

Separate Spheres: Soldaderas and Feminists in Revolutionary Mexico

A Senior Honors Thesis

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for graduation with research distinction in
History in the undergraduate colleges of The Ohio State University.

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May 2010

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Acknowledgements

Many people aided me in the completion of this work. Within the libraries David Lincove pointed me toward sources both within the university and in various online databases, while Steve Rogers provided crucial microfilm reels to me that otherwise would have been unavailable when Ackerman Library's collections were being moved to the newly-completed Thompson Library. Lisa Warren worked with me on several Spanish documents to translate them. Professor Guisela Latorre provided wonderful comments and insight as a member of my defense committee, and Professor Donna Guy's training and help throughout my senior year gave me the ability to better interpret and write about my sources. My advisor, Professor Stephanie Smith, went over my work each week and took a tremendous amount of time helping me to refine my topic, find other sources, and reinterpret traditional findings—without her help and support, this thesis could not have been written. My family, particularly my father, always encouraged my love of history, and Samuel Tinianow helped me throughout the process with brainstorming, editing, and general support. To all of them, I give my most heartfelt thanks, and any errors still remaining in this work are solely mine.

Introduction

Capture in Cuernavaca

In January of 1914, the U.S. Consulate in Mexico issued a report concerning a young girl from Mexico City who had traveled to Cuernavaca.¹ Federal troops had ordered her brother's execution for political reasons, and their mother had gone insane from watching his execution. The girl left her job, an office position in Mexico City, and went to Cuernavaca to see her mother. Upon her arrival, the Federal officers in charge, fearing her to be a sympathizer working for enemy troops, strip-searched her and left her naked and alone in the military prison. She remained a prisoner, and the officers fed her on bread and water while they pressed her for military knowledge and confessions about her rebel sympathies, and at one point threatened her with death. After the girl protested her innocence, the officers then took her from the Cuernavaca prison to the Veracruz military prison. There she worked in the Commandante's office as a clerk until she was able to go back to her job in Mexico City, presumably without ever having seen her mother. Throughout her ordeal her only source of comfort was "a woman (soldadera) about the prison [who] took pity on her, however, and loaned her a blanket." The report specifies that the woman who gave the girl a blanket was one of the many women following the troops to provide for the soldiers' needs. Opposing armies captured such women with impunity.

The consular document described in unusual detail the shared experiences of two women from different social spheres: the middle-class secretary and the soldadera of the Mexican Revolution, who suffered from unnecessarily harsh treatment by Federal officers. Yet the suffering of the two women was not unusual given the place of Mexican women within society.

¹ NARA, Record Group 59, Microfilm Roll 34, 1910-1929.

The administration of Porfirio Díaz, which extended from 1876 to 1910 and directly preceded the revolutionary period, had made few strides in educational reform or diversifying occupational choices for higher-class women. The occupational options for women depended on their social class. While higher-class women could distinguish themselves through work for the Catholic Church or become teachers, middle-class women could depend only on vocational schools that admitted women but did not give special attention to them. The indifference of the Porfirian government to the lower-classes meant that the poorest women had few options other than to work as domestic servants, exploited peons working rural farms, market women or prostitutes.

While those revering the ideals of the Mexican Revolution believed that the revolution itself would be the great equalizer, it did not prove to be so, either between women and men or between the different groups of women in Mexican society. Feminists took encouragement from the promise of better opportunities to demand more equality. As a result, female participation in the revolution was not an alien concept. Yet where the fighting occurred, soldiers raided villages and carried off women in order to make them their *soldaderas*, or camp-followers, who went with the army and cooked, bore their children, and sometimes fought in problematic circumstances. Lower-class women suffered both from their exploited status as prostitutes or wives of exploited indigenous workers, and risked capture and death by following their men into the military. As a result, the *soldaderas* became the subjects, not only for moralists who disapproved of their sexual attachment to their men, but for feminists who deplored their following the armies and as a result dismissed the poorer women as rabble. Moreover, feminists themselves did not achieve sexual or political equality after the revolution, despite their participation in it. As Susie Porter demonstrates, the Constitution of 1917 did establish protective laws for working women.² Yet

² Susie Porter, *Working Women in Mexico City: Public Discourses and Material Conditions, 1879-1931* (Tucson,

this did not translate into specific laws designating the legal equality of women to men, and in the 1920's, during a complicated period for Mexican feminism, enduring attitudes regarding pre-existing gender roles remained tenacious obstacles for women. This situation proved even more complicated with the effects of the revolution that strengthened an already sharply delineated categorization of “good” women and “bad” women, who refrained from equal interaction in society.

My paper examines two ostensibly unrelated groups of women during the Mexican Revolution for the purpose of highlighting the experiences of revolutionary women, and the similarities due to their gender. In my examination of the soldaderas, I make the point that they occupied a separate category of analysis that contrasted with the concurrent feminist activities. To modern feminist observers, the role of the soldaderas may appear empowering, yet their sexual and domestic roles within the military acted as limitations for them. In turn, class consciousness caused feminists to dismiss the soldaderas because of their social status and instead group them into the same category of underprivileged women whom the feminists felt a duty to reform and help, rather than join. Therefore, the soldaderas were already at a disadvantage from before the revolution due to their social class, and their apparent immorality and willingness to follow the troops lent more stigma to their image in the eyes of the feminists.

This paper emphasizes the difficulty of the soldaderas' roles within the army, as they suffered criticism for filling the armies' essential needs that aimed at their domestic role. They were, due to their indispensable logistical contributions to the armies of the leaders that participated in the Mexican Revolution and instituted change, as vital to the formation of a new Mexico as the feminists were to new gender expectations and rights for women. Yet the widely

Arizona: University of Arizona Press, 2003), 174-176.

different social roles of the feminists and the soldaderas polarized the women into traditional dichotomies of elite and poor. Accordingly, another focus of this paper is on the activities of Mexican feminists with an emphasis of the implications of their actions toward lower-class women, while acknowledging the similarities of the criticisms both groups of women endured. Despite being more respectable due to their social class, the feminist movement into the 1920's did not accomplish equality through work or the elimination of gender stereotypes.

Clearly, marked differences distinguished these groups of revolutionary women. While the feminists did not gain equality, they earned respect for encouraging the revolution and for their social standing. The soldaderas had no such legitimacy. As they were targets of criticism and condescension both from male Mexican politicians and feminist groups, the soldaderas only remained the subject of popular folklore after the revolution. The feminists themselves contributed to the disregard of the soldaderas' contributions by maintaining the class-consciousness that ridiculed the soldaderas in the first place. However, their careful maintenance of their status did not gain them more respect through their activism. While class divided the two groups of women, the example of the soldadera and the girl from Mexico City in the Cuernavaca military prison show that both groups remained targets of the gender boundaries of the time. Yet despite the barriers of class, the mere visibility of both the soldaderas and the feminists as groups of women influential in bringing about the revolution, contributed to a reshaping of Mexican female identity that would emerge in subsequent decades. While the feminists' pursuit of more rights for women contributed to greater opportunities for female organization or enjoyment of certain aspects of citizenship, the soldaderas also contributed to this reshaping. The unusual circumstances of the revolution provided a new stage for the soldaderas to transgress gender boundaries through their association with the armies themselves, and their increased visibility in

this way added facets of revolutionary patriotism to the traditional image of camp follower that observers would otherwise solely perceive in them. Thus, their sexual and domestic roles were conceivably a method of subversion rather than accordance with tradition. Both the revolutionary feminists and the soldaderas presented different facets of what the place of women in national progression entailed in the Mexican Revolution.

A Note on Terminology, Methodology, and Organization

This paper deals with specific labels in regards to the soldaderas and elite women. Here, I use the term “rural” to indicate lower-class and often indigenous women who were subject to class condescension. These women, for the most part, formed the ranks of the soldaderas.³ In the Mexican military, some women participated within the military without subservience to males and distinguished themselves through their own valor and independence, yet they were not a major part of the army. Despite the varying opinions concerning how to label these women, I refer to them as soldier-women, not soldaderas.⁴ As this study deals with the social implications of the feminists and the soldaderas, I do not discuss soldier-women. The soldaderas, mostly the wives, lovers, or relatives of the men going to war and who accordingly took care of the needs of their men, formed a distinct entity within the army, requiring historiographical scrutiny to address

³ Shirlene Soto, *Emergence of the Modern Mexican Women: Her Participation in Revolution and the Struggle for Equality: 1910-1940* (Denver, Colorado: Arden Press Inc, 1990), 44.

⁴ Andrés Reséndez Fuentes, “Battleground Women: Soldaderas and Female Soldiers in the Mexican Revolution,” *The Americas*, Vol. 51, No. 4 (Apr. 1995): 525, 546-547. See also Alicia Arrizón's essay “Soldaderas and the Staging of the Mexican Revolution”; Arrizón defines the soldaderas as soldier-women in her examination of the role of soldaderas in postrevolutionary culture. Martha Eva Rocha includes the women who fought for ideological reasons as soldaderas. Jocelyn Olcott, however, names the soldadera as a camp follower and the soldier-woman as a soldada. Alicia Arrizón, “Soldaderas and the Staging of the Mexican Revolution,” *TDR* (1988-), Vol. 42, No. 1 (Spr. 1998): 90; Jocelyn Olcott, *Revolutionary Women in Postrevolutionary Mexico* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2005), 17; Martha Eva Rocha, “The Faces of Rebellion: From Revolutionaries to Veterans in Mexico City,” in *The Women's Revolution in Mexico: 1910-1953*, ed. Stephanie Mitchell and Patience A. Schell (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007), 15.

the gendered expectations of them. Often, society conflated issues of class and ethnicity, so that indigenous women received the same condescension as the soldaderas, which this paper explores.⁵

I apply the term feminist to women of the middle- and upper-classes who involved themselves in promoting legal equality and, as discussed later in this thesis, sometimes advocated female suffrage as methods to advance the ideals of the revolution. Because this study deals mainly with the social influence of higher-class, revolutionary feminists, the women activists of the labor movement and those who fought for the preservation of the Catholic Church in Mexico are not included in this reference, for the purpose of this paper's discussion.

Besides the many valuable secondary sources that analyze the history of Mexican feminism and the soldaderas, I also have examined a wealth of primary sources dealing with these topics. My aim has been to uncover the nuances and implications of these primary documents for the purpose of more in-depth analysis of their significance.

I have organized this paper chronologically, to examine the roles of the soldaderas during the revolution, and feminists in the Porfiriato, in the years during the revolution, and in the immediate postrevolutionary period, up until 1930.

⁵ As Stephen E. Lewis writes, "Although the categories of 'Indian' and 'mestizo' initially had purely racial or biological meanings, they gradually took on socioeconomic connotations as the colonial caste system slowly gave way to a hierarchy based on class and behavior, and as generations of miscegenation made the caste system too unwieldy." Stephen E. Lewis, "The Nation, Education, and the 'Indian Problem' in Mexico, 1920-1940," in *The Eagle and the Virgin: Nation and Cultural Revolution in Mexico, 1920-1940*, ed. Stephen E. Lewis and Mary Kay Vaughan (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2006), 177.

Chapter 1: Soldaderas and Feminists Before the Revolution

Soldaderas in Pre-Revolutionary Mexico

If the government under the Porfiriato was skeptical of female doctors and scientists and negligent towards the working class, it openly exploited the very low classes and peons. As the ideal of womanhood in Mexico consisted of the woman who only used her education to better herself as a wife and mother, it remained open only to the women who had the economic luxury to conform. Lower-class women who invariably had to work in some form could not conform to this ideal, and so did not enter into considerations of proper femininity at all. These perceptions degraded lower-class women, not only from the association with prostitution that the poorer women of the Porfiriato suffered from, but also due to their inability to be genteelly idle.

Indeed, sometimes prostitution was their only recourse. Poorer women made up a large percentage of the prostitutes in Mexico City.⁶ The prevalence of poorer women in the city selling their bodies for survival, and the Porfirian conflation of the issues of labor and sexual morality, gave rise to and reinforced the stereotype of women of the poorer class having little virtue at all. As Katherine Bliss writes concerning Porfirian Mexico City, “[Doctor Luis Lara y Pardo, social hygienist] made careful notes of the kinds of occupations from which prostitutes came, studied the women's fathers' professions, considered the women's stated level of education, and concluded that most capital city prostitutes were poor, rural migrants who had little schooling and pitifully few vocational skills.”⁷ This stereotype influenced the image of the soldadera the

⁶ Anna Macías, *Against All Odds: The Feminist Movement in Mexico to 1940* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1982), 12-13.

⁷ Katherine Elaine Bliss, *Compromised Positions: Prostitution, Public Health, and Gender Politics in Revolutionary Mexico* (University Park, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2001), 33; Anna Macías writes, “[Dr. Lara y Pardo's] contempt, and in fact, his hatred for women prostitutes is apparent on every

country would have after the Porfiriato. Their social place and the often loosely-defined relationship parameters between prostitutes and the men they followed, signified to feminists no more than an extension of the lascivious lower-class women unable to provide for themselves in a legitimate manner.

