossible or impractical for most, and so people went to bathhouses, or simply bathed in the public fountains or the streams and canals of the lacustrine city. The latter options were of great concern among reforming elites whose sense of order was affronted by public nudity as well as the use of the same source for both drinking and bathing. Bathhouses were for bathing and washing clothes; fountains provided water for cooking and drinking. In this logic, the city's *temazcales* were acceptable to the city's rulers because they used relatively little water, and kept the act of bathing away from the potable water infrastructure.

The scarcity of water in Mexico City was exacerbated by natural events. The years 1780, 1782, 1784, and 1785 featured drought, which resulted in shortages in food, famine, and unrest across central Mexico in 1785 and 1786.³ In Mexico City, a "severe lack of water in the public tanks," especially the north and east of the city center, led to "exasperation and clamor among the poor."⁴ In response, officials implemented scientific water policing measures that emulated those taken by the Crown in the 1760s in response to similar drought-induced bread riots in Spanish cities. The first step was a careful study of the environmental and social situation by the Maestro de Obras (Chief Engineer), who reported to the city council the leaks all along the aqueduct, the "deterioration of the pipes [most were clay] which are old and feeble with frequent breaks, the continuous leaking caused by the porosity of the lead [seals and joints], the *Mercedes* of water that continue to be delivered even after their titular owners die, and the excessive waste of the fountains that spill water."⁵ The small reservoir (Alberca Chica) in Chapultepec was locked and the key was lost, and the large reservoir (Alberca Grande) was almost completely empty, its springwater flowing through an open gate down to the lands of the nearby *hacienda* of the Condesa de Miravalle.

Environmental pressures and enlightenment ordering coincided to propel the policing of new arenas of governmental concern, such as public health. Based on the report of the *maestro*, in 1788 the viceroy ordered all the *mercedes* of water to be registered and confirmed, and the springs and reservoirs in Chapultepec to be cleaned and repaired. Especially important was the main canal that delivered water from the springs in the mountains at Santa Fe to the aqueduct that began in Chapultepec. The *maestro* pointed out that the city's potable water often ran in an open ditch, and that people along the canal used the water for drinking, irrigating their fields, and bathing.⁶ To prevent unacceptable use and contamination of the city's potable water by the bodies of its residents, the viceroy asked the *maestro* to cover the aqueduct and fence it off. Two years later the viceroy complained that despite these measures no positive increment in water levels was seen in the city, and ordered a report on the effects of the infrastructural changes. He furthermore ordered the *maestro* to build ditches to capture the runoff water from the Chapultepec springs and channel it back to the aqueduct that led to the city center.

The policing of the city's infrastructure included attempts to control bathing practices among peasants and urban poor, and worry extended to the ways people interacted with the liquid and with each other. The fountains in Mexico City provided water to most of the population, and were seen as an especially important site for the promotion of good health. In 1786 the viceroy Manuel Antonio Florez denounced the custom of the poor of using the water that spilled from the fountains and leaked from the pipes for bathing and washing, activities "not at all appropriate for the public streets" that caused "discomfort for pedestrians, complaints and risks."⁷ Bathing and washing clothes in the canals and fountains of the public water system were prohibited and punished, which circumscribed poor people's access to and interactions with water. In 1790 the Conde de Revillagigedo tried to stop people from "bathing in the public canals" in Mexico City by ordering the construction of a public bathhouse.⁸

These enlightened government reforms were often contested. Fountains, like the springs and rivers that fed them, ran all the time, and much of the water went unused. They consisted of a spout that poured the water from some height into a pool or reservoir below, and their design was meant to allow users to take water from the cascading stream, rather than from the pool, which was considered unclean. In practice, however, the ranks of *aguadores* (water carriers) who serviced most of the population in the city did not wait to fill their amphora from the cascade, instead using the reservoir, which caused great concern among city rulers about the negative effects of this water on the health of the citizens.⁹ To remedy this disorder, in 1790 the Conde de Revillagigedo replaced the central fountain in the Zocalo and its large pool of water with four smaller fountains, none with a reservoir. This measure, like many the Conde enacted in his period of reform, was rejected by the frustrated clotheswashers, bathers, and *aguadores*, who vandalized the new fountains and, in 1794, succeeded in having them dismantled.¹⁰ The cleanliness and healthfulness of the water was not as important to them as plentiful supply and ease of access, but the destruction of the fountains ended up reducing their access to water. A few years later the neighbors in the barrio of San Sebastián complained to the city government that there was no fountain nearby, and so their family members walked a great distance to get water, which resulted in their sons getting into mischief and their daughters being "deflowered."¹¹ This and other complaints identified scarcity as the problem, rather than the unhealthiness of the water itself, which remained more of a concern of government officials.

