THE *SOLDADERAS*: BATTLEGROUND AND SYMBOLISM

THE IMPORTANCE OF FEMALE SOLDIERS IN THE MEXICAN REVOLUTION (1910-1920)

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INTRODUCTION

Popular entre la tropa era Adelita,
La mujer que el sargento idolatraba
Que además de ser valiente era bonita
Que hasta el mismo coronel la respetaba[1-2]

The famous Mexican song *La Adelita* tells the story of a legendary *soldadera*, or female soldier, during the Mexican Revolution (1910).[3] It describes her courage as well as her beauty, demonstrating the idolization of her various characteristics. The personage of Adelita has become a worldwide cult figure to such an extent, her name has become synonym to *soldadera*. Nowadays her image is used by feminist groups in both Mexico and the rest of the world. More importantly, Adelita has transferred into a universal symbol of the Mexican Revolution.

This paper considers the definition of a *soldadera* as ranging from camp followers performing supporting tasks to female soldiers with a military rank. It furthermore takes into account the symbolic significance of these women. Whatever their role, the *soldaderas* have had a considerable impact on the Revolution and its aftermath. The image of the *soldadera* has become a national symbol of Mexico and the Revolution. Countless *corridos*[4], novels, movies and plays have been inspired by the stories revolving the female soldiers. Even though the symbolic meaning of the *soldaderas* is more dominant in present-day society, one should not forget their actual deeds during the Revolution.

This research attempts to create a better understanding of both the cult figure of the *soldadera* and their daily-life tasks, responsibilities and struggles. Therefore, this paper examines the importance of the *soldaderas* in the Mexican Revolution, determining both their influence on events taking place on the battlefield and their symbolic meaning, and how these two sides relate to each other. Put differently, central to the argumentation is who the *soldaderas* were and whom they have become.

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[1] Free translation: “Popular among the troops was Adelita. The woman whom the sergeant idolized. Who was as brave as beautiful, that even the colonel himself respected her”.
[2] Corrido "La Adelita", in J. Romero Flores, *Corridos de la Revolución Mexicana.*
[3] The word *soldadera* is derived from *soldado* (soldier), and was generally defined in Spanish as “the woman who lived with soldiers during war campaigns” (DRAE, 2019).
[4] A popular narrative song and poetry that forms a ballad. This form of music was very popular in Mexico during the Revolutionary period (beginning 20th century).

The following part lays out the academic debate around the significance of the *soldaderas* in Mexico. It provides a rich discussion on her various characteristics. The first chapter creates an insight on the events that occurred during the Mexican Revolution, in order to provide some background information on the situation. The second chapter discusses the numerous reasons for the female soldiers to participate in the Revolution. Thereafter, it concentrates on the circumstances on the battleground for female fighters, and how these developed during the course of the events. The third chapter explains more on the symbolic importance of the *soldaderas* during both the revolutionary period and thereafter. It compares the emblematic characteristics of the *soldaderas* now and in the beginning of the 20th century to each other. Lastly, the conclusion provides an answer to the main question analysed in this research.

The method of research, which is used to collect data, is a qualitative research based on both primary and secondary sources. This research was firstly realized with literary sources to create a general insight in the debate among academics regarding the Mexican Revolution and the features of the *soldaderas*. In addition, information provided by memoirs, newspapers and legislation demonstrates the general notion of female fighters during the years of the Revolution. This paper places the evaluations of these data within the framework of theories and concepts set out in the scientific debate.

As stated before, *soldaderas* were the women participating in the Mexican Revolution. Nevertheless, the term *soldadera* was already used by the Spaniards during the colonial era. During the Spanish Conquest in 1519, the term *soldadera* was used for "servants, either male or female, who took the soldier's pay, the *sold* or *soldada*, and brought him food and other supplies. It seems probable that *soldaderas* came from the lower classes".[5] In other words, *soldaderas* were mostly seen as the lower class wives of the soldiers, supporting them during their time in the army. Arce, for example, argues that "many would say they were wives, others servants, lovers, or prostitutes".[6] Arce herself believes the *soldaderas* to be more than simply servants or prostitutes. She argues that they were integral parts of the military units, performing several tasks. In other words, in contrast to them being "little more than miserable camp followers"[7], Arce refers to them as Mexican fierce fighters for justice. In addition to their realistic existence, the symbolic

[5] E. Salas, *Soldaderas in the Mexican military: Myth and History* (Austin 1990), 11.
[6] C. Arce, *Mexico's Nobodies: The Cultural Legacy of the Soldadera and Afro Mexican Women* (Albany 2017), 560.
[7] Salas, *Soldaderas in the Mexicon Military*, 1.

meaning of the *soldaderas* is discussed broadly. Arrizon relates *soldadera* to 'la Adelita'[8], a broadly known symbol of identity for these women. She continues by stating that currently the name 'Adelita' is used to mean "any woman who struggles and fights for her rights" in both societies of Mexico and the United States.[9]

During the Mexican Revolution, the participation of the *soldaderas* became the most evident. In this period, their numbers increased gravely. They fought for both the Federal Army and for the revolutionary armies. At times, they were camp followers. Others were actual soldiers. Their rank could differ from combatant to commanding officer. However, no accounts have been found on a woman ever reaching the rank of general. In spite of this, within the revolutionary armies female officers were generally called *generala* or *coronela*. Moreover, some women even attempted to take on male identities by changing their name or their clothing.[10] *Soldaderas* came from different social backgrounds, varying from middle class women who played an important role within the political movement to lower class, rural, mestizo and Native women about whom lesser is known.[11]

To understand profoundly the literary debate, it is necessary to observe the different statements as explained by various academics. Firstly, the worldwide phenomenon of female soldiers and their symbolic importance will be discussed. Afterwards, the paper provides a detailed insight on the debate on the importance of the *soldaderas*. It lays down arguments for both their symbolic and practical role in the Mexican Revolution.

Throughout history, a fascination has developed about women participating in war and revolution. Bos describes how female fighters in the Paris Commune of 1871 were viewed upon in different ways. He demonstrates the difference between the image of these women as soft-hearted, innocent and decent on the one hand and of them being dangerous, seductive and "deceptively smiling murderers"[12] on the other. He emphasized how different interests caused different stories, creating a widespread series of images of these women. In his other work, he adds several conflicting characteristics of female fighters in the Paris Commune. The authors argues that they were seen as both brave and

[8] Adelita is the diminutive form of Adela, a very popular female name at the time of the Mexican Revolution.
[9] A. Arrizon, ''Soldaderas' and the staging of the Mexican Revolution', *TDR* 42:1 (1998) p.90-112, 91.
[10] G. Cano, 'Soldaderas and Coronelas', *Encyclopedia of Mexico 1* (1997), 1357-1360, 1357-1359.
[11] S. Soto, *Emergence of the Modern Mexican Woman: Her Participation in Revolution and Struggle for Equality 1910-1940* (Denver 1990), 32.
[12] D. Bos, *Bloed en Barricaden. De Parijse Commune herdacht* (Amsterdam 2014), 361-362.

belligerent, and as mother figures, taking care of the men dying.[13] The various ambivalences around the symbol of the female soldier as explained by Bos will be maintained throughout this research, determining the identity of the *soldaderas*.