Soldaderas, as opposed to the feminist groups, were a noticeable presence in Mexican society since before the Conquest as camp-followers through various conflicts. In pre-Conquest times separate groups of women served as both military aides and options for sexual gratification for the soldiers.⁸ The perception of soldaderas as having secondary sexual purposes may well have originated before the formation of the Mexican state, dating from pre-colonial perceptions. The connotations of immorality that the image of the soldadera held, not only from her travels with the armies but also because of the Mexican conflation of the lower classes with absence of personal honor, did not change. Indeed, in her study of the soldaderas, Elizabeth Salas provides an example of an academic sociologist, Julio Guerrero, who supported the image of the soldadera as debauched and her presence among the military as pointless. Guerrero made his conclusions in 1901, nine years before the outbreak of the Mexican Revolution. Yet Salas's conclusion fails to analyze exactly why Guerrero would think the way he did: "While some soldaderas were docile and easily manipulated by soldiers and officers, others were not so easily cowed...[they] could leave one soldier employer and work for another at will. And it was not unusual for soldaderas to disobey officers' orders if they seemed unduly harsh."⁹

Salas's statement does not necessarily emphasize the independence of the soldaderas.

page [of his work, *La prostitución en México*]. After reading his work one can more clearly understand why "los de abajo" ("the underdogs") who took up arms in 1910 viewed all educated and well-dressed persons with suspicion." Macías, *Against All Odds*, 169.

⁸ Elizabeth Salas, *Soldaderas in the Mexican Military: Myth and History* (Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, 1990), 7-9.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 37.

Rather, her attempt to clarify the variables in their positions merely emphasizes the same reasons why Guerrero labeled them as shameless, and her critique of Guerrero loses potency when juxtaposed with the fact that the soldaderas, while making choices as to which man to follow and what orders to disobey, had very little choice in whether to refuse to follow the troops at all. Nevertheless, Salas's assertion of their ingenuity is accurate. The soldaderas proved to be willing and able allies, both in political demonstrations and in their following the military by acting as providers to the soldiers or military backup. The absence of real independence from serving men due to the nature of their involvement in the revolution also stemmed from their inability to protect themselves if they did not follow the troops, as well as from pre-existing gender norms that gave them little opportunity to distinguish their personal independence. Yet this did not negate the importance of their contributions to the armies that ended up shaping the country's history. Because of the roles that the soldaderas fulfilled, they were not necessarily different from their predecessors in the practical sense, but the unusual circumstances of the Mexican Revolution led to new perceptions of them, both of the efficacy of their roles and whether women had any place at all in the army of a nation moving toward modernity.

A compelling United States newspaper article from September 1911 told a story of influential and powerful pre-Columbian women in South America who, the article stated, “fought with unequalled fury, and who won a place equal to, if not above, that of men in the community.”¹⁰ According to the article, these women, the fabled Amazons in South America, distinguished themselves in battle. The article referred to such women as suffragettes, to create a connection with the contemporaneous women in North America who were campaigning for the right to vote. Ironically, although the author clearly wrote this article to prove that gender

¹⁰ “Suffragettes in America Before Columbus Came,” *The New York Times*, September 17, 1911.

disputes stretched from long before the controversial United States women suffrage activists, the article's suffragette Amazons mirrored contemporary Mexico's soldaderas. The story also implied that long-established restrictions against women in Latin American countries still had not been rectified. The author clearly felt that the mention of such women was opportune, due to the contemporary political situation that was overtaking the whole of Mexico and redefining its internal society.

The Growth of Mexican Feminism in the Porfiriato

The Porfiriato witnessed the emergence of the modern feminist movement that would extend into the later twentieth century both in forms of organization and cases for argument of their positions. During the Porfiriato, the educational and vocational achievements of women contributed to the emergence of the feminist voice. Upper-class women had the option of attending ecclesiastical schools for education, while middle- and working-class women attended the Porfiriato-era schools for training in medical (nursing) and teaching positions. Teachers, particularly, while not receiving much pay, also received societal accolades for their roles in instructing children, which conservative elements meant to emphasize the maternal qualities in the women of Mexico.¹¹ Women willing to face the tide of occupational chauvinism could also obtain degrees in legal or medical fields, but this was the exception, not the rule.¹² Nevertheless, with the concept of female doctors and scientists so alien, public wonder at their achievements gave these women the opportunity to champion increased education for women due to their fame.

The emergence of feminist groups during the Porfiriato served to illuminate the tenacious

¹¹ Anna Macías states, “It is clear from the fulsome praise these women received that in their self-sacrificing devotion to their young students they were conforming to the role that had always been expected of women in Mexican society.” Macías, *Against All Odds*, 10.

¹² *Ibid.*, pp 11-12.

nature of perceptions of proper femininity. As William E. French writes, “According to Luz Fernández M., an alumna of [one of the schools for young women in Chihuahua] education existed to enable woman better to fulfill her role as man's auxiliary.”¹³ In other words, men gave women the gift of education, and it was not intended to enable female aspirations. The concept of women's roles being essential as the mothers of Mexican citizens also proved to be empty praise. As Nikki Craske writes, “Women's role was acknowledged to be important for the state, but not sufficiently so for women to be given a political voice or citizenship rights.”¹⁴ Female education, in the Mexican context, should complement the man's social role, not upset.

Demonstrating both men's increased concern for the profligacy of the lower classes and increased female independence, William French writes, “middle-class Mexicans insisted that women's 'natural' place was in the home...they were troubled by the relaxation of public morals.”¹⁵ The socially sanctioned boundaries of women involved remaining at home and using whatever assets they possessed to benefit their husbands and families, not themselves (including their education). Yet women in the working- and lower-classes could not necessarily depend on their husbands to shoulder the burden of breadwinner. Correspondingly, these feminine ideals targeted the women of the upper and middle classes instead of poorer women.¹⁶

One of the first markers of the formal feminist movement in Mexico in the twentieth century came with the publication of *La Mujer Mexicana* in 1904. Founded by Dr. Columba River, María Sandoval de Zarco, and Dolores Correa Zapata, it gave women with the desire to express their opinions in print the opportunity to contribute to its pages. Significantly, this

¹³ William E. French, “Prostitutes and Guardian Angels: Women, Work, and the Family in Porfirian Mexico,” *The Hispanic American Historical Review*, Vol. 72, No. 4 (Nov. 1992): 533.

¹⁴ Nikki Craske, “Ambiguities and Ambivalences in Making the Nation: Women and Politics in 20th-Century Mexico,” *Feminist Review*, No. 79, Latin America: History, War, and Independence (2005): 120.

¹⁵ French, “Prostitutes and Guardian Angels,” 530.

¹⁶ Craske, “Ambiguities and Ambivalences in Making the Nation,” 120.

journal gathered writing from the Porfirian-era women who had distinguished themselves educationally or vocationally, and helped to create a forum that coalesced the female community in Mexico into coherent groups with specific demands.¹⁷ The presence of active women's voices in itself challenged the assumption that women, like children, should be seen and not heard.

In *La Mujer Mexicana*, women could put forth any argument in favor of the advancement of their sex. Notably, the arguments did possess a strong class-consciousness. For example, Profesora Esther Huidobro de Azua believed that education would help women shine not only in the home but if they desired to support themselves. She also believed that educated women had a responsibility to keep lower-class women from resorting to prostitution.¹⁸ While advocating for the education of middle-class women so they could support themselves, and of higher-class women so they could act as beneficiaries to lower-class women, Profesora Azua emphasized the degeneracy of prostitution and therefore implied that women who sold their bodies, unlike other women employed in textile or seamstress jobs, engaged in the deepest immorality. In this way, the feminist desire for better education took on the prejudices of sexuality about women in this period: that common decency forbade women the right to do as they wished with their bodies. Profesora Azua made her conclusions within a greater social context that conflated the issue of sexual immorality with the work of lower-class women. Indeed, as Susie Porter demonstrates, the question of sexual decency among working women was a prominent one in the sphere of Porfirian industrialization. Doctor Luis Lara y Pardo's 1908 study of prostitution in Mexico City emphasized that women who did not attempt to preserve social boundaries were those who only used employment to rise above their proper place.¹⁹ As a result, the poorer women of the

¹⁷ Macías, *Against All Odds*, 13-14.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 14.

¹⁹ Porter, *Working Women in Mexico City*, 65.

working class were more likely to turn to prostitution or other sexual misconduct to finance their attempts at gentility.

The question of equal rights between men and women was, predictably, a controversial one. While feminist groups in the Porfiriato desired greater legal equality, that did not translate to the perfect equality among all groups. However, Anna Macías emphasizes the desires of the feminists for equal legal sexual standards regarding husbands and wives.²⁰ Society in general was hard-pressed to give up the gender roles and class boundaries that it had held to for centuries. In 1904, the same year of *La Mujer Mexicana's* creation, writer Ignacio Gamboa argued that feminism was adding to the problems of sexual deviancies such as lesbianism.²¹

The periodical *La Mujer Mexicana* and the work of Ignacio Gamboa represent only a small sample of a much larger number of exchanges in the pre-revolutionary period that were nonetheless similar in content. Equality for all proved to be a controversial concept that provoked opposition from both men and women. For the first time in Mexico, coherent groups had emerged advocating female rights rather than the sporadic attempt to gain recognition by a few individuals, but the early twentieth-century feminists had a difficult time. However, the feminists accomplished much by organizing their ideas in such a way that recognized them to be capable of thoughts and opinions. Correspondingly, whether or not others agreed with the assertion that Mexican law presented a double standard for male and female, the existence of a coherent argument to that purpose contributed a great deal to drawing deserved attention (if not always support) to their cause.

²⁰ Macías, *Against All Odds*, 14-15.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 16.

Latin American Feminism Before the Mexican Revolution

With the arrival of the revolution, the visibility of the feminists and their opportunities increased, even if their struggles did not necessarily become easier. Their roles as advocates for more gender equality met with disapproval and criticism, in the same way that the actions of the soldaderas earned the disapproval and criticism of generals and even foreign observers. The difference was that the soldaderas presented a force for the potential disruption of the army, while the feminists fought to dislodge long-standing gender boundaries.

In the pre-revolutionary period, Mexican feminists began to take more active roles in specifying the changes they desired. Feminists argued that a woman's importance to the nation was monumental, for she helped to raise good citizens and uphold modern ideals for younger generations. Women also deserved legal rights and access to jobs. However, the places that Mexican women held socially and legally at the beginning of the twentieth century were not conducive to their enjoying full legal rights. The Civil Code mandated that “the domicile of a married woman not separated from her husband, is that of the latter...”²² The law therefore made illegal the concept of a woman living apart from her husband except in times of marital strife. The code also stated: “Legal cases of divorce are: 1, Adultery of the husband or wife; that of the wife is always cause for divorce, but that of the husband only where the offense was committed in the conjugal home, or the guilty parties have established a concubinage...”²³ The unequivocal right of the husband to divorce his wife for her adultery in any way, shape or form, contrasted with the fact that only technical qualifications made the husband's adultery grounds for divorce. This particularly irked the feminists, who desired one single sexual standard in the household.

²² Joseph Wheless, *Compendium of the Laws of Mexico* (St. Louis, Missouri: The F.H. Thomas Law Book Co., 1910), 57.

²³ *Ibid.*, 95.

Yet the sexual and moral aspect of the article and feminist opposition to it meant that conservative elements would hold up the latter as examples of the degeneracy of the feminists in general.²⁴ The Civil Code, however, provides an enlightening glimpse into the social implications of both the soldaderas and the feminists. The soldaderas were of the lower classes that often did not undergo formal marriage ceremonies. As the feminists were of the upper classes, they had the most interest in preserving legal rights for women through marriage laws. Yet the fact that the soldaderas did follow the law in making the locations of their soldier husbands, in legal terms, their domiciles, exhibits that the concept of the dutiful wife was not only a legal norm that the Civil Code sanctioned but also was a model for the lower classes to emulate in order to attempt social legitimacy.

Laws such as the Civil Code were symbols of female inequalities that were not limited to Mexico. In the early twentieth century, gender perceptions in Latin American countries such as Chile and Argentina presented opportunities for debate. The observation of double standards due to gender boundaries caused much discussion and variations in opinions. Indeed, some women who dedicated themselves to gaining more equality still subscribed to the view that the proper place of a woman was as a good mother and wife. In 1909, an article in *The New York Times* described one Señorita Huidobro from Chile who, far from expressing admiration of women in the United States, reproached North American women for their lack of interest in motherhood and also for placing too many demands on their husbands.²⁵ Señorita Huidobro then defended the work ethics of the Spanish woman, and declared, “And I don't believe in woman's right [sic]—I believe in equality before the law.” Her statements mirrored the desires of Porfirian feminists

²⁴ Macías, *Against All Odds*, 15.

²⁵ “Tells Wives How to Manage Husbands [sic],” *The New York Times*, March 2, 1909.

who focused on legal rights rather than more social changes such as suffrage. These women display the difficulty of navigating an acceptable balance between outright, revolutionary gender ideas and their devotion to traditional gender roles that had always prevailed in their own homes.