Water policing featured strong technological dimensions. A 1792 article in a Mexican scientific journal identified the cause of "the hydraulic problem" in Mexico City to be the lack of circulation resulting from the city's location on a flat lakebed. In such a "horizontal" city water did not flow well. There was little elevation difference between one fountain and another, and so the public fountains could not be connected in a series. The unused water from fountains that ran twenty-four hours a day could not be efficiently channeled to other fountains, and instead overflowed

onto the street and joined the wastewater and rainwater that coursed into the canals and finally into the lake. Surprisingly, the author found there to be an abundance of water: the Chapultepec springs alone provided enough water for a city four times the population of Mexico (home to about 213,000 people at that time). When measured together with the Santa Fé aqueduct, it seems there was water enough for millions of inhabitants!¹²

This situation of both great scarcity and great waste was noted in 1786 by Ladrón de Guevara, who suggested that bronze faucets be installed, and taps and plugs be used, on all household fountains so that “no more than the amount of water necessary for the use of the houses and their neighbors would flow forth, avoiding in this way the spillage and lost water that runs out of the gutters into the streets.”¹³ The author of the 1792 article echoed this impulse to save water and offered plans for a machine designed to regulate the amount of water that flowed into the fountains. It was a valve, linked to a float, that would increase the flow when the fountain’s reservoir was less full, and decrease the flow when it was fuller, shutting it off completely before the reservoir spilled onto the street. The circularity concept that oriented the building of continuously flowing urban hydraulic systems was matched by a repudiation of waste, inefficiency, and shortage, and the design of mechanisms to restrict and administer those flows. Again, these enlightened measures to restrict supply were viewed with suspicion by the people whom they were intended to benefit. Anticipating that such policing of the environment would be rejected by the masses of users, the proponent suggested encasing the machine in a box to shield it from vandals.

POLICING THE BATHHOUSES

Bathing was a major concern of Police in Enlightenment Mexico City. Enlightened rulers sought to eradicate bathing and washing in public, and to move these encounters with water into bathhouses. In Spain, after a century in which bathing—especially social bathing—was discouraged, outlawed, and largely eradicated, people took to the water again in the 1600s. During that same period in Mesoamerica the conquerors repressed the sexual, social, and religious aspects of *temazcal* steambathing in favor of bathing for health and medicinal ends, a negotiation which enabled the *temazcal* as an institution to survive and spread across racial, ethnic, and class boundaries. Bathing in hot water was introduced by the Spanish into Mesoamerica, and by the eighteenth century bathing by immersion was firmly established as an acceptable activity both in Europe and the Americas, good for promoting a person’s well-being and health. Moreover, bathing in hot springs had surged back into popularity, and the fashionable practice of taking waters percolated down from the nobility to the emergent bourgeoisie and other more humble social groups. Like the *temazcal*, bathing by immersion in hot water was considered therapeutic, and the mineral waters themselves were thought to

be medicinal. As we shall see in chapter 4, the modern science of medicine and chemistry grew up around the study of these heterogeneous waters, and there was a surge of interest in Mexican mineral and hot springs at the end of the eighteenth century, stimulated by this inquiry and by an effort on the part of Spain to generate knowledge about its colonial territories, populations, and resources in order to generate wealth and govern more efficiently. Thus the increased prominence of bathing was accompanied by heightened policing of the activity. Just as the anxiety of Spanish priests moved them to chronicle *temazcal* bathing practices in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the enlightenment project of policing the boundaries of the acceptable generated documentation that today provides a window onto the everyday practices of bathing that made up a central part of the water culture of the time.

By the middle of the eighteenth century the bathhouse in Mexico City was an accepted and commonplace institution with its own infrastructural and social requirements. Bathhouses usually offered facilities for immersion, steambathing, and the washing of laundry. They were located in houses that were large enough to accommodate a number of tubs (*placeras*) grouped in a single room or separated into individual stalls. Some bathhouses offered only cold baths, but in those that offered hot water there was a boiler in another room. The *temazcal* was a fixture in the bathhouses, occupying an open space such as a patio or courtyard where smoke from the fire could dissipate. The baths required a concession of water, or *merced*, from the government of Mexico City, a privilege which only larger buildings usually enjoyed. Houses, or institutions that grouped many people under a single roof, such as schools, hospitals, and religious orders, had *mercedes* of water. The *merced* allowed the building owner to install an intake pipe from the city's water distribution system, which then could be used to fill a tank or reservoir. *Mercedes* were limited in number and new ones were seldom awarded. Most inhabitants of the city did not have pipes in their homes and instead carried water from public fountains or bought water from *aguadores*.