Brooks' research focuses on the role of British women during the Second World War. She explains how female nurses who healed men for the war effort were an essential part of the military services.[14] She explains how the nurses, as women, "helped to improve efficiency and boosted the morale of the patients".[15] Brooks argues furthermore that the position of the female nurses depended upon both their clinical skills and their womanhood.[16] In other words, they held a dual responsibility. On the one hand, they had a motherly role in taking care of the wounded man. On the other, they were "sexually knowledgeable single women with unchaperoned access to naked male bodies".[17] Nevertheless, Brooks concludes that the contradiction of being feminine and taking on more masculine roles required by the situation of war only increased during the years.[18]

Even in more present-day situations, women in war continue to be a captivating theme for the audience. Dean argues that the narrative on Kurdish female fighters often results in a "discontinuous depiction of the subject, overshadowing some aspects in favour of other, more suitable features".[19] However, their fight opens up new discussions on various aspects: gender equality, democracy, the nation-state, war and politics.[20] Dean warns that, although the peak of media interest from the West took place between 2014 and 2017, it is still an ongoing fight. Therefore, no final conclusion can be made yet.[21]

The following part will focus on the debate around female soldiers in the case of Mexico, providing a detailed discussion on their importance. Soto places the emphasis on the female participation in the actual warfare during the Mexican Revolution, arguing that they were "instrumental in the formation of revolutionary plans, goals, and objectives".[22]

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[13] D. Bos, 'Martelaressen en moordenaars: Symbolische voorstellingen van vrouwen en de dood in de Parijse commune van 1871', *Jaarboek van de Vrouwengeschiedenis* 24 (2004) p. 68-88, 74-75.
[14] J. Brooks, *Negotiating Nursing: British Army Sisters and Soldiers in the Second World War* (Manchester 2018), 199.
[15] Ibidem, 200.
[16] Ibidem.
[17] Ibidem, 201.
[18] Ibidem.
[19] V. Dean, 'Kurdish Female Fighters: The Western Depiction of YPJ Combatants in Rojava', *Glocalism: Journal of Culture, Politics and Innovation* 1 (2019) p. 1-29, 25.
[20] Ibidem, 26.
[21] Ibidem.
[22] Soto, *Emergence of the Modern Mexican Woman*, 32, 139.

Furthermore, she argues, women were actively involved in "virtually all other phases"[23] of the Revolution. Examples she provides are women from all social backgrounds joining in both the fighting on the battlefields as executing other, related tasks as printing revolutionary documents or helping the wounded.[24] For many women, the Revolution created unique opportunities to break the chain of tradition in Mexico. Soto therefore concludes that the revolutionary reforms, which seemed promising towards the position of women in Mexico, caused women to participate and help win the Revolution. Afterwards, however, many of the women's needs were ignored.[25]

Fuentes examines the importance of the *soldaderas* on the battleground as well. He notes that one should take into account two important facts. The first is that the armies changed in the course of the fight. Secondly, armies or divisions within armies were organized in different ways regarding the participation of women. Fuentes demonstrates his argument as follows: In the beginning of the revolutionary upheavals, during the years of 1910-1912, *soldaderas* were organized as small and mobile bands best suited for sneak attacks and swift retreats. During this period, these women did generally not serve as camp followers. Regional battles were fought out fast, therefore allowing soldiers and officers to "maintain their home ties" and not needing "to bring their families along".[26] However, as the author explains, a second round of warfare broke out in 1913. This time, the fighting reached large areas of Mexico. Fuentes states that: "Protracted military campaigns took armies far away from their home bases so they rapidly evolved as self-supporting, roaming communities of men, women, and children".[27] In other words, armies had to be self-sufficient in gathering provisions or nursing the wounded. Since they needed the men for the actual battles, the *soldaderas* were now put to work performing non-fighting tasks. The three largest armies, the Federales, the Carrancistas and the Villistas all contained large amounts of *soldaderas*. However, as Fuentes adds, the Zapatistas in the south did not obtain formal support units nor *soldaderas*, and were instead more dependent on neighboring communities. The female population of the villages did not accompany the troops, however provided food and "were targets of the

[23] Soto, *Emergence of the Modern Mexican Woman*, 139
[24] Ibidem, 31.
[25] Ibidem, 141.
[26] A.R. Fuentes, 'Battleground Women: Soldaderas and Female Soldiers in the Mexican Revolution', *The Americas* 51:4 (1995) p. 525-553, 552.
[27] Ibidem.

sexual needs of the Zapatista soldiers".[28] Fuentes concludes that the role of the *soldaderas* differs in time and place, and that it is therefore difficult to establish a single definition.

Salas, explaining the development of the *soldaderas* from the Mesoamerican origins until the large-scale Mexican immigration to the United States, somewhat agrees with Soto and Fuentes on the fact that women indeed participated in the Revolution. Nevertheless, she underlines that women mostly performed supporting tasks. They were only put up for fighting when necessary. She continues by explaining how *soldaderas* mostly stayed in the camps, and their actions were many times considered morale inspiring. Therefore, she argues, "the *soldaderas* were unofficially recognized as a necessary part of the Mexican army".[29] Nevertheless, some officers accused them of being whores and spreading immorality among the soldiers. In other words, their symbolic importance could contain different meanings. Salas demonstrates how from the 1930s onwards, the practice of the *soldadera* ceased to exist. However, due to their cultural reconstructions, their legacy remained. Salas concludes that, although the struggle for emancipation of Mexican women remains existing, the *soldadera* imaginary is a "powerful legacy and a flexible enough symbol to empower Mexican women for many generations to come".[30]

Arce argues that *soldaderas*, although commonly referred to as camp followers, were very much involved in a military way, explaining that many of them held military rank, heading their own battalions.[31] Even though cultural production romanticized the importance of the female soldiers, the author explains it was based on the lives of real people. Nevertheless, this does not mean it represents the *soldadera* movement in general. On page 282 she states: "Art and popular culture can intervene, although not always evenly, where history leaves of"[32] Within the cultural reconstruction, *soldaderas* were mostly portrayed as beautiful, caring and an object of desire, ignoring the more 'masculine' characteristics or the fact that they were not always idealized in their days. During the Revolution, *soldaderas* were at times called vulgar, shameless and foul-mouthed, or even mindless. In spite of this, Arce agrees with the distinction made by Arrizon and Soto on the different backgrounds of the *soldaderas*. She states: "the lower

[28] Fuentes, 'Battleground Women', 552.
[29] Salas, *Soldaderas in the Mexican Military*, 121.
[30] Ibidem, 122.
[31] Arce, *Mexico's Nobodies*, 56-57.
[32] Ibidem, 282.

classes were the *soldaderas*, the middle classes served in all capacities, and the upper classes lent their time to the health organizations such as the Red or White Cross".[33]

Arrizon, in contrast, focuses on the problematic identity of 'La Adelita'. She explains how this composed image of women who took part in the Mexican Revolution can be seen in different ways. Although emphasizing the mysticism around 'La Adelita', she makes a distinction between women from lower social backgrounds and indigenous origins fighting on the battlegrounds on the one hand, and women from higher classes participating in the Revolution by performing other, subordinate tasks on the other. However, as a "paradigm of the female rebel"[34], the *soldadera* was an inspiration for many during and long after the Mexican Revolution. Countless paintings and other images were created around the mysterious identity of 'La Adelita'. Afterwards, dramatic plays were written and performed on the subject. Within the symbolism of 'La Adelita', Arrizon argues, "the gendered position of the protagonist is repeatedly represented in romantic concepts".[35] The notion on the *soldadera* varies from an object of sexual desire to a fighting soldier dying in combat. Arrizon finishes by stating that the image of Adelita's heroism is frequently popularized in current society worldwide.[36]

Inherent to the story and identity of the *soldaderas* are the involvement of photography and filmography during the Revolution. Arce argues that the photographing and filming of the *soldaderas* during the Revolution has been "instrumental to remembering these women".[37] She explains that the female soldiers were very aware of the fact that they were filmed, this way revealing their identity in the Mexican Revolution.