One article illustrating the masculine approval of the reticent and submissive woman appeared in the Mexican newspaper *El Dictamen* in September 1910, the same year the Mexican Revolution began. Titled “La Mujer Buena”, the short article glorified traditionally female virtues and explained that the best type of woman was the one who remained quiet and humble.²⁶ This piece reflected the pre-existing gender perceptions of the time, and portrayed the generalized idealization of women with conservatively feminine attributes as ideal. The article exemplifies the traditional gender roles of the period, and the very boundaries that feminists in Mexico attempted to shift. “La Mujer Buena” offered a conservative viewpoint toward gender that appeared frequently in Mexican newspapers.

Anna Macías acknowledged that “Argentina had previously been the leader in women's emancipation and had hosted the first feminist congress in Latin American in 1910.”²⁷ Yet, it, too, faced prostitution dilemmas. According to Donna Guy, Buenos Aires also paralleled Mexico City in the nineteenth century in that it faced similar concentrations of prostitution (though these numbers did not comprise indigenous women but rather immigrants.) Furthermore, it legalized “female prostitution to isolate and, it hoped, control the social and medical consequences of commercial sex.”²⁸ City officials considering working women who resorted to prostitution as social elements whose harmful influences upon the greater population had to be limited. Yet, as in Mexico, higher-class women, to whom ideals of proper femininity were meant to apply, still

²⁶ “La Mujer Buena,” *El Dictamen*, September 30, 1910.

²⁷ Macías, *Against All Odds*, 177.

²⁸ Donna Guy, *Sex and Danger in Buenos Aires: Prostitution, Family, and Nation in Argentina* (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1991), 47.

had to contend with the idealization that often went hand-in-hand with female objectification. Portrayals of women as perfect wives and mothers from men would seem to be praise, but unfortunately such descriptions pointedly omit the presence of any testimony from the women themselves about their role.

In a clear example of such idealization, French Premier Georges Clemenceau wrote a lengthy article for *The New York Times* expressing his admiration for the women of Argentina. Clemenceau discoursed at length about the beauty and accomplishments of Argentine women, comparing them favorably to European women and praising their domestic and social presence.²⁹ The piece is ostensibly the reliable testimony of a leader who in popular perception would be expert in judging admirable femininity and its place within culture. As a result, Argentine women arise from this study as stylish and tender foils to their foreign counterparts. Markedly missing from Clemenceau's piece is the presence of any descriptions of firsthand interactions with women, and as a result, there is no presence of an Argentine female voice in his verbal picture. Such romanticization only lent itself further to the gender barriers as it de-emphasized the importance of women's opinions and, rather, placed importance on how well women performed their roles of being decorative or servile.

The juxtaposition of Señorita Huidobro's description of Latin women, *El Dictamen's* "La Mujer Buena", and Clemenceau's romanticized portrait of Argentine women presents both the problems that women in Latin America faced in terms of claiming more rights, but the case of Señorita Huidobro also presents the issue of women who maintained a delicate balance between not condemning outright every expectation of them and desiring more legal equality. Señorita Huidobro was, in her own words, an "old maid", and by inference was of a high enough social

²⁹ "Clemenceau Pays Tribute to the Women of Argentina," *The New York Times*, March 12, 1911.

status to remain unmarried without severe economic repercussions. Nevertheless, she still felt the need to proclaim the superiority of Latin women in the sphere of managing families to women of the United States who struggled for equality. The articles also display a dilemma in women of Latin America being obligated to present exemplary portraits of their sex. Clemenceau's article makes use of sweeping generalizations of Argentine women who were clearly in the upper class, while *El Dictamen's* ideals of femininity likewise were ones that did not apply to the lower classes. Yet Señorita Huidobro made her statements with the intention of being a representative for other Latin women who suffered the stereotypes of perceived laziness. These examples display concern, overall, for the picture that upper-class women presented to the world even as they attempted to manipulate it for more respect, as Señorita Huidobro clearly attempted to do by emphasizing the need for women to respect the privacy of their husbands if they desired to be good wives (despite her single state). As rural, poorer women did not have the same esteemed image as that of higher-class women, they had little to no social influence, but what influence the higher-class women did possess could suffer from their espousal of more radical ideas. In Mexico, to facilitate change, women needed outside support for their ideas to allow them greater freedom to speak out, as well as set a stage for their social and political attempts. To this end, they utilized the support of revolutionary leaders by working for land distribution among the lower classes and thus gained places in the political sphere.

Chapter 2: The Arrival of Revolution

Porfirio Díaz became President of Mexico in 1876, and his government ostensibly ushered Mexico into an era of modernity, yet with the price of notoriety attached. He repeatedly ran for president, relying upon rigged elections to keep himself in power. He was committed to the ideals of nineteenth century liberalism, which included dedication to economic development.³⁰ Díaz attempted to develop Mexico economically by allowing foreigners to use the land for various industrial purposes. The peons who normally worked this land for themselves were either forced to work the land so that foreign companies could gain the revenues for themselves, or starved.³¹ As John Mason Hart writes, “In 1910, 90 percent of the Mexican campesino population was without land.”³²

The Mexican Revolution, therefore, began as a reaction to the Porfiriato. In 1910, despite his own declaration to the contrary, Díaz ran for the Presidency again. Francisco I. Madero, who led an increasingly strong anti-reelectionist group in Mexico, was his opponent, despite the fact that Díaz had no intention of allowing a fair campaign.³³ Yet his repressive tactics against other candidates and his brief imprisonment of Madero to gain the Presidency earned him public ire. Madero, especially popular among the rural workers for his promises of land reform, wasted no time in proclaiming Díaz's actions illegal, and he eventually succeeded in driving the former dictator from Mexico. Madero's problems, however, came to a head when the leader of the army, Victoriano Huerta, led a revolt against Madero, deposed him on February 18, 1913, and then

³⁰ John Mason Hart, *Revolutionary Mexico* (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1987), 109.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 158-159.

³² *Ibid.*, 162.

³³ *Ibid.*, 102.

executed him.³⁴ In response, Generals Francisco “Pancho” Villa, Emiliano Zapata, Venustiano Carranza, and Álvaro Obregón all retaliated militarily against Huerta, who resigned in 1914.³⁵ During this period, the Constitutionals Carranza and Obregón, and the Conventionists Zapata and Villa all wanted to bring Mexico into the twenty-first century in accordance with their own ideals. They fought throughout Mexico, bringing waves of both conservative soldiers and agrarian revolutionaries, as well as the women who followed them, in their wake.

The tumultuous political scene in Mexico with the departure of Porfirio Díaz thus brought forth military and political leaders who wished to shoulder the responsibility of transforming Mexico into a modern nation. The very violence of the revolution catapulted the country into a new era that, due to the riotous involvement of the whole country, acted as a watershed that reframed the concepts of citizenship in Mexico to include people with ideas, instead of the old norms of hacendado and peon, white and indigenous. These norms remained, but the revolution allowed for the push of ideas such as universal suffrage and equality of land ownership. Feminists attempted to reframe the place of women in society.

While the military did not view the soldaderas as a legitimate group, they remained an important part of the army.³⁶ At the same time, Mexican feminists eagerly demonstrated their intentions, and had a great deal to contend with in society. The soldaderas were not necessarily more accepted, but they did possess the benefit of precedence to their cause as the army depended on them, and in any case they did not advocate gender equality or make the same

³⁴ Ibid., 261.

³⁵ Ibid., 13-14, 276-280.

³⁶ As they had always acted as the unofficial commissariat, the Mexican military apparently saw no need to create an official one, despite disapproving of the presence of the soldaderas. The soldaderas continued their work in the Mexican military even into the Porfiriato, despite lack of military conflict during this period. The women continued providing food for the men, reasonably enough since the soldiers still needed to eat, even if they were not necessarily on call.

claims for better education and treatment as the feminist groups. Since formal feminist organizations were relatively recent in Mexico, they had not made much headway into the attitudes and laws of the times. The revolution, however, gave both the soldaderas and the feminists the opportunity to prove their patriotism by their aiding the new political forces at work.

Throughout Mexico's history, the soldaderas and feminists deserved recognition for their different roles. Had they been able to work together, they would have been able to extend legitimacy to each other's roles by demanding rights and attention together as two extremes of Mexican womanhood, high and low. Indeed, such an alliance would have challenged the traditional dichotomy of the perception of women as being arbiters of either morality and proper behavior or debauchery and irresponsibility. Yet this same dichotomy led to the feminists and soldaderas being set against each other. The upper-class feminists scorned the soldaderas for their submission to their soldiers and their dubious morals, or treated to them condescendingly as victims of a poorer class who could only turn to prostitution, while the soldaderas refrained from allying themselves with feminist causes due to this difference in social class. The revolution's high-profile utilization of soldaderas emphasized the stereotype of the poor or indigenous woman with easy virtue, and thus polarized the two groups further. Yet the presence of both examples displayed an emergence of Mexican female social presence.

Chapter 3: The Revolution and the Soldaderas

The Visibility of the Soldaderas

Women aided revolutionary armies since the beginning of the conflict. Although a number of sources do not make clear if women always fought, it is reasonable that some followed the army for ideological reasons and took advantage of opportunities to help. A *New York Times* from April 1911 told of a battle at Agua Prieta where the Federales were trying to regain control of the site. The leader of the rebels was one Balasario Garcia. The article noted: “...still further to the rear [of Garcia's troops was] the little army of Señora Telamantes and her two daughters, the strength of which is not known here.”³⁷ Though the women were at the rear of the rest of the army and the journalist who wrote the article seemed uncertain as to designate what role they filled, the women's initiative at being present at the battle was noteworthy to the article's author.

Accounts of the soldaderas become more frequent and detailed upon the death of Francisco Madero in 1913 at the hands of Victoriano Huerta's forces. With the murder of Madero, the country suffered a division into several armies, the most prominent of which were led by Emiliano Zapata, Francisco “Pancho” Villa, Venustiano Carranza, and Álvaro Obregón. As this was when the conflict escalated the most, the numbers of soldaderas grew and became more conspicuous with the enlargement of those fighting. By this time, the soldaderas had become a visible entity within the army, and observers noted that these women cooked for the men and carried their children with them. They had become important enough to foreign observers to classify them as a separate part of the army, illustrated by a report of Mexican prisoners held at Forts Wingate, Rosecrans, McIntosh, Brownsville, and Bliss. The report noted

³⁷ “Battle Day and Night,” *The New York Times*, April 18, 1911.

that out of a total of 4,804 “Mexican military prisoners; 988 are Mexican women (soldaderas)...”³⁸ The confusion about their overall role led to a lack of uniformity in how others labeled them. A telegram from Veracruz in 1913 by Consul Canada reported that a group of “thirty marauders led by woman [sic]” robbed a Mexican plantation.³⁹ The women, in all likelihood, came from the same rural class that shared the anti-elitist sentiments of Emiliano Zapata and Pancho Villa, and as women following the army, they were likely soldaderas.

The mention of soldaderas also appeared in the consular documents regarding members of the Mexican army who died in aforementioned prison camps. One such document from February 1914 reported that two soldaderas had died of acute intestinal obstructions and organic heart disease.⁴⁰ Such documents from American camps, while mainly recording the deaths of the soldaderas, showed that the Americans paid more attention to the soldaderas as a unit within the camp than the Mexican army itself did. Another document, from February 1914, reported the death of a soldadera who was fifty years old, showing that the camp-followers were not only younger women.⁴¹ The presence of a middle-aged soldadera in the camp hints at several reasons for her camp participation: she could have followed her man out of dedication and loyalty of several years, or she could have simply refused to stay away due to the dangers that banditry posed to women, whether they were old or young.

Soldaderas served the varying parts and groups of the armies. The Zapatistas did not include large numbers of soldaderas traveling with the armies, but nonetheless women served the same purpose as soldaderas from their homes.⁴² Villista women became involved in both acting

³⁸ NARA, Record Group 59, Microfilm Roll 37, 1910-1929.

³⁹ NARA, Record Group 59, Microfilm Roll 28, 1910-1929.

⁴⁰ NARA, Record Group 59, Microfilm Roll 34, 1910-1929.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Fuentes, “Battleground Women,” 534-535.

as the army's quartermaster as well as fighting for the advancement of the army.⁴³ The prevailing belief among the higher ranks, however, was that the soldaderas created a nuisance since they slowed the progression of the armies and provided distractions.

Yet the accompanying women could prove useful for various military tasks. An American consular document from September 1913 emphasized the importance of examining women for secretly carried ammunition, remarking upon the high volume of women searched at El Paso who had been carrying ammunition in the previous year, 1912.⁴⁴ Another document from August 1914, which reported on the conditions of the Mexican border, dealt with a similar situation. After apprehending “two Mexican women of suspicious appearance...the two women gave the names of Tomasa Hernandez and Ignacia Ramírez [and] voluntarily produced the ammunition they were carrying on their persons.”⁴⁵ The person providing the testimony of this event, one Captain L.H. Bash, declared that “there is no doubt that the firm of Shelton-Payne Arms Co. of El Paso, Tex., is engaged in this smuggling business.” It is plausible that these women carried arms across border lines to armies that they were part of. These brief mentions give glimpses into the psychology of both American soldiers and Mexican soldiers: the American consulate clearly saw the need to search women for whatever aid they were giving armies, while the Mexicans in all probability assumed that the women would be as taken for granted, the same way they were in Mexican camps. The latter document also exhibits a similar chauvinism and xenophobia on the part of the Americans, as the Captain never specified exactly why the Mexican women were suspicious in appearance. The report from 1913 gives a glimpse into American attitudes regarding gender, by stating that the problem of women carrying ammunition arose from there

⁴³ Ibid., 539.