Bathhouses were owned and operated in a variety of ways. Some were run as businesses, with the income derived from charging people to use the *placeras* and *temazcales*. Other baths were run as charities, especially by religious orders that tended to provide bathhouses for indigents, sick people, or rehabilitated prostitutes. It was especially common for bathhouses to cater only to women because it was prohibited for both sexes to use the bathhouse, and also because men could more easily bathe in the streams and canals that were a common feature of Mexico City and its outskirts well into the nineteenth century. The owner of the house where the baths were installed could be a private individual or corporate owner, and religious groups such as convents or orders of priests were especially prominent. Often the locale and *merced* of water was rented to the person or group that ran the bathhouse, with the same variety of lay and religious actors operating the establishments.

Every bathhouse was maintained by a set of required jobs that included tending the fire and the boiler for the hotwater baths, tending the fire for the *temazcal*, filling and emptying the *placeras*, carrying buckets of water to the *temazcal*, cleaning the installations, and handling money. There was often a bathhouse manager who oversaw the activities for the owner, and there was always at least one *temazcalero* (sweatlodge worker) to carry out all the menial labor. The sex of the workers was especially important, for it was inappropriate and outlawed for men to be in contact with women bathing in the *placeras*, and especially in the *temazcal*. Archival records give the impression that *temazcaleros* in the bathhouses of Mexico City were often indigenous people recently arrived from small towns in the Valley of Mexico or nearby who lived in the bathhouse and earned room and board along with their wages. In the case that a bathhouse was run by a religious order or convent, the work was performed by its members.

In Mexico City, bathing of all kinds became more frequent over the course of the eighteenth century, especially among the poor. According to the city government records consulted by the viceroy Conde de Revillagigedo in 1793, there were twelve bathhouses licensed in 1691 by royal decree, and in 1741 this number was increased to twenty-four in order to serve the growing population.¹⁴ In 1741 Don Leandro Manuel de Gogochea received a license from the viceroy Conde de Juanclara to establish a new bathhouse with a *temazcal* for women in his house on the Calle de la Servatana, and then again in 1744 he was given another license to use his water concession to open a bathhouse for women in his house on the Calle de la Miserecordia.¹⁵ In 1743 Leandro Manuel de Coxenechea y Carreaga received permission from the viceroy to open the Casa de Baños del Comercio at #22 Calle del Coliseo Viejo, also only serving women. More licenses were awarded in 1750 for bathhouses that offered *placeras*—or bathtubs—along with *temazcales*.¹⁶

The expansion of the practice of bathing in the eighteenth century also spurred the creation of bathhouses that were not licensed. In 1778, Sebastián Fabian and Miguel Pedro, *caciques* of the indigenous barrio of San Hipolito (just northwest of the Alameda), complained bitterly to the city government that Miguel Oballa purchased a house in that neighborhood with the goal of establishing a bathhouse. The problem, they stated, was not the bathhouse in itself, but the fact that Oballa lacked a *merced* of water and was therefore robbing the barrio's water system to supply his business.¹⁷ *Temazcales* operated on unoccupied lands by rivers and canals, offering steambaths to those who used those bodies of water to bathe. The increase in licensed and unlicensed bathhouses in Mexico City shows that bathing acquired a greater importance in the eighteenth century among the poor, who, according to the second Conde de Revillagigedo, were "the people that use them most."¹⁸

The upswing in bathing was due in part to the increasingly accepted idea that it was an activity that should be promoted due to the health benefits it offered to both individuals and to the population as a whole. While plagues and diseases always

caused fear and concern among rulers and ruled alike, it was during the eighteenth century that the more encompassing category of “public health” came into being in Mexico as an object of analysis and government intervention.¹⁹ Bathing was a key practice of public health that quickly spread from the educated elite through the popular masses. For example, when applying for a license to build a bath and *temazcal* the owner of the property called “La Quemada” made it clear to the police department that they were supporting bathing because it was “public, and noted for its medicinal qualities.”²⁰