Poniatowska takes it further by describing the photographs taken of the *soldaderas* as a contradiction to the kind of story told by the canonical authors of the Mexican Revolution. With these images, she aims to prove the female soldiers were not foul-mouthed, vulgar beasts, as according to certain contemporaries.[38] Poniatowska praises the role of photography in preserving the legacy of the *soldaderas*, and explains that without this photographic evidence, the presence of these women would be lost for history has tried to deny their importance. Moreover, the author compares the icon of the *soldadera* to the importance of the train as an icon in revolutionary Mexico. Interesting is

[33] Arce, *Mexico's Nobodies*, 62.
[34] Arrizon, ''Soldaderas' and the staging of the Mexican Revolution', 96.
[35] Ibidem, 98.
[36] Ibidem, 109.
[37] Arce, *Mexico's Nobodies*, 41.
[38] E. Poniatowska, *Las Soldaderas: Las Mujeres de la Revolución Mexicana* (Mexico City 2006), 13.

the transformation of the train from a symbol of the modernization of Mexico during the Porfiriato to a symbol of the revolutionaries. Put differently, both the *ancien régime* and the revolutionary movement used the train as an emblem of their ideological victories. Poniatowska explains how during the Revolution the *soldaderas*, as the trains, travelled throughout the country to support the troops.[39] Due to art, the figure of la Adelita is irreversibly related to the *soldaderas*. She explains that art "filled in the lack of recognition"[40] for women.[41] Poniatowska believes the images taken during the Revolution form the discourse that counters the official narrative.

Several critics have created a response to the research of Poniatowska. Rueda-Acedo sides with the work of the previously discussed author, and explains how her story of the *soldaderas* as contra discourse to the official story by the authorities created new alternatives for historic reflection. By emphasizing their evident existence in photos and film, argues Rueda-Acedo, Poniatowska saves the *soldaderas* from animosity, rewriting them into Mexican history.[42] Soltero Sánchez calls this process the turning "intrahistory into history". The author explains that for this process to have taken place, the most important instruments that Poniatowska used were literature and photography.[43]

Nevertheless, other authors express their criticism on the objectivity on the photos and films related to the events in Mexico. Legrás, likewise examining the symbolic meaning of the *soldaderas* through photographic material, explains how it is ever-changing according to the political climate of a given time. Therefore the author suggests that a single reality never exists and interpretation requires "an always renewed criticism of the imaginary structuration of the world".[44] He concludes that during the Revolution women in Mexico emerged as if in a new light due to photography, however questioning its objectivity.

Pick, Landeta and Bolaños examine the role of filmography in the reconstruction of the *soldadera* identity. Their research provides a detailed analysis of the *soldadera* as a protagonist in the films 'La Negra Angustias' (The Black Angustias, 1949) and 'La

[39] Poniatowska, *Las Soldaderas*, 20-21.
[40] Own translation from Spanish. Original text: "los corridos suplieron la falta de reconocimiento".
[41] Poniatowska, *Las Soldaderas*, 22.
[42] A.R. Rueda-Acedo, 'Las soldaderas de Elena Poniatowska: Estampas femeninas de la Revolución', *Romance Notes* 51:3 (2011) p. 423-431, 430.
[43] E. Soltero Sánchez, 'Apunten, disparen, flash: Elena Poniatowska, Víctor Casasola y Manuel Álvarez Bravo', *América sin Nombre* 11-12 (2008) p. 156-162, 162.
[44] H. Legrás, 'Seeing Women Photographed in Revolutionary Mexico', *Journal for Theoretical Studies in Media and Culture* 38:1 (2016) p. 3-21, 113-114, 19.

Soldadera' (The Camp Follower, 1966). By means of filmography, they argue that the *soldaderas* are restored into history: "films reveal how the identity and social reality of their characters [of the *soldaderas*] have been shaped by discrimination and misogyny".[45] By demonstrating this, the authors reveal how symbolism within filmography is able to challenge the archetypal representations of women during and after the Mexican Revolution, laying emphasis on the harsh reality of the *soldadera's* daily-life.[46] This counteracts the idea of 'la Adelita' as a beautiful and brave object of desire, as explained by Arce and Arrizon.

Fernández likewise points out the difference between the popular image of la Adelita and the real-life *soldadera*. She designates the representations of female soldiers in movies as romanticized. By participating in the Revolution, Mexican women broke with their traditional gendered roles. Fernández emphasizes that *soldaderas* indeed "fought valiantly alongside the men in every rank of both the Federal Army and the revolutionary forces".[47] Some of them even became generals. In spite of their accomplishments on the battlefield after the Revolution their importance was soon forgotten or misrepresented so that they fit with societal expectations. Consequently, the female soldiers would no longer form a threat to the male's dominant position. For this reason, the symbolic meaning of the *soldaderas* revolved around their beauty. Fernández concludes that during the Revolution women overcame many obstacles and achieved limited forms of equality. However, due to the media, their identity is virtually unknown. Instead, la Adelita embodied the stereotypical *soldadera* during Mexican Cinematic Golden Age (1930s-1950s). However, during the 1960s the symbol of la Adelita started to be more realistic. From that moment onwards, she is a strong and brave woman who stands for independence and is less associated with desire of sexuality.[48] In other words, Fernández believes that over the past decades the symbolic meaning of the *soldadera* has increasingly approached the realistic situation.

Several conclusions can be made on the foregoing discussion. A debate has emerged on the importance of the *soldaderas*. Some authors place the emphasis on the

[45] Z. Pick, M. Landeta & J. Bolaños, 'Reconfiguring gender and the representation of the soldadera in the Mexican revolution film', *Studies in Spanish and Latin American Cinemas* 11:1 (2014) p. 75-90, 75.
[46] Ibidem, 88.
[47] D. Fernández, 'From Soldadera to Adelita: The Depiction of Women in the Mexican Revolution', *McNair Scholars Journal* 13 (2009) p. 53-62, 62.
[48] Ibidem, 62.

soldaderas as the women who fought in the battlefield.[49] They conclude this, among others, from the fact that numerous women commanded soldiers and held military ranks. Other academics underline the importance of the *soldaderas* as mostly performing supporting tasks.[50] According to them, women were active in all kinds of aspects of the Revolution. However these general conclusions, several authors underline the difference in social background of the *soldaderas*. The actual fighting was mostly done by indigenous women who possessed a lower social status while women from higher classes were mostly involved in other, subordinate tasks.[51] Moreover, Fuentes warns that the construction of the armies containing women differed in time and place.