⁴⁴ NARA, Record Group 59, Microfilm Roll 29, 1910-1929.

⁴⁵ NARA, Record Group 59, Microfilm Roll 40, 1910-1929.

being no female inspectors, the implication being that these were necessary to preserve the decency of women searched in military operations.

An article in *The New York Times* from 1913 dedicated a segment to describing the organization and make-up of Carranza's army. The segment, titled "An Unmilitary Camp" mostly described the presence of soldaderas, explaining that women customarily accompanied their men. The article stated: "One accustomed to military discipline...would perhaps find a great deal to criticise [sic] as well as to astonish...", showing an international scorn for the presence of camp-followers.⁴⁶ The lower classes' rejection of foreign help, especially in the form of the American armies, may have led to the scorn of Americans such as the author of this article for any irregularity in the Mexican army, and chauvinism likely combined with this to produce intense disdain for the soldaderas. A memorandum to the Department of State's Division of Latin-American Affairs in 1916 noted that because the soldaderas not only accompanied the armies and brought family members with them, they were inherently harmful to military morale. Yet the author of the memorandum admitted that there was no way to rid the army of the women, due to their indispensable role of feeding and caring for the soldiers.⁴⁷ As the memorandum referred only to a single "Mexican army", it is plausible to assume that the consulate was referring to the Constitutionalist cause that Carranza headed, given the United States's later espousment of Carranza's presidency. Therefore the memorandum, along with the aforementioned *New York Times* article, acts as further enlightenment of the activities of soldaderas in the Carrancista ranks.

⁴⁶ "With Gen. Venustiano Carranza's Army in Mexico," *The New York Times*, November 9, 1913.

⁴⁷ NARA, Record Group 59, Microfilm Roll 51, 1910-1929.

The Soldaderas As Moral Support

Though higher-ranking army leaders, North American journalists, and politicians expressed otherwise, the reliance of Mexican soldiers on women was not necessarily ill-placed, because a good deal of them shared the same nationalistic fervor. *The New York Times* ran an article in 1916 about the great anti-American feeling among the lower classes of Mexico; as this is the class from which came most of the soldaderas, it is not implausible to assume that the women felt as vehement about driving unwanted Americans away.⁴⁸ The article emphasized the volatile nature of the lower-classes of Mexico in regards to any intervention by American troops.

Only two years earlier, American journalist John Reed, known for his famous account of the Mexican Revolution, wrote a letter to the editor of *The New York Times* in April, 1914, that emphasized the need for the United States to stay out of Mexico, because the only reward that military involvement would bring would be the animosity of “the peons and their wives.”⁴⁹ His statement corresponded to the *New York Times* article emphasizing the distaste of the peons toward the North Americans. Reed displayed his depth of perception by not only declaring that military involvement would antagonize the peons but also acknowledging that the anger of the lower-classes against the United States in general increased due to the North American exploitation of Mexican land during the Porfiriato. Emiliano Zapata formed his support group from the rural Mexicans who desired, more than anything else from the revolution, agrarian reform that would allow them better subsistence from the land. Therefore, the idea of aid from the United States proved unpopular in Mexico, as illustrated in a letter to the editor of *The New York Times* by George McPherson Hunter, who wrote that, even four years later, “The implication

⁴⁸ “Mexican Peons Restive,” *The New York Times*, April 28, 1916.

⁴⁹ “The Causes Behind Mexico Revolution,” *The New York Times*, April 27, 1914.

that it is the duty of [the United States] to oversee, play 'big brother' or general uplifter toward Mexico is treated with scorn across the Rio Grande.”⁵⁰

Also in April 1914, the United States consul passed along a message from a North American named Arnold Shanklin, who wrote: “Thursday evening the women and girls took a lead [in the riots prevalent in his location] marching the streets singing their national anthem...in addition to their usual cry 'death to the Gringos', they took particular pains to cry death to the American Consul General.”⁵¹ As evidenced here, support of the anti-American cause transcended female participation in the war itself and materialized in the form of actual protests by women. Such nationalistic fervor, which came from the same economic resentment that facilitated the revolution, made it easier for the women to display their patriotism not only in supporting their soldiers but rallying for their cause.

In the November after Madero's murder, *The New York Times* ran an article about the involvement of women in the war. The article detailed the activities of women participating in the armies specifically to fight, as well as providing for the soldiers. The document used the terms *soldadera* and soldier-woman interchangeably, although the article stated “the 'soldaderas' are expert with both knife and rifle.”⁵² As the *soldaderas* came from rural classes that depended upon farming the land for their livelihood, it is plausible to assume that they had suffered greatly, along with their men, during the Porfiriato, when they had worked under foreign exploitation. Consequently, they possessed an automatic distrust of help from the same foreigners that had essentially left them to starve in earlier years. This added a facet of support in principle to their physical support of the soldiers.

⁵⁰ “Future Relations with Mexico,” *The New York Times*, January 12, 1918.

⁵¹ NARA, Record Group 59, Microfilm Roll 36, 1910-1929.

⁵² “Women Fight on Both Sides,” *The New York Times*, November 3, 1913.

The Life of a Soldadera: Danger and Domesticity

Perceptions of the soldaderas' roles varied from being nuisances that impeded the orderly progression of troops, being immoral influences among the soldiers, and being martyrs more akin to Madonnas than human beings. Yet the fact remained that the soldadera had to put up with far worse treatment than what the soldiers endured. The place of a soldadera was behind the man in her life, but this fact does not rule out the fact that they did frequently go voluntarily. Rather, it emphasizes that women accepted their domestic place enough to go under orders to areas where their safety was very far from assured, and that they probably placed more importance on their own ability to protect their children than leaving them in the care of someone else only to be victimized later on by other troops. The roles that the army prescribed for them marked the boundaries of their participation as domestic.

Camp-followers were by no means a new institution by the time of the Mexican Revolution, as indeed their constant presence in the military throughout the history of Mexico will attest. Yet the unusual circumstances of the conflict as well as international interest in Mexico's revolution, and the fact that some women participated militarily as well as in the provisionary sphere, allowed the soldaderas to become more prominent than if they had filled only the traditional roles of camp-followers. In order to survive in the turbulent period of the revolution, they could not afford to be particular about whether they conformed or did not conform to ideals of chastity or decency that, in any case, were reserved for women of the upper class.

The 1916 memorandum to the Department of State's Division of Latin-American Affairs detailed the necessary yet allegedly demoralizing influence of the soldaderas and offered a

valuable glimpse into their cooking, mentioning that the women primarily provided tortillas, tamales, tacos, and pulque. The document stated in detail the household items that the soldaderas used to create meals, “comprising a small sheet-iron brazier for cooking cakes, a few earthenware jars for steeping the corn in lime water and a 'metate'...”⁵³ The inclusion of a small portable kitchen for the soldaderas to utilize emphasizes the aforementioned domestic aspect of their work. Without them, the army could not eat, since the soldiers subscribed to the convention of food preparation being solely the task of the woman of the house. A similar report of border conditions from April 1914 detailed the testimony of a Mexican soldier in the federal army who declared that “the soldiers in Piedras Negras have not been paid for over two months [and that] the women were selling all their little possessions in order to buy necessities.”⁵⁴ However, this report did not even mention whether they were soldaderas or soldier-women. Rather, the document emphasized that when the men were not paid, the women sold their belongings to alleviate the condition of the men in need. As the report did not make any other mention of the soldiers trying to alleviate the problems stemming from their lack of money themselves, the women obviously provided for them. The fact that the women sold their possessions in order to maintain themselves and their men, further highlights the resourceful nature of the soldaderas' role. M.O. Harris, a railway conductor living in Mexico during the revolution, testified before a Congressional hearing in 1920 that the women accompanying the soldiers on trains would take whatever time they could to cook when the train had stopped.⁵⁵ John Reed noted that the women carried everything themselves, which may have influenced how suspicious they appeared to other

⁵³ NARA, Record Group 59, Microfilm Roll 51, 1910-1929.

⁵⁴ NARA, Record Group 59, Microfilm Roll 36, 1910-1929.

⁵⁵ United States, Congress, Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations, *Investigation of Mexican Affairs: Hearing Before a Subcommittee of the Committee on Foreign Relations* (Washington, D.C.: Govt. printing office, 1920), 2612. This document contains several references to women following the troops.

military forces. In his account, a customs officer apprehended a pregnant women and demanded to know what she was carrying, mistaking her condition for concealed supplies.⁵⁶

Edith O'Shaughnessy, the wife of American diplomat and Chargé d'Affaires Nelson O'Shaughnessy, noted of them: "These women are the only visible commissariat for the soldiers; they accompany them in their marches; they forage for them and they cook for them; they nurse them, bury them... It is appalling what self-abnegation is involved in this life."⁵⁷ O'Shaughnessy, of an upper-class, foreign background, made an accurate observation about the self-sacrifice of the soldaderas, but her words do not acknowledge that the women could not stay at home due to the dangers of banditry in the countryside, nor would their men have allowed it, and they had no other alternative due to their class.

The soldaderas, aside from having to put aside any personal desires of their own for their men, suffered from equal or greater risk than the soldiers. While many soldaderas began their travels with the army at the behest of their men, it was not unheard-of for soldiers to merely rape women and then carry them off as their soldaderas. The women accompanied them, often because they had no other alternative but to go with the men who had disgraced them. A letter from an unnamed resident of Chalchihuites, sent to the American Consul-General and the American Ambassador in June 1913, noted: "In this immediate vicinity we have had small bands prowling round all week...in all the nearby ranches they have been committing their usual acts, taking away the corn beans [sic] and every other eatable they could find...at two of the ranches they have carried off girls. One of these was fourteen years old, and the other was about eighteen and she was carried away on her wedding day."⁵⁸ As with the reported plantation raid led by

⁵⁶ John Reed, *Insurgent Mexico* (New York, New York: International Publishers, 1969), 4-5.

⁵⁷ Edith O'Shaughnessy, *A Diplomat's Wife in Mexico* (New York, New York: Harper & Brothers, 1916), 144-145.

⁵⁸ NARA, Record Group 59, Microfilm Roll 29, 1910-1929.

women in 1913, since bandits most likely attacked the wealthiest areas first, they were probably Conventionist groups. Carrying off women was one way a man could get a soldadera, questioning the assumption that all soldaderas were inherently debauched.

The women had to go along with the troops to war even in times of indisposition. John Reed's account mentions a woman who had had to give birth to her child on the march, and the baby had died from dehydration. Indeed, the conversation had taken place on a moving train, as soldaderas often traveled this way, and the discussion of Reed and the other soldaderas is cut short by another woman giving birth.⁵⁹

Yet the harsh treatment of the soldadera is not surprising when considered in the context of the general brutality during this time. A letter from the American Consulate in Veracruz to Secretary of State William Jennings Bryan in January 1914, revealed: "The Federal troops in this district are getting more vicious every day...[they] kill a few inoffensive men and capture others with women and even children, making the charge that they are rebel sympathizers. Consignments of women, young girls and men pass through Veracruz every day...the women are sold into peonage or prostituted."⁶⁰ These women and girls found themselves in much the same position as the girl from Mexico City who had traveled to Cuernavaca in order to see her mother, only to be branded a rebel sympathizer. The Federal troops probably captured women regardless of class and imprisoned them together, as in the first document. The dilemma of being a woman during the Mexican Revolution meant that a woman of the middle- and upper-classes would be better protected by remaining in her place of education or employment. Yet the case of the young girl whose desire to see her family led to her imprisonment clearly illustrated the danger of

⁵⁹ Reed, *Insurgent Mexico*, 197-199.

⁶⁰ NARA Record Group 59, Microfilm Roll 34, 1910-1929.

women attempting to see relatives.

Correspondingly, an article in *The New York Times* from July 1915 depicted the pandemonium in Mexico City as the army streamed in and people of the city lined up in front of the offices of the International Relief Commission. While the article stated that the presence of the soldiers prevented widespread rioting, it then went on: “In one instance the soldiers fired low, killing a number of women.”⁶¹ The women availed themselves of the Red Cross first-aid booths for themselves and their children. They had clearly been lining up for food in front of the International Relief Commission with the assumption that as women of the house it was their duty to provide the meals, and then had suffered a small massacre as a result. Neither the soldiers nor the city's males apparently helped the women injured in the fray. As even women lining up for foodstuffs in a time of hunger did not protect them from the soldiers, it is unsurprising that those who followed the army itself suffered equally.

The violence of the soldiers became a concern to men trying to protect their families as well. In a letter sent from a man named Joseph Azpiloueta to Secretary of State Robert Lansing in August 1915, Azpiloueta desperately wanted to get his mother and siblings out of Mexico due to the dangers for women. Indeed, he had written to the Secretary of State before, but his petition had been rejected on account of lack of funds. With this letter, Azpiloueta sent money for his mother's transportation, in order to “save [her] from death.”⁶² His touching concern for his mother demonstrated evidence of his devotion, and again indicated the level of risk for women.