The increasingly common assumption that bathing was good for the health of the population arose from various roots. The *temazcal* was always viewed as therapeutic, and was used since before the conquest to remedy specific health problems. One of these uses was to help women purify themselves and recoup forces after childbirth, a practice that remained strong throughout the colonial period, as *temazcal* bathing was adopted into the institutional medicine practiced by doctors and hospitals. In Triptio, Michoacán, the hospital run by the Augustine friars utilized a *temazcal* in the 1540s, as did the Hospital Real de los Naturales in Mexico City, which cared for indigenous people and also made use of the hot mineral springs in Peñón de los Baños.²¹ The Hospital del Amor de Dios, founded around 1540, featured, by the eighteenth century, a *temazcal* and bathhouse in its building on the Callejón del Amor de Dios. This *temazcal* provided therapy for patients, but was also a business that provided income to its owners. When, in 1788, this *temazcal* came under scrutiny by the city government, the overseer defended the steambath as a normal and accepted feature of any bathhouse in the city: “they all have what they call a *Temazcal*, which is looked upon as important medicine in the Capital, following general custom.”²² This was the colonial *temazcal*, purged of many of its indigenous religious and social meanings when it was adopted by the Spanish-dominated colonial society, and reshaped more narrowly as therapeutic and medicinal (see chapter 1). Another root of the idea that bathing was healthful came from Europe, where bathing and water were long associated with health and therapy, an idea that grew stronger in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

The health benefits of bathing were, however, a promise fraught with peril, for bathhouses and *temazcales* were also known to be a setting for sinful encounters between men and women. The assumption was that these were either illegal sexual liaisons between prostitutes and clients, or simply the customs of Indians and poor mestizos that nevertheless offended God and the ruling class. In the Spanish tradition, social bathing was considered particularly dangerous for the honor of women, a guiding principle of gender present also in Latin America.²³ Such transgressions did not occur only among the unruly *plebe*, however. In 1779 a lower cleric (*racionero*) working in the Cathedral of Morelia, Michoacán, was punished for bringing his lover to the baths at the Cuincho hot springs managed by the Franciscan order. A short time later the viceroy received a complaint from the mother of two young women who were taken for a weeklong tryst to the same

bathhouse by two other clerics.²⁴ Sex in the baths, by all accounts a rather common occurrence, caused a moral clouding of the beneficial waters.

Swimming showed the same Janus-faced character as bathing: widely accepted by the late colonial period as a healthy encounter with water, but still deeply suspect for its social implications. In the lacustrine city swimming in rivers and canals was a common social activity among the *plebe*, not easily distinguished from bathing. Elites also enjoyed swimming, however. In 1814, Don Manuel Pevedilla asked the Junta de Policía of Mexico City to award him a license for the swimming pool at his country house, which was used by his friends and acquaintances to “have fun.” The pool was four feet deep, measured about sixteen feet by thirty feet, and was surrounded by walls on all sides. He assured the government that men and women would not swim together in his pool and that he would maintain order, but argued that it was the right of any citizen to have fun in his home. The government agreed to provide this permit for the pool, because of the sound moral and political character of Sr. Pevedilla, but also on the grounds that bathing in cold flowing water afforded proven health benefits. Ramón Gutiérrez del Mazo, the political chief of Mexico City who granted the permission, declared before the *junta* that swimming was a beneficial activity supported by wise policies and education, but that it was too often ignored or disdained in the heavily populated urban center. In his view, swimming should, like bathing, be promoted by enlightened government. The permit was granted under the agreement that men and women would not share the water at the same time: not even boys and girls could “have fun” together.²⁵ The fears of disorder, and the moral strictures about immersion and sharing water that those fears engendered, were centered on plebian bathing and swimming, but extended even to the private spaces of elite houses. Residents of New Spain learned to negotiate in their practices of swimming and bathing the tense opposition between the health benefits and moral degradation caused by these socioaquatic encounters, participating in this way in the disciplining process that was Police.