Other authors examined the symbolic meaning of the *soldaderas* during and after the Revolution. Agreement on the matter does not seem to exist. It is clear that photography and film were inextricably related to the creation of the symbol of 'la Adelita'. This seems to produce both positive and negative effects for the importance of the *soldaderas*. Various authors suggest that the presence of female soldiers in photos and films preserved the legacy of these women for many years after the Revolution.[52] However, others argue that it created a romanticized, unrealistic image of them.[53] This research aims to fill the discrepancy between the real-life and symbolic importance of the *soldaderas*, meanwhile creating a comparative study to discover which meaning has been more crucial in determining the course of the Mexican Revolution. Furthermore will be examined if the *soldaderas* have had a say in the narrative about them, or if their identity has been formed by others and if so, to which purpose.

[49] Arce, *Mexico's Nobodies*; Arrizon, 'Soldaderas' and the staging of the Mexican Revolution'; Fernández, 'From Soldadera to Adelita'; Fuentes, 'Battleground Women'.
[50] Arrizon, 'Soldaderas' and the staging of the Mexican Revolution'; Salas, *Soldaderas in the Mexican Military*; Soto, *Emergence of the Modern Mexican Woman*.
[51] Arce, *Mexico's Nobodies*; Arrizon, 'Soldaderas' and the staging of the Mexican Revolution'; Soto, *Emergence of the Modern Mexican Woman*.
[52] Arce, *Mexico's Nobodies*; Poniatowska, *Las Soldaderas*; Rueda-Acedo, 'Las soldaderas de Elena Poniatowska; Salas, *Soldaderas in the Mexican Military*; Soltero Sánchez, 'Apunten, disparen, flash'.
[53] Arce, *Mexico's Nobodies*; Arrizon, 'Soldaderas' and the staging of the Mexican Revolution'; Fernández, 'From Soldadera to Adelita'; Legrás, 'Seeing Women Photographed in Revolutionary Mexico'; Pick a.o. 'Reconfiguring gender and the representation of the soldadera in the Mexican revolution film'.

CHAPTER 1
THE MEXICAN REVOLUTION: A CONTEXTUALIZATION

Causes

To understand profoundly the origins of the *soldaderas*, it is important to have some knowledge on the causes, developments and consequences of the Revolution of 1910. The Mexican Revolution originated from a widespread discontent on the regime of president Porfirio Díaz, who had, during his 35 years of ruling, modernized Mexico.[54] After having controlled the country as "interim president" for a while, he easily succeeded in winning the presidential elections, and was sworn in officially on February 17, 1887. At the time, he vowed to only serve one term. Nevertheless, he engineered the election of general González, his trusted subordinate. When González succeeded him on December 1, 1880, Díaz kept his influence on governmental affairs. Four years later, he was reelected president, a title he carried on uninterruptedly for the following 26 years. His device became 'order and progress', and he invested in many industries.[55] The regime of Díaz, many times referred to as the *Porfiriato* (1876-1910), mainly sought development in formal education and the construction of infrastructure. The latter provided better transportation for rural products in agriculture, mining and timber.[56]

Nevertheless, Díaz had only included members of the elite and foreign investors in the benefits of the modernization, impoverishing gravely the middle and lower classes of the country.[57] This unequal system concentrated wealth in the hands of 7,200 hacienda owners and some 45,000 rancheros, less than 1 percent of the rural population, while leaving more than 11 million rural workers underemployed, destitute, and oppressed by debt peonage and even slavery. Furthermore, 162 foreign capitalists controlled more than 80 percent of the coastal regions and 22 percent of the total surface of Mexico.[58] To uphold

[54] D. Marley, *Mexico at War: From the Struggle for Independence to the 21st-Century Drug Wars* (Santa Barbara 2014), 327.
[55] Ibidem, 111.
[56] J. M. Hart (2013) 'Introduction'. In D.W. Richmond & S.W. Hayes, *The Mexican Revolution: Conflict and Consolidation, 1910-1940*, Arlington, United States: Texas University Press, 1.
[57] J. Reed, *Insurgent Mexico* (New York 1914), 48.
[58] Hart, 'Introduction', 1.

his position and maintain order, Díaz had installed Federal Army garrisons and mounted police squadrons known as *rurales* throughout Mexico.[59]

When he announced his plans for an eighth term as president, Francisco I. Madero declared himself oppositional candidate for the presidency. Madero, a Mexican liberal politician and businessman originating from an elitist family in Coahuila, published *La Succesión Presidencial* in 1910, providing a legalistic but possible course of political action against the existing government. His criticism was mainly concentrated on the practice of reelection, and not on the regime of Díaz itself. He particularly called upon alienated groups as the provincial elites and intelligentsia. Thereafter, Madero started campaigning in the region of Mexico City. He furthermore sought support from the anti-reelectionist movement in the eastern parts of the country. Afterwards he returned home to Coahuila, where he worked on local elections with mixed results. Being chosen the leader of the anti-reelectionist movement he emphasized the need to remain within the law. Madero travelled to the western states, where he obtained support from provincial elites and intellectuals as well. This way, anti-reelectionist sentiment started to grow all over Mexico, stimulated by numerous movements.[60]

During Madero's nation-wide campaigning, the Díaz administration tried to hold on to the narrow political base of its *ancien régime*. Intolerant of the new oppositional force, the president arranged the arrest of Madero, along with many of his supporters. On September 27, 1910, Congress certified the results and proclaimed Díaz president for the eighth time. Nevertheless, on October 4, Madero escaped San Luis Potosí prison and fled to San Antonio, Texas.[61] From exile he called for a national uprising against Díaz on November 20, in order to drive him from power by force of arms.[62] Numerous outbreaks erupted throughout northern Mexico in late November 1910, particularly in the rural areas. Rebels easily defeated troops and *rurales*, making the situation too explosive to keep Mexico under governmental control. When the Revolution spread from the provinces to the cities, not enough soldiers were available to confront so many widely scattered outbursts. A coordinated response was furthermore hampered by uncertain telegraphic communications.[63]

[59] Reed, *Insurgent Mexico*, 101, 108.
[60] J.M. Hart, *Revolutionary Mexico* (Berkeley 1987), 100-101.
[61] Reed, *Insurgent Mexico,* 81.
[62] Marley, *Mexico at War*, 112.
[63] Ibidem, 327-328.