Despite the possible protection the army might have afforded lower-class women from rampaging soldiers, the women ranked far below that of the soldiers themselves. If the men

⁶¹ “Wild Disorder in Capital,” *The New York Times*, July 7, 1915.

⁶² NARA Record Group 59, Microfilm Roll 159, 1910-1929.

traveled by horses, the women often walked. Similarly, if the men traveled by train, the women and children faced great danger by riding on top of or underneath the trains.⁶³ They did not enjoy special protection from the dangers of war simply because they were women with children, either. A consular telegram from Veracruz from February 1915 briefly mentioned an attack on a train on the Mexican Railway which killed five soldiers and “one soldier's woman.”⁶⁴ A more gruesome story involving violence toward the soldaderas can be found in an article from *The New York Times* from November 1916, which reported a Zapatista attack on Carrancista soldiers, stating: “...the Zapatistas for fifteen minutes kept up the slaughter, slaying men and women, who prayed for mercy, and killing the babies who accompanied their mothers, the papers declare.”⁶⁵ However, it is worth mentioning that because many soldaderas ended up joining the army because a soldier had carried them off, the fact that the Zapatistas would feel no qualms about murdering them when they could just as easily have adopted them into the army displays a different attitude, rather more ruthless, toward the soldaderas. The Zapatista murder of the enemy soldaderas indicated that these soldiers already had food and aid from their own women.

A higher-ranking-officer's wife could also be harmed in the course of the army's battles and traveling. A consular report on the political conditions in Durango in August 1915 reported: “Recently General Natera's mother, his wife, and three children were made prisoner by one General Banda, at Sobrerete, Zacatecas, just after General Natera revolted against the Conventionist cause...these women and children were taken away to Torreón about August 7th.”⁶⁶ The document noted that a wife of a Villista general was then held hostage in Durango in retaliation. The presence of the officer's wives did not mean they necessarily fulfilled the same

⁶³ Salas, *Soldaderas in the Mexican Military*, 43.

⁶⁴ NARA Record Group 59, Microfilm Roll 43, 1910-1929.

⁶⁵ “Bandits Massacre Women and Children,” *The New York Times*, November 13, 1916.

⁶⁶ NARA Record Group 59, Microfilm Roll 48, 1910-1929.

role as that of a soldadera, and the report stated that “an effort will be made to arrange an understanding between the factions so that wives and families of officials will not be molested or abused...” This document clearly illustrated a paradox: that women were valuable both as servants and as hostages in the Mexican army, no matter their rank, yet it appears that social class and rank did partly determine their fates.

Criticisms of the Soldaderas

North American depictions of the soldaderas extended the stereotype of the debauched camp-follower. John Reed's famous account of the soldadera “Elizabetta” who displayed her questionable virtue by begging to sleep with the journalist before immediately transferring her affections to another officer, contributed to popular perceptions of these women.⁶⁷ His story, additionally, both appears to correspond with an article on soldaderas by Vincent Starrett, published in the American periodical, *The Open Court*, in 1918: “Ordinarily (exceptions cheerfully granted) she has only one lover...for him crimes may be committed without remorse. Remorse is an emotion she has never felt.”⁶⁸ Starrett's description of the soldadera is predictably one-dimensional and paints her as not only debauched but a criminal. Going further, Starrett declared: “The soldadera is not immoral; she is unmoral. She has not forgotten; she never knew...Poor brutalized, degenerate sloven!”⁶⁹ This was a particularly heartless summation, considering that many women had no choice but to follow the soldiers who raped them, abducted them, or held their lives in the palms of their hands. John Reed's account mentioning women giving birth on the move emphasizes the presence of the social double-standard, which glorified

⁶⁷ Reed, *Insurgent Mexico*, 106-109.

⁶⁸ Vincent Starrett, “Soldier Women of Mexico,” *The Open Court*, Vol. 31, No. 6 (June 1918), 59.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 61.

upper-class mothers but did not do the same for poorer, rural ones.

Another source of criticism with which the soldaderas contended came from the higher ranks. Journalist John Reed noted the rancor of the soldaderas against the generals who commanded them but cared very little for their well-being during battles and while traveling.⁷⁰ As will be examined in articles of *The New York Times*, a common perception of the soldaderas was that their presence impeded military progress and professionalism. This viewpoint was perhaps not unreasonable: while the soldadera was responsible for providing the army food, the toughness required by their roles led to arguments within the camps and scuffles in how they obtained their resources. The Englishwoman Rosa E. King, who had taken up residence in Mexico in 1905, recalled a story in which soldaderas of the Federal army encountered opposition from Zapatista sympathizers who did not wish to sell them chickens: "...[the soldaderas] chased the fowls and took the plumpest, while the owners stood by not daring to oppose them."⁷¹

General Villa in principle detested the soldaderas and did not approve of any woman at the front. The report of conditions along the border of New Mexico from Colonel Chas. A.P. Hatfield in 1913 that detailed the passage of Villa's wife in a "covered carriage drawn by five mules" into Columbus, New Mexico exhibited both Villa's concern for his wife and his disapproval of feminine presence at the front: he sent his visiting wife away with an escort as he planned to march on Chihuahua City.⁷² Carranza did likewise and sent his entire family out of Mexico, to the admiration of one Reverend S.G. Ingman who observed "the husband and father [bidding] goodbye to his loved ones."⁷³ Yet in accordance with his reputation, Villa had no

⁷⁰ Reed, *Insurgent Mexico*, 198.

⁷¹ Rosa E. King, *Tempest Over Mexico: A Personal Chronicle* (Boston, Massachusetts: Little, Brown, & Co., 1935), 177.

⁷² NARA, Record Group 59, Microfilm Roll 29, 1910-1929.

⁷³ NARA, Record Group 59, Microfilm Roll 191, 1910-1920.

difficulty exercising his customary ruthlessness in warfare against the women he viewed as a threat. *The New York Times* reported an incident where, out of a line of approximately three hundred women, two shots were fired at Villa's head, but missed. The article went on, "Unable to learn which one had attacked him Villa ordered all the women herded together and shot down."⁷⁴ This story might have been untrue, since a similar one already existed but, according to Elizabeth Salas, dated from 1916.⁷⁵ Quite possibly, this particular incident had occurred in 1916 and had been built up through various circles, with the embellishments that oral accounts usually add. *The New York Times* did not have its own eyewitness for the event, only a merchant from Jiménez by the name of Jacinto Trueba who stated that the event had happened a few days earlier, and probably mixed up a well-known anecdote with popular legends of Villa's cruelty. *The New York Times* also reported Trueba to be wealthy, and that "Trueba said that Villa captured him and asked for a ransom of 5,000 pesos, but he managed to escape." This makes his testimony suspect, as those from more elite classes would no doubt have a greater distrust of Villa, and his account of his own bravery further questions his veracity. Certainly, Villa disliked the presence of soldaderas in his camp, and his overall feeling toward the issue cannot have been reassuring for the women serving the soldiers in his command.

Another article from *The New York Times*, dated June 16, 1920, speculated on the workings of a well-run, well-trained Mexican army that would be necessary for a stable administration after the conflicts of the past decade: "The new President will need a compact, well-uniformed, well-schooled army, a commissariat department taking the place of the women who now cook and patch for the nondescripts carrying rifles."⁷⁶ The article also stated, "And the

⁷⁴ "Reports 300 Women Shot Down By Villa," *The New York Times*, June 19, 1920.

⁷⁵ Salas, *Soldaderas In the Mexican Military*, 46.

⁷⁶ "An Army for Mexico," *The New York Times*, June 16, 1920.

'soldierettes,' or women camp-followers...would have to be divorced from the army—a great wrench to the customs of the country, but imperative.” The author clearly described the troops with a level of condescension common in North American views of Mexico during this period, believing that elimination of the soldaderas would be imperative to bring Mexico and its army into the modern era. According to such critics, the elimination of the soldaderas and providing, in their place, an official quartermaster for the military would allow the armies to move faster without women and children following them, and would improve the personal discipline and morale of the soldiers by eliminating possible distractions.

The overall disapproval of the soldaderas' roles proved to endure throughout the revolution. As both Mexican and American sources elaborated on them and their roles, there is a marked absence of concern for the actual women. The common factor uniting the criticism of the soldaderas was that they prevented the army from being professional, due to the perception that the accompaniment of women and children slowed military progress, and also due to the problems their resourcefulness created, as Rosa King's story demonstrates. Foreign and Mexican observers alike did not comment on whether the women would be better off at home, with better education or providing more stable homes for their children, nor did they provide any other theoretical alternative for the women who would otherwise be camp-followers.

Chapter 4: Revolutionary and Postrevolutionary Feminism

Feminism and the Revolution: Activity and Encouragement

While the soldaderas followed the troops and provided for revolutionary soldiers, Mexican feminists worked alongside revolutionary leaders to forge places for themselves in the new society. The appearance of an article in Pennsylvanian newspaper *The Wilkes-Barre Times Leader* in May 1916 titled “How Women Profit by Political Turmoil” illustrated this concept. The article stated, “It is always in periods of political and social unrest that woman perceives her best chances of seizing upon a little more freedom...in Mexico, in the midst of the present political turmoil, woman is emerging from a seclusion and dependence which have amounted almost to subjection...” The article detailed that the middle class made up most of the feminist movement, but instead of specifying that the middle-class feminists had excluded lower-class women from their activities, it argued: “[These women] were hampered by conservative Spanish traditions on the one hand, and on the other by ideas of woman's inferiority inherited from the Indians and the peons...”⁷⁷ According to this article, the gender perceptions of the lower classes were one of the culprits of female disenfranchisement. In this way, the feminists became perceived victims of the backwardness of the lower classes. Nevertheless the article accurately asserted that women had taken advantage of the revolution to increase the range of their feminist activities.

Revolutionary Mexico produced several women who, active in social critique before the conflict, gladly took up the battle cry of revolutionaries fighting for fairer labor practices and land redistribution and became leaders.⁷⁸ Juana Belén Gutiérrez de Mendoza, a woman of indigenous

⁷⁷ “How Women Profit by Political Turmoil,” *The Wilkes-Barre Times Leader*, May 27, 1916.

⁷⁸ Macías, *Against All Odds*, 25-26.

descent, had a special empathy with disenfranchised workers suffering from the Porfiriato.⁷⁹ Hirmela Galindo, author and newspaper editor, radically associated with greater equality for women. Galindo managed to combine her feminist activity with her alliance with Venustiano Carranza; however, after the presidency of Carranza, she left the sphere of Mexican feminism.⁸⁰ Dolores Jiménez y Muro focused on reforming labor practices and social issues.⁸¹ Her demand to better wages and her support for agrarian reform found favor with Emiliano Zapata and other revolutionary proponents.⁸² Anna Macías states that these women were the “three persons who best [exemplified] the intellectual contributions of women to the Mexican Revolution...”⁸³ Upper- and middle-class women encouraged the revolution by protesting the Porfiriato, illustrated in the example of the Daughters of Cuauhtémoc, and by the activities of women activists alongside the brothers Ricardo and Enrique Flores Magón to aid the anti-Díaz Partido Liberal Mexicano.⁸⁴ Other women, not necessarily feminists, worked for the revolution by acting as spies or even handing out arms to the troops.

Yet not all revolutionaries accepted the feminists' encouragement of the revolution as a boon. *El Dictamen*, in April 1915, described the numbers of politically minded women as being like mothers wishing to discipline unruly and childish male leaders. The article, implying that women in the political ranks would degrade the unity of men, declared, “Beware, constitutionalist citizens—the petticoats threaten us with death!”⁸⁵ Similarly, Francisco Bulnes, a conservative Porfirian politician, wrote in 1916: “Feminism has penetrated into Mexico as an auxiliary

⁷⁹ Ibid., 26.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 33-37.

⁸¹ Ibid., 30-31.

⁸² Ibid., 32.

⁸³ Ibid., 26.

⁸⁴ Rocha, “The Faces of Rebellion: From Revolutionaries to Veterans in Mexico City,” 19; Soto, *Emergence of the Modern Mexican Woman*, 41-43.

⁸⁵ “Insisto Sobre las Viejas,” *El Dictamen*, April 11, 1915.

disturbing force...In general, as is the case everywhere, the unattractive and indigent predominate, and as the dictatorship did much toward educating them, it armed an implacable and stupendous host of adversaries.” Bulnes went on: “Mexican feminism is interested in the 'social question' because it has outlined a more serious program, the monopolization of all the Government [sic] offices, basing their ambition on the fact that men are being needed in Mexico to work the rich mines, till the marvellous [sic] warm lands, run the splendid factories of our nascent industries, speed the locomotives of our railroads, man the merchant marine to be established and the navy to be built, and, above all, develop the indispensable aviation corps which is the ever-open, far-seeing eye of the army.”⁸⁶ Bulnes feared a feminist takeover of politics through their espousal of the revolution, while his assertions about the education level and social class of those comprising the feminist movement revealed his biases and charged the feminists with possessing more power than they did in actuality.