THE BANDO OF 1793

Together with improved administration of the *mercedes* of water and renovation of infrastructure, the viceregal government responded to chronic water shortages with a project to establish order in the use of public fountains and bathhouses. The famous modernizing viceroy of New Spain, the Second Conde of Revillagigedo, ordered a study made of the bathhouses, *temazcales*, and laundries of Mexico City, to establish the bases for an edict, or *Bando*, that reformed and regulated those establishments and the contacts that took place within them between people, and between people and water. The ordinance was proclaimed on September 24, 1792, and published in 1793. The *Bando* established rules to promote “public comfort, decency and health,” part of a wider focus on “all the objects of policing in this

Capital.” Public bathhouses were commonplace and bathing was viewed by the viceroy to be a “necessary” and indispensable practice that deserved his attention over other matters of state. It was not the first time the government issued rules for the bathhouses, but Revillagigedo complained that the government failed to hold the private bath owners and administrators to “the few rules already pronounced that favor good order and Public service.”²⁶

The viceroy, an American-born *criollo* administrator whose father served as viceroy of New Spain some forty years earlier, felt a deep commitment to colonial society and to changing it for the better. Revillagigedo brought a spirit of rational secular reform that was emblematic of the approach of the enlightenment Bourbon government, and he was notorious for his efforts at fighting corruption and enforcing the law. Similar in his governing style to Ladrón de Guevara, he proceeded systematically and scientifically in designing the new rules for bathing. First, the city sent architects and police officers (*celadores de Policía*) to visit all the existing bathhouses and evaluate their physical state, as well as the bathing practices that occurred within them. Based on these visits, the viceroy made an evaluation of the cultural traditions of bathing in Mexico City, as well as associated physical and infrastructural problems of bathhouses, before producing a long list of criteria that bathers, bathhouse owners, and employees were required to fulfill.

The 1793 *Bando* obliged all formal bathing and washing establishments to be licensed by the government, and established seventeen rules that *baños*, *temazcales*, and *lavaderos* were required to comply with. The measures were aimed at promoting “comfort, decency and public health” by stopping the “abuses, excesses and disorders that until now have reigned in the bathhouses to the detriment of the Public.” The *temazcales* were viewed with suspicion by the governing Spaniards and *criollos*, and while the religious dimensions of their use were largely gone by the beginning of the nineteenth century, some of their social and sexual aspects remained. At a very basic level this was just a question of economy: the *temazcal* required a good deal of fuel, effort, and time to heat, so men, women, and children often used the *temazcal* together once it was heated. Certain *temazcales* were also most likely sites of sexual encounters, as they had been in the precolonial period, and the Revillagigedo government tried to eliminate heterosexual sex in the bathhouses by “cutting it off at the root.” The neighborhood administrators of *Policía* were charged with enforcing the 1793 decree. Decency, or “good order,” was paramount, and the first rule of the *Bando* was that bathhouses could only serve women or men, but never both. Unlike those earlier moments in the colonial encounter when the Church sought to eradicate the entire practice of the *temazcal*, the *Bando* of 1793 promoted this form of bathing while protecting a social and moral order based on the honor of women and a notion of public health.

Other rules aimed to separate bathers and create privacy within the bathhouse itself, a project that spatialized morality along the axes of caste and class. The *Bando* decreed that individual bathing chambers should be divided into separate

rooms by unbroken walls, with no way to see bathers from the windows, or from the doors, if they were to be left open. The doors should all have locks, with keys in the possession of the bathhouse operator in case of emergency, as well as a straw mat to cover the floor and to rest upon, a bench or chair, and shelf for a candle. The *Bando* suggested that some, if not all, of the bathing chambers should have extra luxuries: a bell pull to summon the *temazcalero* to add water to the bathtub; hot and cold faucets to allow each bather to deliver all the water he or she should desire, rather than having it poured bucket by bucket by the *temazcalero*; a space for the bather's servant that was separated from the bathtub, again to maintain privacy. These rooms were for those who could afford them, while the poor used *bateas*—washbasins—housed in a single undivided room, “as was the custom.” The individuation, privacy, and class distinction of the bather was achieved by these spatial and infrastructural regulations in the bathhouse.

Along with the *placeres* and *bateas*, many bathhouses installed *temazcales* as well as *lavaderos* for washing clothes, and these too were objects of policing that reinforced social distinctions. The *temazcales* were more popular among the poor and indigenous, and by 1741 there were twenty-four of these steambaths licensed by the government to operate in the city. Fifty years later, Revillagigedo's *Bando* allowed an unlimited number of bathhouses for bathing by immersion, but insisted on maintaining the number of *temazcales* at twenty-four. In that interim, many more unlicensed *temazcales* were set up next to canals and rivers that still existed on the city's fringes, serving the poor and indigenous people who used them most. The *Bando* suggested that all *temazcales* be located on the outskirts of the city “so that the poor people would have them closer at hand.” The bathhouses of the city center, on the other hand, could focus on bathing by immersion, a practice that required the running water of the public water system. *Lavaderos* were a series of washbasins in an open space and were used by poor women. Having studied the water culture of Mexico City, the viceroy found it necessary to prohibit these washerwomen from undressing and washing the clothes they were wearing, a practice that was common at the public fountains.²⁷ Finally, the bathhouses were required to have toilets, with cesspools or connections to the city sewers in the street that would carry off the human waste along with all the used water from the *placeres*, *temazcales*, *bateas*, and *lavaderos*. Shit, an unremarkable feature of early modern urban space, was recast as reprehensible.²⁸