In addition to the upheavals in the northern parts of Mexico, a second popular insurrection, started by thousands of peasants, exploded in the south in March 1911. Emiliano Zapata, a charismatic revolutionary fighter, was at the head of the peasant uprising.[64] Zapata, born in the valleys of Morelos in 1879, originated from an ancient family of small-time rangers. Growing up he had developed a genuine sympathy for the poor peasants of Morelos, living in poverty and peonage. Marley provides a solid explanation for his reasons to join in the Revolution: "Frustrated by the corruption of local officials and the indifference of federal authorities in the distant capital, Zapata had embraced the Revolution a few months after its eruption in northern Mexico".[65] Demanding *tierra y libertad* (land and liberty), he gathered an army of peasants under the name of *Ejército Libertador del Sur* (Liberation Army of the South). His army gained such strength that they were able to attack and defeat the federal forces in Cuautla.[66]

Meanwhile, Madero kept up his efforts from the north, taking over Ciudad Juarez with the help of general Pascual Orozco, colonel Francisco (Pancho) Villa and some 3,500 northern rebels.[67] Orozco, born in the northern state of Chihuahua in 1882, worked as a muleteer before the Revolution. He was active in the mining industry in the mountains of his home state. Orozco was one of the first to respond to Madero's call for a national uprising. Together with a few of his relatives, he continuously seized small federal outposts in the fall of 1910. In November and December 1910, he led and won an attack against the federal troops at Ciudad Guerrero. While publically announcing his victory, he titled himself "jefe de armas Pascual Orozco jr." (Chief of Armies Pascual Orozco jr.).[68] Francisco 'Pancho' Villa, currently a famous symbol of the Mexican Revolution, was a lowly bandit who became the leader of revolutionary troops in the north of Mexico. He originates from a poor family living of a small ranch.[69] As Orozco, Villa likewise besieged and defeated small towns in hands of the federal armies. He received a lot of support and his armies grew rapidly. Being a charismatic, brave and well-armed ex-bandit, Villa was called the *Centauro del Norte* (Centaur of the North).[70]

[64] Arrizon, 'Soldaderas' and the staging of the Mexican Revolution', 109.
[65] Marley, *Mexico at War*, 455.
[66] Ibidem.
[67] Ibidem, 328.
[68] Ibidem, 274-275.
[69] Reed, *Insurgent Mexico,* 68-69.
[70] Marley, *Mexico at War*, 431-433.

After having lost Ciudad Juarez, Díaz proved unable to prevent another 1,700 of his troops from being chased out of Torreo on May 15, 1911. Six days later, the southern state of Morelos fell to Zapata's peasant army. It became evident the authoritarian president was on the losing side. Sensing the dictator's weakness, on May 24, 1911, inhabitants of Mexico City started rioting in the main square. After the gathering of thousands of angry citizens outside the Presidential Palace, Porfirio Díaz finally ceded the presidency on May 25. Thereafter, he fled into exile in Europe to live out the rest of his days.[71]

In spite of Díaz's departure from the country, many problems remained. It was hard for Madero to govern the disrupted country, for he did not possess sufficient political experience. The new president proved not able to control the demands and actions of revolutionary peasants and workers. Furthermore, he failed to win over the oligarchy and foreign investors to his rule.[72] Orozco, dissatisfied with the results of the Revolution under Madero, rose against him in Chihuahua City on March 3, 1912. His forces attacked the Maderista army from its rear, causing severe damage.[73] When Madero was not able to withstand the attacks, Victoriano Huerta, head of the army, led a revolt against him.[74]

José Victoriano Huerta Márquez, a conservative born in Jalisco in 1850, enjoyed a military career from 1872 onwards. When the Revolution broke out, Huerta was teaching mathematics in Mexico City. After the outburst, he successfully re-joined the Federal Army in his former rank of brigadier general. Notwithstanding he had protected Porfirio Díaz to Veracruz in order to flee into exile, he did not play a major part in the early fighting. When Madero had assumed his office as president, he had replaced Huerta with the high-minded general Felipe Ángeles. After Orozco turned against Madero, it did not take long before Huerta declared his rejection and took up his arms against the president as well. During the summer of 1912, he launched a campaign of violence that lasted for several months.[75] On February 18, 1913, Madero was deposed and executed by Huerta.[76] On March 17, 1913, Orozco accepted the rank of brigadier in Huerta's federal army.

In reaction to Huerta's victory, military revolutionaries Pancho Villa, Emiliano Zapata, Venustiano Carranza and Álvaro Obregón all picked up their weapons against Huerta. They came from a variety of backgrounds and had different ideas on how to rule

[71] Marley, *Mexico at War*, 329.
[72] Hart, *Revolutionary Mexico*, 13.
[73] Marley, *Mexico at War*, 275.
[74] E. O'Shaughnessy, *A Diplomats Wife in Mexico* (Whitefish 1916), 80-81.
[75] Ibidem.
[76] Reed, *Insurgent Mexico*, 75, 110.

the country after the accomplished Revolution. Nevertheless, when it came to defeating and replacing 'the usurper' Victoriano Huerta, no doubt existed in the minds of these men. Or in the words of Edith O'Shaugnessy: "On that point, *all* are united".[77]

Carranza, born in 1859, was a politician from Coahuila. He originated from a rich, landowning family in the north. When Madero was murdered in February 1913, Carranza drew up the Plan de Guadalupe, a purely political plan to oust Huerta. Thereafter, Carranza became the leader of the northern forces opposed to Huerta.[78] Álvaro Obregón, originating from a humble background in Sonora, became general of the Army of the Northwest, created upon Carranza's call for the creation of a nationwide constitutionalist army.[79] Driven by the disgust on Huerta's remorseless seizure of power, together they defeated Huerta's armies numerous times. Not being able to fight of this many enemies, Huerta was forced to sign his resignation in 1914. Thereafter, Mexico was left in the hands of the four revolutionaries that had defeated him. Nevertheless, conflicts caused by different ideologies obstructed them from bringing peace back into the country.[80] When Carranza entered the capital accompanied by Obregón's victorious army and assumed the presidency, Zapata denounced the self-proclaimed accession on September 8, 1914.[81] Two weeks later, Villa decided to side with Zapata.[82]

To solve the existing problems, the Convention of Aguascalientes (1914) was held. During this convention, reconciliation was hampered by old disagreements. Persistent in wanting to establish a nation according to their own principles, a new wave of revolts broke out under Constitutionalists Carranza and Obregón and Conventionists Zapata and Villa.[83] In the north, Villa and Carranza fought against each other, with Villa enjoying a series of victories for two years. Meanwhile, Zapata continued his struggle against the federal armies in the south.[84] During the Civil War of 1914-1915, Carranza and Obregón succeeded in driving back the armies of his opponents Villa, to the north, and Zapata, to the south. Despite his efforts to continue the revolution in Morelos, Zapata was ambushed

[77] O'Shaughnessy, *A Diplomats Wife in Mexico*, 97.
[78] Reed, *Insurgent Mexico,* 81, 145.
[79] Ibidem, 149.
[80] Hart, *Revolutionary Mexico*, 330.
[81] D.W. Richmond, *Venustiano Carranza's Nationalist Struggle, 1893-1920* (Lincoln 1983), 58.
[82] Marley, *Mexico at War*, 456.
[83] Ibidem, 13-14, 276-280.
[84] Reed, *Insurgent Mexico*, 131.

and assassinated by Carranza agents on April 10, 1919.[85] Villa, after years of continuing his fight, was likewise murdered.[86]

Under the rule of Carranza, the Constitutionalists were in power from 1915 to 1920. Carranza himself executed the presidential office from 1917 to 1920. At the Constitutional Convention in September 1916, he had promised to respect the liberal Constitution of Mexico, drafted in 1857. However, at the time he already stressed its shortcomings. As a consequence, Carranza ordered the drafting of a new constitution in 1917 in Santiago de Querétaro.[87] Carranza, being a Constitutionalist, was disappointed to see a more radical version of the Constitution than he had envisioned.[88] The Constitution was ratified on February 5, 1917. Important to remark are the socialist components, as for example the redistribution of land[89] and the separation of Church and State.[90] In addition, education was declared to be free and non-religious[91] and the rights of workers must always be respected.[92] The latter formally made an end to peonage in Mexico.