Despite the criticisms aimed at them, feminists took the opportunity to espouse the cause of the revolution as the arrival of worthy, modern ideals. In doing so, they managed to create a clear alliance between their interests and those of the political leaders fighting for the overthrow of the Porfiriato. Through this method, the feminists could attempt to earn the approval of revolutionary men and thus gain more legitimacy for their movement. An article illustrating this is one from *The Dallas Morning News* in September of 1919, titled “Council of Mexican Women Issue Patriotic Manifesto.” The article stated: “Mexican women, the manifesto declares, 'will assume the men's duty toward the fatherland if the men fail to do so.' The officers of the organization are wives of prominent Mexican generals.”⁸⁷ These women may or may not have

⁸⁶ Francisco Bulnes, *The Whole Truth About Mexico: President Wilson's Responsibility*, Trans. Dora Scott (New York, New York: M. Bulnes Book Company, 1916), 142, 144.

⁸⁷ “Council of Mexican Women Issue Patriotic Manifesto,” *The Dallas Morning News*, September 9, 1919.

been feminists, but their initiative in declaring themselves protectors of their homeland on the same level as men displays the new opportunities for women to prove their nationalistic fervor. Those espousing traditional roles for women decried not only the transgression of gender boundaries involved in this process but also the feminine support of the revolution itself.

Mexican feminists focused on greater equality for women, but also took interest in the economic concerns of the lower class. Yucatán feminists attempted to teach Mayan women their labor rights and how to take care of their families, and feminists from other parts of Mexico, correspondingly, took up revolutionary ideals as a way to illustrate their roles as important citizens of a new nation. Yet their condescending attitude toward the lower class women they felt a duty to help revealed their class-consciousness. Nevertheless, the revolution helped women continue feminist activities that they had begun before the outbreak of the conflict.

Feminism and Class-Consciousness in Yucatán

The feminist activity in Yucatán during and after the revolution, with the outward support of progressive governors Salvador Alvarado and Felipe Carrillo Puerto, showed how revolutionary sentiments and feminism developing convergent interests that retained their strong class-consciousness. In 1916, *The New York Times* published a lengthy article titled “Many Mexican Problems Solved in Yucatán,” which painted Yucatán in Mexico as a sort of haven that expressed many of the revolutionary ideals of equality and reform. The piece also emphasized the presence of a new economic system in Yucatán that allowed more freedoms for the poorer classes. According to the article, civil governor Salvador Alvarado was in a large part responsible for redistribution of land among indigenous laborers. The article also detailed the vast number of successful changes for women both in regards to labor laws and more equality. It quoted

Modesto C. Rolland, a member of Alvarado's Agrarian Commission: "...the response of women to the new conditions has been a wonderful thing." Rolland acknowledged the previously unrecognized, low status of poorer women who worked as laborers as well as the disregard for women in general. Yet he then added that "the women of Yucatán have had already their first feminist congress, with an attendance of 3,000 delegates..."⁸⁸ Rolland appeared to include rural laboring women along with feminists in the same group.

Studies of Yucatán feminism, however, do not support such a classification and instead show a pronounced divide between the Maya and the upper-class feminists who organized without Maya participation and acted to exclude them from the formal feminist organizations themselves. The feminist congresses of 1916 became landmark events for the Mexican women's movement. Stephanie Smith, however, describes that these events did not include the Maya because of their status and their historical association with the Catholic Church. Both Alvarado and the feminists also argued that the Maya were too attached to pre-revolutionary and pre-feminist ideals, and that as such they could not contribute to the same degree as upper-class women who focused all their energies on the modern concepts of feminism and female equality.⁸⁹ The feminists also showed their condescension to the lower classes by teaching them how to take care of their children and recommending family planning.⁹⁰ While feminist groups lost support after the return of conservative power in 1924, their support of class differences and their willingness to subscribe to the concept of feminism to aid a woman as wife and mother did not lead to real cohesion of Mexican women. The *New York Times* article was not wholly incorrect, yet it overestimated the amount of progress the region had made and failed to address the nuances

⁸⁸ "Many Mexican Problems Solved in Yucatán," *The New York Times*, October 1, 1916.

⁸⁹ Stephanie J. Smith, *Gender and the Mexican Revolution: Yucatán Women and the Realities of Patriarchy* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 30-31.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 35, 50.

of feminism there.

The feminists of Yucatán notably coalesced women into actual feminist leagues and then took advantage of their groups to directly open up new channels of reform by working alongside sympathetic leaders like Alvarado and Carrillo Puerto. As a result, feminism, aside from attracting attention internationally, broke through barriers of gender discussion and allowed other leaders to work for the support of feminist issues or provide for better equality. Upper- and middle-class women in the rest of Mexico thus benefited from the increased attention, if not immediate achievements, that the feminist groups garnered.

Female Activism in the 1920's

Feminist activity expanded beyond Yucatán. On Sunday, March 2, 1924, *The New York Times* ran an extensive article about the feminist movement in Mexico. “New Women of Mexico Striving for Equality” provided an overview of the goals of Mexican feminism, and its social aims, all done with the cooperation of Señora Sofía Villa de Buentello, leader of the Cooperative Women's Union. Villa de Buentello's first declared that, despite emulating to some degree the feminists of the United States, Mexican women were more repressed than their American counterparts and desired to achieve equality through more gradual means. Indeed, in contrast to the feminists who encouraged the revolution actively, Villa de Buentello painted the country's internal conflict as detrimental and childish.⁹¹ That she felt the need to speak out against revolutionary activity while embracing the atmosphere of political chance that allowed feminism to be more visible displays an increased confidence, at least for women such as Villa de Buentello.

⁹¹ “New Women of Mexico Striving for Equality,” *The New York Times*, March 2, 1924.

With the revolution, new attitudes emerged about citizenship, as illustrated in *The New York Times* in an article from 1921, describing in detail the migration of Mexicans to the city and their postrevolutionary attitude. Appropriately titled “Mexican Masses Show New Spirit,” the article claimed that soldiers would receive new appropriations of land in an attempt to offset the desertion of agricultural areas. The movement of the troops through cities had led to a concentration of former soldiers in urban areas, amidst increased migration: “From districts that before the outbreak of revolution had slept the sleep of centuries are now pouring forth thousands of Indians and Mestizos, in whom the revolution has stirred up a desire for the things their neighbors have seen, in what, to them, is the great outside world. These adventurers are mostly young men and not a few of them are young women.” Furthermore, “...The incoming masses have the spirit of the revolution in them.”⁹² The article implied that the new populations of the cities included groups of confident women who flocked to the cities in search of better economic opportunities. They no longer saw themselves tied to the men they accompanied, and they comprised both lower-class women seeking employment and women eager to participate in social and political spheres.⁹³ The *New York Times* article containing the testimony of Señora Villa de Buentello corroborated this: “Business has opened in thousands...and the social ostracism that resulted when a woman went to work for a salary now is largely gone.”⁹⁴ After detailing the growth in number of office workers, dentists, accountants, and other occupations, the article stated, “It is from these professional women and officeworkers [sic] that the feminists are recruiting their forces.” The article reported that ninety percent of the feminists in the Cooperative Women's Union came from this new class, while the remaining ten percent were

⁹² “Mexican Masses Show New Spirit,” *The New York Times*, August 8, 1921.

⁹³ See Susie Porter's *Working Women in Mexico City* for details of the politics concerning working women.

⁹⁴ “New Women of Mexico Striving for Equality,” *The New York Times*, March 2, 1924.

rural women that acted as representatives of the lower classes in these feminist groups. The unequal representation of poorer women among feminists evidenced the lack of real unity between peon women and upper-class feminists. Furthermore, the article specifically described the feminist attitude towards the soldaderas: “The feminists would have [the soldaderas] bend all their efforts not in thus promoting fratricidal strife, but to persuading the soldiers to leave the various armies, to making the fighters realize that they are being misled by unscrupulous leaders for selfish ends.”⁹⁵ Thus, the feminist attitudes had naïve expectations of the soldaderas.

Class and Gender in Education, Sexuality, and the Workplace

Feminists approached a variety of social issues, among them the question of female education. Education during the Porfiriato had not been comprehensive, even for upper-class women. Lower-class women had little recourse to schools. The ideals of the revolution introduced more concerns for education of Mexican citizens in general, even if there was much work to be done in this area.

In 1917, a Washington, D.C., periodical featured an article concerning the proposed governmental plans of the newly elected governor of Sonora, Plutarco Elias Calles. Aside from land reforms, and furthering the anti-alcohol stance of Mexican temperance causes, Calles discussed educational reforms, from primary levels up. Calles stated, “The Government will seek to have each district give a scholarship to one young woman and one young man, in order that they may take the normal course at the capital and provide the State with teachers who have affection for their own native region and zeal for the good results of education.”⁹⁶ Although

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ NARA, Record Group 59, Microfilm Roll 191, 1910-1920.

Calles, the future President of Mexico, considered Mexican women to be, in most cases, the agents of the Catholic Church, he made a small concession to the campaign for better female education within the Mexican feminist movement. His equal allocation of scholarships to an equal gender ratio indicated the new attitudes towards education and occupation for women in the revolution and immediately after it.

Señora Sofia Villa de Buentello, however, spoke little of educational reforms directed specifically at women, save for the same class-conscious attitude of other feminists of the period in focusing most attention on the education of poorer women so that they might emerge from ignorance into proper citizenship. The article in *The New York Times* mentioned that another feminist group called the Free Women, started in 1922, petitioned presidential candidates: “They touched upon labor and industry, marital relations, education and the appointment of women to political office.”⁹⁷ Yet despite the desire for educational reform, both Villa de Buentello and the leader of the Free Women, María Casas y Miramon, had become educated through their own efforts, and not through education in a formal school. As a result, in the eyes of these women, education for non-peon women may have been in part the responsibility of the woman herself, rather than depending on school reforms completely. Nevertheless, the educational reforms of the administration of Álvaro Obregón did benefit women by preparing greater numbers of them to enter vocational schools or universities.⁹⁸ In 1921, Wallace Thompson, author and former vice consul to the city of Monterrey, declared, “The preponderance of uneducated women in Mexico continually works against the improvement of their position...yet even [the state of education for women in Mexico today represents] a vast improvement over the schooling which was given the

⁹⁷ “New Women of Mexico Striving for Equality,” *The New York Times*, March 2, 1924.

⁹⁸ Soto, *Emergence of the Modern Mexican Woman*, pg 100.

present generation.”⁹⁹

With increased migration to the cities came new attention to the movement of women to the United States. A report from the vice consul of Torreón to the Department of State in 1925 stated that despite a large amount of anti-immigration propaganda in the United States, Mexican workers went to the United States in droves for the opportunity of better salaries. The report also stated that Mexican women had particular interest in working in domestic households in the United States for as much as three pesos, or one dollar and fifty cents, per week. Yet the report emphasized that only a particular class of Mexican women had decided to apply for positions: “We have many applicants who are in no sense of the word public prostitutes but have perhaps lived with men and have never been married.” These women were often mothers as well, yet did not regret their unmarried states. The report stated, “All of these immigrants are largely of the peon class...,” therefore the women may have been *soldaderas* previously.¹⁰⁰ Their free admission of their “immorality” would not have been surprising to the upper classes, given the social position of women going north to look for work.

Yet in addition to providing a glimpse of what social class the women who were going both to Mexican urban centers and to cities in the United States were from, both the *New York Times* article and the consular report possess a deeper implication. Ex-*soldaderas* frequently went to the cities to find work after the military engagements of the revolution ceased, and they also availed themselves of the opportunity to go to the United States.¹⁰¹ While the consular report is more descriptive of the morals of the women traveling to the cities for greater economic

⁹⁹ Wallace Thompson, *The People of Mexico: Who They Are and How They Live* (New York, New York: Harper & Brothers, 1921), 232.

¹⁰⁰ NARA, Record Group 59, Microfilm Roll 204, 1910-1920.

¹⁰¹ Fuentes, “Battleground Women,” 551.

opportunity, the fact was that the cities could be dangerous for single women.¹⁰² These aspects of urban life remained the trend throughout the revolution as women fleeing from revolutionary conflicts in rural areas faced the prospect of starvation in the cities. As a result, former soldaderas could easily enter prostitution in the cities to maintain themselves.

Though Hirmela Galindo shocked the Mexican feminist congress of 1916 with her assertion of the need for sexual education and respect for the sexuality of the Mexican woman, her attitude to prostitution was not unlike that of other feminists: at best, that prostitutes were “fallen” women deserving of help, and at worst, they were dangerous for the public health due to the risk of disease transmission.¹⁰³ The latter fear appears to have been a serious issue within Mexican society. In a consular report from Charge d’Affairs George Summerlin in January 1919 containing summaries of two articles concerning testing for venereal diseases before marriage within the newspaper *El Universal*, Mexican health law required males to submit a negative Wassermann test result before marrying. Yet, as José María Rodríguez of the Superior Board of Health stated, “It is unnecessary that women be included in the regulations issued by the Board of Health, inasmuch as they enter matrimony with the sacred offering of virginity.”¹⁰⁴ Protection of public health also appeared to mean protection of the purity of women. Lower class women, however, could not always afford to be particular about the ideals of purity regarding necessary occupations for their maintenance, thus the ability of a poorer woman to obtain such a test would stigmatize her in the eyes of the authorities.

Aside from the class differences, the increase in women in all professions also attracted

¹⁰² Bliss, *Compromised Positions*, 71-73.