Police records about the enforcement of the *Bando* provide insight into bathing practices, social mores, and class dynamics in Enlightenment Mexico City. For example, in early 1793 José Molina, a neighbor of the “Padre Garrido” bathhouse, on the Calle de San Miguel, heard a ruckus coming from that business.²⁹ The neighbor happened to be the local watchman (*celador*), and knew that it was up to local police officials such as himself to uphold order and propriety in the city. The viceroy just recently announced new rules for bathhouses that were meant to eradicate the “disorder and disarray” that reigned in those establishments and to ensure orderly

bathing for the benefit of public health. José, the *celador*, was compelled to investigate what seemed to be the sort of entrenched social bathing habits among the city's indigenous and poor that the new rules were meant to eradicate. The principal rule of this new *Bando* was that bathhouses for women such as this one were off-limits to men, so naturally José peeked through the door. He saw a large group of women and four men having lunch and drinking *pulque*, an alcoholic beverage favored by Indians. As if this was not enough of an affront to the civility of the public and the will of the viceroy, one of the women was undressing while the men were present. José dutifully reported this "disorder" to his superiors at the city police.

Witnesses were called to give testimony in the government offices. Standing before the police tribunal, the *temazcalero*, a "tribute-giving Indian" from Chalco named Lorenzo Francisco Antonio, identified himself and stated that because his boss, the female bathhouse operator, was gone at the time, he gave permission for the group to have lunch inside, but told them not to bathe until all the men had left. He stepped down and the next witness—the *temazcalero*'s wife, a mestiza woman from Mexico City named María Gertrudis González—was called to give testimony. As she rose to give her deposition, Lorenzo spoke briefly and quietly to María in Nahuatl, with the Spanish police official listening attentively. María then proceeded to explain to the government officials that the group was accompanying a woman who recently gave birth (a *parida*) so that she could take the *temazcal*. It was understood by everyone in the room that such a visit to the *temazcal* was a common ritual in which relatives and friends participated, and was accompanied by food and *pulque*. The wife of the *temazcalero* finished by declaring that it was the husband of the *parida* who brought the buckets of water into the *temazcal*—not at all an indecent encounter. Last to provide testimony was María Antonia López, a Spanish woman who rented the building and operated the bathhouse. She placed the blame for the incident on the Indian *temazcalero*, saying that she was called away from her responsibilities because of a sick child, and that she did not give her employee permission to allow men and women into the bathhouse together.

When all witnesses finished their statements, the police official overseeing the depositions made a dramatic announcement. He had overheard Lorenzo Francisco murmuring instructions in Nahuatl to María Gertrudis about what to say to the tribunal, and he would lock the *temazcalero* up in jail for "seducing and guiding" her. Later, when Don Bernadeo Bonavía y Zapata ruled on the case, he found the prisoner Lorenzo Francisco guilty of the "grave excess" of allowing men and women together in the bathhouse, and of allowing "scandalous abuses, entirely prohibited." He sentenced the *temazcalero* to eight days of hard labor on public works projects, cautioning him that there would be no mercy if such a thing happened again. The Spanish bathhouse operator, on the other hand, was simply cautioned not to abandon her duties again. Lorenzo responded with the formulaic utterance of the subaltern: "I hear and I will comply, but I won't sign because I don't know how to write."³⁰