The Constitution of 1917 can, due to its long-term importance, be seen as a breaking point in Mexican history. This Constitution is nowadays still in effect. Furthermore imbedded is the principle of "no re-election", making it impossible for Carranza to run for president a second time in the elections of 1920. When former general Obregón announced his plans to run for the upcoming presidency, Carranza expressed his displeasure. To secure his influence, he attempted to appoint Ignacio Bonillas as the next president.[93] This way, the Carranza administration made the same crucial mistake that the Díaz and Madero regimes before him had committed. Carranza's claim was supported solely by the upper bourgeoisie and provincial elite. This stratum was too narrow, and the government failed to establish a solid economy to sustain the large group of people excluded from participation in politics.

Ignacio Bonillas, personal advisor and confidant to Carranza, was announced as successor to the presidency. Despised by Obregonistas for his limited participation in the Revolution and educational background in the United States, riots broke out and

[85] Soto, *Emergence of the Modern Mexican Woman*, 97.
[86] Marley, *Mexico at War*, 440.
[87] Richmond, *Venustiano Carranza's Nationalist Struggle*, 107-108.
[88] D.L. Riner, J.V. Sweeney, *Mexico: Meeting the Challenge* (Berkeley 1991), 64.
[89] *La Constitución Política de Los Estados Unidos Mexicanos* (February 5, 1917), article 27.
[90] Ibidem, article 130.
[91] Ibidem, article 3.
[92] Ibidem, article 123.
[93] Hart, *Revolutionary Mexico*, 335.

eventually a new wave of violence was launched.[94] Large Obregonista armies started closing in swiftly on Mexico City, forcing Carranza to abandon his capital on May 7, 1920. Despite his efforts to flee the country, the fugitive president was attacked from all sides and consequently murdered in the mountains on May 21, 1920.[95] A few months later, Obregón was elected president. The election of Obregón ended the largely-scaled armed and violent struggle in Mexico. Therefore, several historians believe this to be the end of the Revolution. However, since the effects of the Revolution would last for a long time, no consensus exists on this notion.[96] To provide a clear understanding of the arguments posed, this research uses the year 1920 as the end point, since it was at this moment the armed phase of the Revolution had concluded.

The Revolution caused a profound transition of Mexican State and society. Some of the goals set out by the revolutionaries were achieved, others however proved disappointing and impossible. Nevertheless, one cannot deny the significant impact the Revolution had on the country. Mexico, in the words of Hart: "changed from a caste-closed society to an open one that stresses individual competition and social mobility".[97] The cornerstone for this seems the be the offering of higher education, which currently provides university experience to over a million graduate students.

Possibly the most important change regarded the redistribution of land, which used to be mostly in the hands of the elite and foreign investors. In the 1930s, agrarian reforms resulted in the nationalization of more than 150 million acres of land, leaving the oligarchy and foreigners nearly empty-handed. From this period onwards, strategic regions containing useful resources were controlled by a mixture of local and state elites, workers and *campesinos*, cooperating in *pueblos* (public assemblies) in service of the nation's economy. In spite of their changing influence throughout the decades, these organization still exist continuously challenging the political authority in Mexico City.[98] Moreover, one cannot deny the impact of the 1917 Constitution, which is, with several amendments, nowadays still in force. Including all members of Mexican society, the basic principles written down in this document provided progressive changes for many

[94] Hart, *Revolutionary Mexico*, 335-336.
[95] Richmond, *Venustiano Carranza's Nationalist Struggle*, 233-235.
[96] Marley, *Mexico at War*, 330-331.
[97] Hart, *Revolutionary Mexico*, 374.
[98] Hart, 'Introduction', 2.

excluded and ignored groups, of which most notably peasants, workers, slaves and women.

However, the Revolution did not deliver all of its promises. In spite of the seeming victories of the revolutionaries, the urban and industrial working class did not gain a much better wage. Nevertheless the widespread organization of Unions for protection and profits of the workers, the unemployment rate remained at about 40 percent. Furthermore, the benefits of university education only touched certain layers of Mexican society, leaving the majority of its subjects behind. Therefore, the existing gap between rich and poor remains, and is continuously growing in Mexico.[99]

In short, the Mexican Revolution existed of numerous waves of political unrest and violence that spread throughout the country. The main reason for its ignition was the general discontent around the *ancien régime* of dictator Porfirio Díaz. When his opponent Madero fled his imprisonment and called for a national rebellion, many joined in the fighting. They all had their own reasons to participate. The *campesinos* wanted to regain municipal autonomy and the land they had lost to foreigners. The working class demanded an end to the harsh working conditions and repressing production system. Provincial elites and the small bourgeoisie joined the Revolution to overthrow the authoritarian regime they had been excluded from. The main shared goal was to drive foreign domination away from the nation's basic resources and economic infrastructure. Eventually, this led to a civil war culminating in more fighting each time: When Madero was assassinated by Huerta, head of the army, revolutionary leaders picked up their weapons against the 'usurper'. After defeating him, however, old conflicts led to bad blood between the revolutionaries. It was Carranza who succeeded in claiming the presidency, supported by the Constitutionalists. Under him, the Constitution of 1917 was drawn up, which is still in force today. However, after naming a 'puppet'-successor, he was overthrown by the forces of Obregón, who made an end to the armed phase of the Revolution. In the end, the Revolution and the Constitution changed Mexico profoundly. However, it is important to note that not all of the goals of the revolutionaries were achieved, and many are left in poverty still.

[99] Hart, *Revolutionary Mexico*, 374.

CHAPTER 2
THE REVOLUTION FOR THE *SOLDADERAS*

This chapter focuses on one side of this research, namely how the *soldaderas* have experienced the Revolution at the time. This part is divided into two segments. First, it explains the reasons for women to participate in the Mexican Revolution. It sets out several motivations and compares them to each other. Next, it discusses the circumstances of the troubled period for the *soldaderas*. It focuses on the numbers of involved female fighters, and how they were divided over the different regions of Mexico. Furthermore, this section analyses the responsibilities attributed to these women. Lastly, it takes into account their life conditions and treatment during the ten years of revolutionary violence.

From the beginning of the Revolution onwards, numerous reasons caused women from all social and racial backgrounds to join in the struggle, no matter the nature of their contribution. As the Revolution evolved, the numbers of *soldaderas* solidly and continuously seemed to grow.[100] Their reasons to participate inseparably forms part of their identity. Therefore, this part sets out the most important causes for the *soldaderas* to involve themselves in the existing turmoil.