¹⁰³ Alaide Foppa, “The First Feminist Congress in Mexico, 1916,” Trans. Helene F. de Aguilar, *Signs: Journal of Women and Culture in Society*, Vol. 5, No. 1 (Aut. 1979): 196; Smith, *Gender and the Mexican Revolution*, 163.

¹⁰⁴ NARA, Record Group 59, Microfilm Roll 148, 1910-1920.

the attention of legislative bodies. A consular document from June 1919 told of the new labor laws that the Mexican Chamber of Deputies passed that displayed a desire to regulate the employment of working women. Article 9 stated that minors between the ages of twelve and sixteen would have a six-hour workday, and that women would enjoy the same rights “excepting as regards the maximum work day.” The same article also prohibited women from selling “intoxicating drinks for immediate consumption.”¹⁰⁵ Article 10 went into detail about protective laws for pregnant women in the three months before their delivery, and specified paid maternity leave for one month and a medical examination before returning to work. The document included the number of votes for and against each article. Article 9 passed with eighty-nine votes supporting it and sixty-seven against. Contrastingly, the succeeding article passed with one-hundred and forty-nine votes supporting it and seven against. The more unanimous support given to the article regarding working mothers reveals the high social regard for women's maternal roles and the ideals of femininity that such a role represented.

The lack of unanimous support for labor regulation for women continued into 1924, when the article within *The New York Times* containing the interview with Sofia Villa de Buentello observed, “In certain industries the women...work amidst abominable hygienic conditions.” Men's and women's wages had not become equal, either. After detailing the increase of professional women, the *New York Times* article of 1924 stated that salary differentials between women and men were still disproportionate.¹⁰⁶ The statistical proof of this came in the form of an American Foreign Service Report from the Consulate in Torreón, Mexico, to the American Consul General in Mexico, in October of this same year.¹⁰⁷ The document detailed the wages of

¹⁰⁵ NARA, Record Group 59, Microfilm Roll 162, 1910-1920.

¹⁰⁶ “New Women of Mexico Striving for Equality,” *The New York Times*, March 2, 1924.

¹⁰⁷ NARA, Record Group 59, Microfilm Roll 167, 1910-1920.

men and women at various jobs as follows: female bookkeepers received ninety to one-hundred and twenty pesos, as opposed to the one-hundred and twenty-five to two-hundred and fifty pesos of male bookkeepers; salesmen received seventy-five pesos per month, in contrast to the forty or fifty pesos that “salesgirls” received. Likewise, male stenographers who knew only Spanish earned eighty to ninety pesos per month, while female stenographers with the same skills only received sixty to seventy. The inequality of wages between men and women is not indicative of the repression of Mexican women, as salary differentials remain controversial issues internationally to the present day. Rather, the attention that this issue garnered in the postrevolutionary period notably highlights the progressive attempts of both male policymakers and women feminists.

Yet while increasing numbers of women entered the workforce, conflicts between new social movements and traditional gender roles remained. An article in the Mexico City newspaper *Excélsior*, from 1921, detailed how, during the meeting of the third Socialist Conference, concern for the female worker was expressed only indirectly. Conference attendees believed that employers would commit ideological crimes by not paying men proper salaries, thus forcing women out of their homes and endangering their modesty.¹⁰⁸ The adherence to the mandate that women should remain as bastions of the home revealed the strong allegiance of Mexican workers to traditional gender boundaries and delineation of male and female roles.

The consular document that recorded the laws passed in the Chamber of Deputies depicted the issue of restriction of working hours of women and minors as more contentious than protective legislation for pregnant women. It is plausible that the latter article owed its support to the sentimentality about motherhood that still remained in Mexico, exceeding support for

¹⁰⁸ “La Tercera Conferencia Socialista,” *Excélsior*, February 28, 1921.

working women's rights. Though this document details events ostensibly unrelated to the issues of feminism, the gender boundaries of Mexican society remain apparent in even postrevolutionary legislation concerning women. This sentimentality concerning women and specifically mothers also affected political views about female suffrage.

Political Work of the Feminists

In 1924, the article in *The New York Times* containing the statements of Sofía Villa de Buentello stated that Mexican feminists pursued female suffrage as a way to pass feminist reforms.¹⁰⁹ As early as 1911, *The New York Times* reported that even the question of universal suffrage for all Mexican men had become a pertinent issue in the mind of Francisco Madero.¹¹⁰ The article explored whether educational requirements should be prerequisites to allow voting, which in practice would necessitate better education for all classes if the population were to participate in larger numbers in elections. *The New York Times* published this article before the Constitution of 1917 declared all Mexicans free to vote without specifying gender. The following year, an electoral law restricted voting to men, yet as Sarah Buck writes, “Feminists would point to the ambiguity of [the Constitution] again and again over the next thirty years.”¹¹¹ The remaining controversy about women suffrage was evidenced by an article in *The New York Times* on September 2, 1920. The article detailed the conservative Provisional President Adolfo de la Huerta presiding over the Mexican Congress, before the swearing in of Álvaro Obregón, as it discussed land reform and the right of women to vote.¹¹² This meant that the Mexican political

¹⁰⁹ “New Women of Mexico Striving for Equality,” *The New York Times*, March 2, 1924.

¹¹⁰ “Mexican Suffrage,” *The New York Times*, April 25, 1911.

¹¹¹ Sarah A. Buck, “The Meaning of the Women's Vote in Mexico, 1917-1953,” in *The Women's Revolution in Mexico: 1910-1953*, ed. Stephanie Mitchell and Patience A. Schell (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007), 78.

¹¹² “Huerta Addresses Mexican Congress,” *The New York Times*, September 2, 1920.

sphere had gradually accepted feminist issues as matters for discussion. Yet political acknowledgment of issues did not indicate approval, merely that the feminists were bringing up an issue that those opposed to women's rights felt the need to counter with arguments about women's impracticality and that they did not deserve suffrage.¹¹³

Mexican feminists could boast of achievements, even if they did not lead to complete equality. The 1914 divorce laws of Venustiano Carranza introduced dissolution of marriage as an issue within feminist groups. Although not all feminists approved of divorce (Sofia Villa de Buentello among those who disapproved), the 1914 laws, and the subsequent Law of Family Relations in 1917 elaborating on them, allowed for legal dissolution of marriages and the remarriage of both the husband and wife afterward, and for greater female power within the home.¹¹⁴ Correspondingly, a consular report to the Secretary of State from Durango in March of 1916 containing amendments to divorce laws stated: "...the entire procedure and fundamental law relating to divorce has been newly created."¹¹⁵

Feminist achievements, however, could be sporadic. In a report to the Secretary of State from May 1922, forwarded a press dispatch from the newspaper *Excelsior*, indicating that the state Legislature of San Luis Potosí was making preparations to allow women to vote.¹¹⁶ The report included a quote from the *Excelsior*, "However, it is more probable that the women of San Luis Potosí will be content with their reputation of being excellent mothers and refrain from mixing in politics, though naturally a few 'of the advanced type' will do so.'" The next year, another document to the Secretary of State in January reported that San Luis Potosí had gained female suffrage, but only for those able to read and write, and not for those affiliated with

¹¹³ Buck, "The Meaning of the Women's Vote in Mexico, 1917-1953," pp 74-75.

¹¹⁴ Smith, *Gender and the Mexican Revolution*, 123-124.

¹¹⁵ NARA, Record Group 59, Microfilm Roll 148, 1910-1920.

¹¹⁶ NARA, Record Group 59, Microfilm Roll 99, 1910-1920.

religious organizations.¹¹⁷ The mandate that only educated women, with the implication that higher-class women would be included in this number, and those free from the backward influence of the Catholic Church, be allowed to vote, shows the class boundaries of the time. The document displayed the unwillingness of male leaders to grant citizenship rights to women associated with pre-revolutionary institutions and to the lower classes. By confining themselves within these parameters, the feminists acted within the gender boundaries of the time to effectively limit the benefits of feminist reforms to the upper classes.

Yet one year later, an American Foreign Service Report from 1924 regarding feminism in the state of San Luis Potosí declared, “There is no movement or issue in this district that might be classed as a movement towards or an issue involving feminism...”¹¹⁸ The service report stated that the lack of a feminist movement in the area was because of the women of the district remaining loyal to the Catholic Church, and the report went on to make the point that in any case, the right of suffrage that Governor Rafael Nieto had given women in the district was pointless because corruption was so widespread in the politics of San Luis Potosí. Yet the author of the report, Walter F. Boyle, optimistically believed that the arrival of fair politics would give feminism more. Whether or not the women of San Luis Potosí had demanded the right of suffrage, it remains significant that the governor of the state would include it in his program as a means of progressiveness. It is important to note the dismissive tone of the consular report in regards to Nieto's reforms, as his political reforms tended towards socialism and the United States was wary of possible socialist or communist action.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ NARA, Record Group 59, Microfilm Roll 148, 1910-1920.

¹¹⁹ “The United States...in 1920, had reduced Mexico to pariah status by refusing to recognize or extend credit to a revolutionary nation whose constitution threatened the sanctity of private property.” Stephen E. Lewis and Mary Kay Vaughan, “Introduction,” in *The Eagle and the Virgin: Nation and Cultural Revolution in Mexico, 1920-1940*, 14.

The 1920's, however, did not prove to be an era of great progress for the feminist movement. As Shirlene Soto demonstrates, this stemmed not only from remaining gender stereotypes and external criticism, but also from the struggles of Mexican feminist groups to coalesce into the movements they would form in the later parts of the twentieth century.¹²⁰ For example, in 1926 Elvia Carrillo Puerto, sister of progressive Yucatán governor Felipe Carrillo Puerto, failed to enter the Mexican Congress.¹²¹ An American article stated, “Her defeat has caused no surprise in political circles as the experts believe that the time is not just ripe for a woman to succeed in national politics in Mexico. The woman suffrage movement has not gained much momentum here, although its supporters declare that they will continue agitation even if they cannot hope for much success for many years.” This same year, San Luis Potosí reversed the law granting female suffrage.¹²² Progress against the gender boundaries of the time proved slow and often unprofitable for feminist activity.

Internal and External Threats to Cohesion

Mexican feminists did not always coalesce into strong groups for the purpose of bringing reforms. These women did not allow lower-class women to become their allies. Women of the rural, poorer classes only formed small parts of feminist groups, as representatives of those who wished for the advancement of revolutionary reforms. Yet the lack of universal agreement over the most pertinent gender issues and strength of outward disapproval led to, respectively, problems within the movement itself, and slowed the progress the feminists wished to make.

The differences of opinion within the feminist groups themselves proved detrimental to

¹²⁰ Soto, *Emergence of the Modern Mexican Woman*, 97-98.

¹²¹ “Woman Loses in Mexico,” *The New York Times*, July 13, 1926.

¹²² Macías, *Against All Odds*, 112.

the movement, often leading to ideological disagreements that did not allow the women to pursue specific goals until they were achieved.¹²³ Sofía Villa de Buentello herself was evidence that not all feminists could agree on every issue, as she advocated women suffrage, but did not approve of divorce because of the stigma it lent to women.¹²⁴ When Villa de Buentello helped to organize the Congress of “Mujeres de la Raza,” in 1925, lack of universal feminist support for her views led her to attempt, unsuccessfully, to call for the adjournment of the congress.¹²⁵ As Shirlene Soto describes, this congress was significant in that the discord between Villa de Buentello and more radical feminists such as Elvia Carrillo Puerto not only caused the congress to dissolve, but gave the Mexican press ample opportunity to mock the feminists for their inability to convene successfully.¹²⁶ In 1928, journalist Ernest Gruening claimed that the activism of feminists such as Villa de Buentello, who worked for legal rights for women while still objecting to divorce, presented a contradiction: “Some Mexican 'Feminists', sufficiently aware of women's handicaps to protest against them publicly and in print, are, paradoxically, still so imbued with the conventionally Mexican way of thinking that they object to legalizing divorce on the ground that it releases a husband from his marital responsibilities.”¹²⁷ Gruening used the word “feminist” in quotes to refer to Villa de Buentello in his notes. Yet this statement also exhibits that Gruening acknowledged the difficulty of working for women's rights in a society so constrained by

¹²³ Soto, *Emergence of the Modern Mexican Woman*, 120.

¹²⁴ Carmen Ramos Escandón, “Challenging Legal and Gender Constraints in Mexico: Sofía Villa de Buentello's Criticism of Family Legislation, 1917-1927,” in *The Women's Revolution in Mexico: 1910-1953*, ed. Stephanie Mitchell and Patience A. Schell (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007), 57-58.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 59.

¹²⁶ Soto, *Emergence of the Modern Mexican Woman*, pp 107-108. Note that Soto, in her glossary (pg 174), states that the term “mujeres de la raza” indicated that the women of this congress were “white, Spanish-speaking women,” yet Carmen Ramos Escandón states that “[the group] called *Mujeres de la Raza* (Women of the Hispanic Race) [was] an organization that sought to include both peasant and urban working women.” It is possible that this organization may have been willing to accept the membership of poor white women, but not indigenous peasants. Escandón, “Challenging Legal and Gender Constraints in Mexico,” pg 58.