This courtroom drama tells us much about relations of inequality and power that surrounded bathing in Mexico City in the late eighteenth century. To begin with, while the *Bando* regulated bathtubs, *temazcales*, sinks, and clothes washing tubs, this and most other cases of transgressions and prosecutions only dealt with *temazcales*. The *Bando* reasserted earlier regulations that prohibited mixed-sex bathing in the *temazcales*, but said little about bathing by immersion. One judge explained in 1750 that the earlier rules were “provided by the Duke of the Conquest because there were too many disorders in those *temazcales*,” and the regulation of bathing in the 1790s continued to focus on steambaths.³¹ This shows that the regulations were an effort to change the water culture of the poorer, more indigenous social classes. *Placeres* were used by relatively affluent Spanish, creole, or mestizo people who could afford to conform to the moral standards and values of Enlightenment officials, such as privacy. Bathing by immersion in tubs of hot water was a relatively recent import to Mexico, and did not have the same deep religious, social, and sexual dimensions associated with the *temazcal*. The 1793 *Bando* certainly prohibited mixed-sex use of the *placeres*, but it influenced bathing by immersion in a more positive, rather than punitive, way through the architectural requirements it established. Clients who could pay for expensive *placeres* were to be provided with privacy and comfort: a vision for how bathing should be rather than an attack on what it should not be.

Bathing shows us how the class struggle between rulers and ruled was organized. Both the group that carried out the postpartum bathing ritual and viceroy’s capillary police organization were motivated by concepts of cleanliness, decency, and public health, but the concepts held quite different meanings for these different people. This new definition of bathing proposed by the viceroy in the *Bando* of 1793 was clearly not shared by many of the clients of the bathhouses. There was an abrupt social divide based on notions of class, race, ethnicity, honor, and decency, and on access to one or the other form of bath: *placer* or *temazcal*. The *placer* was a tradition with origins in Spain, not the Americas, and bathing by immersion was imagined in the late eighteenth century as the more refined, European form. The *Bando* aimed to refine the *placer* even further, individualizing and privatizing the bathing experience. The poor and indigenous, on the other hand, conserved practices of ritual *temazcal* bathing in groups: in the case presented above, for a woman who just went through childbirth. This bath was a social ritual celebrating the birth of a child and the survival of the mother, who was accompanied by family members and friends to support her in the care of the infant as well as in the bath itself.

Police was an exercise of rule on the terrain of culture. It was not ignorance of customs that drove the viceroy to outlaw them in the *Bando*, but rather knowledge about them gained from careful study. The delegate of the Crown to rule New Spain imposed a concept of the correct way to bathe that sought to change popular

bathing customs, obliging the mass of city residents who utilized public *temazcales* to do so quietly, orderly, individually, and in a way that repressed sexual and social dimensions in favor of emergent concepts of cleanliness, decency, and public health. Washerwomen, cleaning their own clothes as well as the clothes of their wealthier employers, were also singled out as a particular threat to the new order. They were admonished for nudity while washing; they were castigated for washing in the public fountains; they were accused of open defecation in the bathhouse.³²

Cultural attitudes toward bathing do not derive in any automatic way from the social position of an individual, and in some cases it was young indigenous women who lodged complaints with the police that a man was attending to their *temazcal*. Bruna Cisneros and her sister María, both indigenous women from Mexico City, testified against José Anselmo Escobar, *temazcalero* in the bathhouse of the Calle de las Moscas, for entering the *temazcal* to make steam by throwing water on the hot stones and to pour buckets of water over the bathers. María declared that her sister was deeply ashamed because the man saw her body, and it was this shame and sense of honor that motivated her to report the breach of the law to Molina, the local police officer. While they were at the bathhouse to take a shared *temazcal*, by no means did these poor indigenous women feel comfortable with unknown men seeing them naked or entering into the *temazcal* with them, which reflects the limits of the sociality of bathing among subaltern folks in Mexico City. Although the sense of honor and shame articulated by María was rooted in traditions that went back well before the Enlightenment, it was also at the heart of a modern sense of public decency and order expressed in the *Bando* and articulated by her testimony and those of other subaltern actors.³³

The records about policing the bathhouses in Mexico City shed light on both the emergence of modern governance and on the effects of policing on the ways people related to waters and to each other. The infractions to the *Bando* of 1793 judged by the *regidores* were brought to their attention by citizens who were local agents of Police—the *celadores*. José Molina, who took the initiative of investigating the “Padre Garrido” bathhouse described above, was from the neighborhood. The proclamation of the viceroy was enforced by the local agents of government who introduced the careful gaze of Police into people’s neighborhoods, businesses, homes, and baths. Another police officer, Onofre Ramírez, sent his wife of twenty-five years to take a *temazcal* in a women’s bathhouse he suspected of having male *temazcaleros* that mistreated the female clients. By her own account, Ramírez’ wife was lucky to have escaped unharmed by the *temazcalero*, and remained fearful of retribution for her testimony.³⁴ Considering the risks, the commitment of both husband and wife to uphold the law and police the culture of water is remarkable. We can discern in these stories how an awareness of the rules and a consciousness of the position of one’s self in relation to the rules were insinuated into everyday relationships, even the most intimate ones.