Maybe the most important reason so many women partook in the Mexican Revolution, is because they were forced to do so. In other words, not all *soldaderas* participated voluntarily. Throughout Mexico, numerous women (and men) were abducted and forced to join in the military struggle. The justification for this evidently originates from the notion that women should support their men during wartimes.[101]

Miguel Garibay, who wrote about the Revolution in his memoirs, explains that when the soldiers entered a town, they demanded money, women, horses and pistols. According to him, the revolutionaries, "if they wanted a woman, they carried her off by force".[102] The *Mexican Herald*, a Mexican newspaper, tells more on the systematic kidnapping of women by the revolutionaries. The title of the article of April 13, 1913 states: "More than forty women, including all of the female population of a small village

[100] Fernández, 'From Soldadera to Adelita', 55-56.
[101] Reed, *Insurgent Mexico*, 64.
[102] M. Garibay, 'The Revolution'. In M. Beeson, M. Adams & R. King, *Memories for Tomorrow*, Detroit, United States: B. Ethridge, 1.

within two kilometers of Jojutla were carried away by Zapatistas".[103] Will B. Davis, who worked at the American Consulate during the Mexican Revolution, narrates the abduction of a woman by Carrancistas in Guadalajara in 1915.[104] In the same year, something similar happened in the monastery of Mother Elías de Santa Sacto, a member of the Carmelite order. She tells about the abduction of 45 to 50 nuns by the Carrancistas.[105]

However being the exception, some women managed to escape the aggression of the soldiers. María Cristina Flores Carlos, at the time living in Jalisco, explains how after a soldier tried to kidnap her in the streets, she never left the house again when the revolutionaries were in town.[106] Elsie González remembered her grandmother's efforts to save her older sister from abduction by hiding her under a basket until the soldiers had left.[107] Some families tried to hide the long hair of their daughters, as Mollie Gosset of Monterrey recalls.[108] Juseta Sumaya from Cabo San Lucas explains how sometimes families would even leave their house and sleep in the fields, fearing the federal soldiers "would take away the girls and abuse them".[109]

Once the women were taken away from their homes by both federal and revolutionary troops, they were transported to distant geographical areas to be sold into peonage or prostitution.[110] Edith O'Shaughnessy, wife of the U.S. *Chargé d'Affaires* in Mexico, recalls clearly such an incident during the Huerta Administration (1913-1914). She explains how when Huerta considerably expanded the federal army within two months, increasingly more women were abducted and forced into the army. She describes how the government took over three hundred *campesinas* (female peasants) away from their homes in Morelos and deported them to Quintana Roo, south of Yucatán. However, when tension rose among the troops, they were sent to Veracruz, and left – in many cases pregnant – at the beach.[111]

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[103] 'More than forty women, including all of the female population of a small village within two kilometers of Jojutla were carried away by Zapatistas', *Mexican Herald* (April 13, 1913), 1.
[104] W. Davis, *Experiences and Observations of an American Consular Officer during the Mexican Revolution* (Chula Vista 1920), 171-172.
[105] O. Martínez, *Fragments of the Mexican Revolution: Personal Accounts from the Border* (Albuquerque 1983), 243.
[106] Ibidem, 259.
[107] E. González, 'My Grandmother's Courage'. In M. Beeson, M. Adams & R. King, *Memories for Tomorrow*, Detroit, United States: B. Ethridge, 2.
[108] Martínez, *Fragments of the Mexican Revolution*, 232.
[109] Ibidem, 228.
[110] 'Rebels in Cananea carries away numerous women', *Mexican Herald* (September 5, 1912), 1; 'Five men and five women kidnapped by Zapatistas', *Mexican Herald* (January 20, 1913), 1.
[111] O'Shaughnessy, *A Diplomats Wife in Mexico*, 124-125.

Because of the large scale, the violence against women itself became a reason for women to partake in the Revolution. Many of the *soldaderas* joined the army after having seen their family members or friends taken away or killed. Ángela Jiménez had seen her sister being raped by a soldier, after which she shot him. After shooting the officer, Jiménez' sister killed herself. Jiménez, disguising herself as a man and calling herself Ángel, decided to join the Orozquista army to avenge her sister. Eventually she attained the rank of lieutenant colonel.[112] Additionally, older women entered the war seeking revenge for the death or capture of their husband, son or brother. The *New York Times* of November 3, 1913 provides two examples. María Sánchez, on the one hand, took her brothers place in the revolutionary army after their deaths. Señora Pimental, on the other, is said to have freed her son from a Federal prison by killing two guards.[113]

Nevertheless, the violence created organizational developments regarding female rights as well. As Soto points out, "confronted by such deleterious conditions, women were forced to organize and protect themselves and to work to change discriminator laws".[114] Consequently, the early feminist organizations such as *Admiradoras de Juárez* (1904), *Sociedad Protectora de la Mujer* (1904), *Hijas de Anáhuac* (1907), *Hijas de Cuauhtémoc* (1910), *Amigas del Pueblo* (1911), and *Regeneración y Concordia* (1911) started to take shape and demanded an end to gender discrimination and violence.[115]

In short, although some tried to escape their fate, many women were taken and forced to participate in the Revolution by both federal and revolutionary armies. A systematic practice of abduction took shape in order to support the troops. Because of the widespread violence, several women joined the army to seek vengeance for their loved ones. Moreover, the aggression against women caused the women to protect themselves by starting feminist organizations.

A variety of women joined in the Revolution voluntarily, for example to fight for idealistic of personal reasons. Some female warriors followed their men into battle for a simple lust for adventure. For example, Maud Kenyon-Kingdon, a witness at the time, describes the following phenomenon: "Through the various towns and villages, lying in the direct route of the soldiers' march, there was found a class of women with the

[112] E. Pérez, E.R., Kallas, J., and Kallas, N. *Those Years in the Revolution, 1910-1920: Authentic Bilingual Life Experiences as Told by Veterans of the War* (San José 1974), 161, 170.
[113] 'Women Fight on Both Sides', *New York Times* (November 3, 1913), 1.
[114] Soto, *Emergence of the Modern Mexican Woman*, 33.
[115] Ibidem.

inordinate love of wanderlust; who joined the rank and file of those soldiers of misfortune and proceeded onwards with them".[116] Clearly their adventurous spirit was an important reason to follow men into battle. They seem to have been bold women who, according to an article in the *Mexican Herald*, "were mounted like the men and carried guns and cartridge belts".[117]

The idealistic goals of the Revolution attracted the *soldaderas* as well. Many women originating from the countryside partook in the rebellion persuaded by the idea of agrarian reforms and redistribution of land. Logically, numerous women became *soldaderas* to improve their economic situation. Especially lower class women enjoyed better life conditions in the army. While serving the soldiers, they would receive money of which they kept some of it for themselves. This way, they were able to provide for themselves and their children.[118] Moreover, some women saw military life as a direct source of food. An example is provided by George S. Patton, a member of the 1916-1917 Pershing Expedition.[119] He tells about a woman who had approached him, offering to share his bed if he would provide her with food.[120]