¹²⁷ Ernest Gruening, *Mexico and its Heritage* (New York, New York: D. Appleton-Century Company, 1928), 627.

centuries-old gender norms.

Some feminists favored accepting American help to further their social aims. Yet others, remembering only too well the involvement of the United States in Mexico's economic affairs during the Porfiriato, rejected this idea.¹²⁸ An article in *The Dallas Morning News* from 1919 titled "Mexican Feminist Council Wants No U.S. Philanthropy" exhibited the attitudes of the latter group.¹²⁹ The article stated that Elena Torres, the general secretary of the Council, had expressed the need for Mexico to take care of its own charity work to avoid foreign interference from the United States, no matter how benevolent it appeared. Torres, a prominent feminist in Mexico, participated in welfare programs administering help and education to the poor and lower classes.¹³⁰ Yet another article from *The Fort Worth Star-Telegram* detailed the activities of the Mexican branch of the Young Men's Christian Association in educating both Mexican children and lower-class women in family maintenance in 1921.¹³¹ Despite a level of opposition to foreign aid, help from the United States actually resembled the activities of Mexican feminists, as well as those of female supporters of the temperance movement and the groups of professionally-trained women in Mexico during this period.¹³²

Contradictory and at times hostile attention from outside influences also acted to repress feminist progress. Similarly, while the Mexican press frequently scorned feminist attempts at social and legal reform within the country, the *Excélsior* apparently had no qualms about endorsing American feminism when the newspaper published an article discussing President Harding's tentative decision to send a female delegate to a conference for disarmament in

¹²⁸ Macías, *Against All Odds*, 115.

¹²⁹ "Mexican Feminist Council Wants No U.S. Philanthropy," *The Dallas Morning News*, December 25, 1919.

¹³⁰ Soto, *Emergence of the Modern Mexican Woman*, 100.

¹³¹ "Mexican Schools to Continue Work," *The Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, May 19, 1921.

¹³² Macías, *Against All Odds*, 113-114.

Washington D.C.¹³³ At a period when newspapers often recommended traditional gender roles for Mexican women, the contrast of printing such a piece is startling. Nor did all Mexican women agree that feminist reforms merited greater attention than other social issues, as María Luisa Castellanos de Alonso Inguanzo wrote for *El Dictamen* in 1922. Here, she argued that Mexican women should not demand rights while neglecting the duty of caring for the young and ignorant, so that the latter might become good Mexican citizens.¹³⁴ Another analogous contradiction appears in the opinion of José Vasconcelos, Minister of Public Education and author of *La Raza Cósmica*, who accused the feminists of hurting their own movement by focusing too much on trying to attain suffrage at the expense of other issues.¹³⁵ In a similarly critical vein, notable United States feminist Carrie Chapman Catt, while not specifically referring to Mexico but to Latin America, stated in an article for *Current History* in 1923 that the lack of effective feminist organizational movements was what led to the continuance of female disenfranchisement in Latin America: “Women in South America do not want to organize nor to work for the emancipation of their sex; yet they long for that freedom. Organization is not a strong point with the Latins...the women leading the organized groups with definite aims find the outlook dark and unpromising.”¹³⁶ Catt's statement acts almost as a condemnation when juxtaposed with the clear condoning of North American feminism within the *Excelsior* article of 1921.

Anna Macías writes that the major achievement for Mexican feminists in the 1920's, the reformed Civil Code of 1927, extended Carranza's Family Relations Law and achieved more

¹³³ “La Opinion Extranjera Al Día”, *Excelsior*, August 18, 1921.

¹³⁴ “Ocupemonos Menos de Los Derechos y más de los Deberes,” *El Dictamen*, April 2, 1922.

¹³⁵ “El Final de la Jira del Sr. Vasconcelos,” *La Revista de Yucatán*, December 9, 1921.

¹³⁶ Carrie Chapman Catt, “Anti-Feminism in South America,” *Current History* (New York), Vol. 18, No. 6 (Sept. 1923): 1036.

legal equality between the sexes.¹³⁷ Yet she is not incorrect in stating, “In this case, as in so many others, changing the law has not led to changing the custom.”¹³⁸ Ernest Gruening, pointing to the continuing legal double standards regarding women's power within the home and legal reasons for divorce, remarked unequivocally in 1928: “The Revolution has done little, purposefully, toward the emancipation of women.”¹³⁹ Meanwhile, traditional gender perceptions remained strong in Mexican society into the 1920's. One year after the Civil Code's revision, the U.S. Consul records included a copy of the *Boletín de Educación Pública*.¹⁴⁰ Within it, Doctor Máximo Silva addressed female scholars and emphasized that as the adornments of the Mexican nation, they should eschew bad ideas and influences to properly instruct others. The implication, that an educated woman should raise conscientious Mexican citizens, is clear. Similarly, one of a series of articles leading up to May 10, Mother's Day, in the *Excélsior*, declared that the position of mother was a sacred one.¹⁴¹ The feminists could make little progress in the social sphere where such traditional attitudes remained prevalent, though the 1930's would prove to be a more effective legacy of their attempts.

¹³⁷ Macías, *Against All Odds*, 119-120.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 120.

¹³⁹ Gruening, *Mexico and its Heritage*, 627.

¹⁴⁰ NARA, Record Group 59, Microfilm Roll 204, 1910-1929.

¹⁴¹ “Se acerca el día de nuestro férvido homenaje a la madre, eterna fuente del amor sublime,” *Excélsior*, May 3, 1929.

Conclusion

The Evolution of Female Social Identity

The criticisms that both soldaderas and feminists endured during their respective periods of activity display the pre-existing attitudes towards gender. Soldaderas often fell into their roles by twists of unfortunate circumstance, the politics of virtue leaving them no other option but to follow soldiers who raped or captured them. Others perpetuated the pattern of domestic submissiveness to their male partners by accompanying them. Theoretically, outside the considerations of class, such examples of the soldaderas present images more compliant with the gender norms of the period than otherwise. Yet the concept of a sexually virtuous soldadera does not appear in the annals of the revolution. Military officers denounced their presence among the troops as disruptive, while observers from the United States wasted no time in adopting this sense of derision and creating a popular image of debauchery that pervaded both Mexico and North America. The soldaderas were not soldier-women, but contributed to the revolution in a fashion that proved more poignant. Frequently victims of circumstance, they nevertheless vehemently adopted the cause of providing for, and at times allying with, the fighting men with tremendous ingenuity and resource, and their constant service of both their men and the military of their nation when their decision to follow the army was not wholly their choice created a debt that modern Mexico's development owes to them.

Similarly, the feminist movement in Mexico had a later start than that of the neighboring United States. When the movement did arise, within the strict confines of the Porfiriato, it did not become a consistent progression into the struggle for women's rights, but a multifaceted

movement that suffered from the lack of internal national modernity and the perceived powers of the Catholic Church over women. The feminists endured criticisms not only for the fact that they were attempting to discard the restrictions of centuries past, but also for the ways in which they attempted to organize. Their activities during the revolutionary and postrevolutionary period became as much a method of organization and progression as the revolution was for the nation.

Yet the issues of the revolution, rooted in centuries of conflict and repression between the upper and lower classes, acted as dividers between the soldaderas who provided the stage for change and the feminists who sought to bring change about. The social classes of the feminists were, in terms of social prestige, higher than the rural or indigenous backgrounds of the soldaderas, and as a result, their condescension to women of the lower classes swept the soldaderas into the broad category of inferior or ignorant females to whom the feminists ministered, but did not allow into their ranks. The feminists could maintain their sense of social legitimacy by not crossing the boundaries that social class erected, but in doing so robbed the lower-class women, including the soldaderas, of the chance to eloquently express their own wish for involvement in the making of a new nation. Women of the working classes organized for their advancement and made strides in later years, but the cause of the soldaderas ended with the cessation of military engagements. Thus, they could not organize for official recognition of their roles. As Guisela Latorre points out, the result was that “[The soldadera] was not only de-historicized and mythicized, but she was also recruited into a discourse that simultaneously excluded her.”¹⁴² Correspondingly, as Tabea Alexa Linhard has demonstrated, posterity diminished the real contributions of the soldaderas and disguised their importance by reducing

¹⁴² Guisela Latorre, “Agustín Víctor Casasola's Soldaderas: Malinchismo and the Chicana/o Artist,” in *Feminism, Nation, and Myth: La Malinche*, ed. Amanda Nolacea Harris and Rolando Romero (Houston, Texas: Arte Público Press, 2005), 101.

them to Adelitas (after the famous *corrido*, or folk-song, about the soldadera Adelita), or romantic subjects of myth that, due to their roles as the auxiliaries of the soldiers and nothing more, lessen the possible threat to institutionalized masculinity within the national consciousness.¹⁴³

The disregard of the soldaderas in official accounts of the revolution is evident in the circumstances creating the Commission for the Veterans of the Revolution in 1939. The brainchild of the minister of defense, General Jesús Agustín Castro, the Commission granted medals and pensions to those who had aided the revolution.¹⁴⁴ Women who had served in the military could not apply, though the women who had fought in the revolution as soldier-women did so anyway, with some cases of success.¹⁴⁵ Yet, Martha Eva Rocha writes, “being related, as wife or concubine, widow, daughter, sister, or mother of an ex-combatant was not sufficient reason to attain veteran status.”¹⁴⁶ The soldaderas had no qualifications, therefore, for the government to recognize them as veterans, while the feminists who worked as spies or openly announced support of the revolution (for example, Hirmela Galindo) became part of the national revolutionary narrative. The feminists, then, at least had the benefit of being officially attached to the history of Mexico's liberation within national canon, while the soldaderas received little recognition outside of folklore.

Though set apart in society and within the legends of the revolution, the feminists and the soldaderas only became so due to class standards that were already in place by the time of their activities. Their disunion was a symptom of this social separation. Their battles were similar, in that both groups fought for the advancement of their respective causes, and elicited much

¹⁴³ Tabea Alexa Linhard, *Fearless Women in the Mexican Revolution and the Spanish Civil War* (Columbia, Missouri: University of Missouri Press, 2005), 44.

¹⁴⁴ Rocha, “The Faces of Rebellion,” 16.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 17.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 16.

negative attention and condemnation for their activities. The consular report concerning the two women held in the Cuernavacan military jail illustrates that though the girl from Mexico City and the soldadera held different social places, they endured similar treatment from the male soldiers that imprisoned them. Likewise, the soldaderas and the feminists endured similar levels of criticism for their activities, though pre-existing barriers of class acted to alienate them from each other.

Their legacies are not mutually exclusive. Mary Kay Vaughan writes, “The soldaderas heralded a more open, mobile, experimental womanhood...[the revolution] assaulted Victorian morality and rules of sexual repression and brought women into public space in unprecedented ways.”¹⁴⁷ The soldaderas challenged the concept of female virtue by accompanying soldiers on the move, and did not refrain from doing so because of the absence of marriage. The feminists utilized the public space of the revolution as much as possible to draw attention to their own goals and to reshape their own aims as those of a modern nation. Both groups garnered opposition and criticism for their activities, yet they both helped to publicly familiarize people with an increasingly active picture of female participation. Even if gender equality did not come about in full by the end of the 1920's, the soldaderas and the feminists had planted its seed.

Thus, there is a possible channel for further research. The flappers of the United States had their Mexican counterparts in the chicas modernas, who also shaped the image of the modern Mexican woman. The influences of feminism and the subversion of gender roles of the soldaderas transitioned women to the more liberated woman of the 1920's. As Anne Rubenstein demonstrates, when combined with the Mexican public's greater familiarity with film and fashion

¹⁴⁷ Mary Kay Vaughan, “Introduction,” in *Sex in Revolution: Gender, Politics, and Power in Modern Mexico*, ed. Gabriela Cano, Jocelyn Olcott, and Mary Kay Vaughan (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2006), 24-25.

of the United States, women started dressing like flappers and cutting their hair, yet the social initiative of such women outraged Mexican traditionalists that still treated female bodies as the public manifestations of society's better or worse values.¹⁴⁸ When the parallel freedom of North American women was in part a reaction to the gaining of the vote in 1920, the fact that Mexican women followed their own version of foreign trends, when they had gained no such political strides, conceivably includes the activities of the soldaderas and the feminists in their willingness to become more visible. Yet the liberated women of the time did not encourage similar liberation for the poor or indigenous, thus displaying the same class-consciousness of the concurrent feminist movements. Anne Rubenstein writes: "...neither opponents nor defenders of las pelonas wanted women who appeared too Indian ('barrel shaped') or too poor to adopt this new style."¹⁴⁹ The presence of strong Mexican women, throughout the social spectrum, during the Porfiriato and the revolution, and the formative national years following, indicates the resolve of such women to express their identities. However, the ways in which feminists and liberated Mexican women navigated their progressiveness throughout the complications of such intense social stratification displays the very deep-rootedness of the issues of race and ethnicity within Mexican society, that the twentieth century and the supposed modernization of the country did not displace. Due to the tenacity of such race- and class-consciousness, it is imperative to understand the wide variations of the experiences of Mexican women within the framework of the revolution.

¹⁴⁸ Anne Rubenstein, "The War on Las Pelonas," in *Sex in Revolution: Gender, Politics, and Power in Modern Mexico*, 62.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 64.

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