CONCLUSIONS

Water scarcity and social heterogeneity threatened to burst the levees of colonial order in the late eighteenth century. The city was imagined by its rulers to work like a human body, with its interrelated organs and circulation of fluids, and so government was seen to require the creation of infrastructure and the ordering of space. Society, too, was expected to be orderly, and government in the late colonial context was directed at managing the frictions between heterogeneous groups defined by origin, status, and *casta*. In late colonial Mexico, *policía* was the word given to this regulatory activity and institution by the viceregal government, a meaning that shifted toward “security” as the nineteenth century progressed.³⁵ A series of dictums issued by the Crown in the 1780s created institutions, codified policing, and heightened its importance to colonial administrators, especially in Mexico City.³⁶ Police encompassed the ordering of political economy and the control of urban space through the building of circulatory infrastructure and the management of wastes. It was, moreover, a moral project to manage populations by reforming behaviors and cultural practices and eliminating vices.

Public health was a key arena in which governing officials sought to expand the purview of policing. In the eighteenth century the health of people was considered to be intimately connected with the environment, as it had been since Hippocrates penned *Airs, Waters and Places*.³⁷ From this perspective, odorous airs, or miasmas, were held to be vectors of disease, and cold and heat were also blamed for health problems.³⁸ The watery urban environment of Mexico City was thought to produce these smells and airs, so public health measures tried to improve circulation of these substances and keep waste out of them. Good health depended on clean, constantly circulating water, and the government did what it could to keep the water in the city’s pipes and canals safe from the polluting contact with humans and animals, and to keep it apart from the compromised waters of the lake and the rivers. It was this conceptual link between environment and health that gave rise to the thriving fields of climatology and mineral springs medicine in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.³⁹

Water management was framed in terms of the health of the entire undifferentiated public. However, the issue of provisioning specific different groups of people in the city with liquid was never far from the surface, and much of the archival record reflects contention over the resource. Water was crucial, of course, to the livelihoods of peasants who depended on the lakes and irrigation systems for food. But water was also fundamental to the survival of the swelling urban populations of the eighteenth century. When urban water sources dwindled, or became contaminated, unrest followed. There never seemed to be enough water in the public infrastructure, especially for the expanding, peripheral neighborhoods of poor recent immigrants to the city, and so the policing of water was aimed at ensuring supply and access to the liquid for heterogeneous groups of poor and marginal

people. Water management was fraught with peril, but its positive promise could be realized by building infrastructure and shaping ideas and actions.

A major focus of policing in Enlightenment Mexico City was the practices and infrastructures of bathing. After the sixteenth century during which bathing was viewed with suspicion, it regained by the eighteenth century a privileged place among civilized customs due in part to the success of the Spanish rulers in reshaping the practice. The *temazcal* had been largely purged of its indigenous religious and sexual associations and was by that time used by all social groups for cleanliness and health. Bathing by immersion was also on the upswing, influenced by similar shifts in Europe and North America and the encouragement of Enlightenment governments. The sciences of medicine and chemistry were growing quickly in the service of public health, and they focused on water and the positive improvements that could be achieved through its management.⁴⁰ Despite these changes, bathing retained worrisome moral and civic dangers. It cleaned and healed, but was also still a setting for sexual and social encounters that the government, as always, strived to prevent. Bodies were separated; men and women kept apart. Bathing by immersion was increasingly individualized and bathing in the *temazcal*—always a group activity—was segregated by gender.

While the contours of this overall shift in water culture are clear, a close look at the archives shows us that would be a mistake to award too much coherence, or effectiveness, to the project of Police. Far from a steamroller of spiritual history that functionalized people to the demands of bourgeois society, Police in Mexico City was a series of declarations, actions, and decisions, not always interconnected, that percolated unevenly through the urban underclass. The institutions of Police were similarly incomplete, with partial coverage and selective application. What policing does show is how the daily frictions between rulers and ruled were organized along lines of race, class, sex, and ethnicity, and how universalizing concepts such as “nation,” “public,” and “citizen” were deployed by the government and reworked with differing content by people according to their position within specific fields of power. Enlightenment water governance was an incomplete and fragmented project that would nonetheless gain strength over the following two centuries.