At times, Mexican women joined into rebel bands, spreading unrest throughout the region they were active. Several articles in *La Tribuna* confirm this, telling the story of the widows, wives, daughters and sisters of the rebels forming their own battalion and terrorizing the region Puente de Ixtla, Morelos. An important motivation for their fury was to avenge their beloved and lost male counterparts. Under the leadership of 'La China', they plundered the area gravely disintegrating the communities living in the Telecala district in Morelos.[121]

Not only revenge, but love as well persuaded women. Salas provides the example of a girl named Quinn, who voluntarily followed her boyfriend into war. She was only fifteen years old when she, for her beloved, joined Villa's forces. She accompanied her boyfriend on the troop train, hoping to become his *soldadera*.[122] Another example of a young girl becoming a *soldadera* out of love, is that of Manuela Oaxaca. As Quinn, she was

[116] M. Kenyon-Kingdon, *From Out of the Dark Shadows* (San Diego 1925), p. 51
[117] 'Women in Men's Garb Fight with Rebels in Michoacán', *Mexican Herald* (June 20, 1913), 1.
[118] Fernández, 'From Soldadera to Adelita', 55-56.
[119] An unsuccessful military operation conducted by the United States Army against the paramilitary forces of Mexican revolutionary Francisco "Pancho" Villa from March 14, 1916, to February 7, 1917.
[120] G.S. Patton, *The Patton Papers, 1885-1940* (Boston 1972), 303.
[121] Z.T., *La Tribuna* (May 29, June 3 & 4, 1913).
[122] Salas, *Soldaderas in the Mexican Military*, 72.

only fifteen years when she decided to follow her boyfriend in military service.[123] The loyalty of wives to their husband as a reason to participate in the Revolution, cannot be underestimated. When John Reed asked a *soldadera* why she was fighting for the Villista army, she pointed towards her husband and simply responded: "Because he is".[124]

However, some groups solely existed of female rebels who had, instead of attaching themselves to other men, realigned themselves with powerful female leaders. Several of these distinguished cases were: Margarita Neri in Guerrero, Rosa Bobadilla in Morelos and Juana Ramona, also named "the Tigress", in Sinaloa.[125] By analysing these examples, it becomes clear how women could advance in rank if they proved skilful fighters. *El Paso Morning Times*, a Texan newspaper, presents the story of Colonel María Quinteras de Meras. She enlisted in the army of the famous Pancho Villa, and fought from 1910 until 1913 under his command. By her fearless actions in battle, she gained the respect and honour of many high officers, including the military leader himself. The newspaper continues that Quinteras de Meras "shoots and throws a rope as well as any of the men in Villa's army".[126] The fact that both she and her husband fought for personal or ideological reasons, is evident by the fact that they refused to take any pay from Villa. Put differently, they did not fight for money.

In general, the Revolution created the first opportunity for women to take control over their own actions, fighting independently from men. As Fernández describes, "women found they were able to rise above some of the limitations in their lives".[127] By joining the army, Mexican women broke with their traditional roles. Even if they performed the same tasks in the battlefield as they would have at home, the idea of participating in the Revolution was liberating to many Mexican women at the time. For some of them had decided voluntarily to join the army, it had been by their own choice.[128]

Other women sought for protection in the turbulent times of the Revolution. With federal and revolutionary troops and bands raiding throughout Mexico, they felt saver in the army than in their poorly secured houses on the countryside. Especially with their husbands, fathers and brothers in the army, they lacked protection at home. Therefore, a

[123] Fernández, 'From Soldadera to Adelita', 55.
[124] Reed, *Insurgent Mexico,* 64.
[125] Salas, *Soldaderas in the Mexican Military*, 42.
[126] 'Heroic Mexican Women win Shoulder Straps by Deeds in Battle', *El Paso de Morning Times* (May 7, 1914), 8.
[127] Fernández, 'From Soldadera to Adelita', 55.
[128] Ibidem, 62.

significant number of women followed their male counterparts into military service.[129] This phenomenon was stimulated by the fact that, without the protection of men, it was easier for the revolutionary armies to enter the villages and force the female population to join them.[130]

I. Thord-Gray, who fought for Pancho Villa during the Revolution, illustrates this notion. Thord-Gray first served as an artillery officer in Francisco 'Pancho' Villa's forces, and later became cavalry officer in Carranza's army under Obregón. He describes how among the followers of Villa "the men wouldn't come without them [their women], and it was dangerous to let them for because they might fall into the hands of the federals, while their men served with the rebels".[131] The story of Ángela Jiménez proves relevant once again. After witnessing the horrors her sister went through before killing herself, she joined the army for having nothing left. According to an article in *The Sun*, an American newspaper, Jiménez joined the military service to seek protection from something similar happening to her, before she climbed the military ranks.[132]

Not only did the *soldaderas* seek for protection in the army, they provided it to others as well. By doing their jobs, they took care of their wounded family and friends, and provided for means against the lingering hunger.[133] A good example is that of Beatriz González Ortega, who was a nurse in the army of Pancho Villa. She was working as director of the Normal School in Zacatecas when Villa and his troops attacked the city in June 1914. As a response, González converted the school into a hospital. From here, she kept up the efforts taking care of the wounded of both the Villista army and the federal troops. To keep Villa from suspecting her allowing federal soldiers into her hospital, she burned their clothes. Even when she was caught and tortured by the forces of Villa, she did not betray the federal soldiers in her hospital.[134]

Whether they sought security from their men, or wanted to bring it, protection was an important motivation for the *soldaderas* to participate in the revolutionary struggle. They were willing to sacrifice themselves to secure the safety of first and foremost their

[129] Fernández, 'From Soldadera to Adelita', 55.
[130] H. Fowler-Salamini & M.K. Vaughn, *Women of the Countryside, 1850-1990* (Tucson 1994), 95.
[131] I. Thord-Gray, *Gringo Rebel* (Coral Gables 1960), 211.
[132] 'The Fate of Ángela Jiménez', *The Sun* (September 21, 1913), 14.
[133] M. Nash & S. Tavera, *Las Mujeres y las guerras: el papel de las mujeres en las guerras de la Edad Antigua a la Contemporánea* (Barcelona 2003), 260-262.
[134] A. Macias, 'Women and the Mexican Revolution', *The Americas* 37:1 (1980), 70.

family. Therefore, in the words of Nicolás Durán, a lieutenant under Villa, the *soldadera* was "the soul of the Revolution because she dedicated all her will to suffering".[135]

The circumstances of the *soldaderas* exist of various notions and could be different in place and time. As stated before, throughout the years of the Revolution more women would join the army and partake in the nationwide rebellion.[136] Firstly, to analyse the importance of these women, one should be aware of the quantity of them, and how they were spread out over the different regions of Mexico. Secondly, it is important to know which tasks they performed, for this is crucial to establish their role in the Revolution. Lastly, it is important to examine the daily life of the women in the army. Therefore, this part discusses consecutively the numbers, responsibilities and life conditions and treatment of the *soldaderas*.

It is clear that at no point in Mexican history so many women participated in an armed struggle. The number of *soldaderas* peaked in the thousands.[137] However impossible to exactly estimate the proportion of women in the armies, O'Shaughnessy describes *soldaderas* as representing more or less 20 percent of a combined group of men and women.[138] In other words, however marginal to the proportion of men, women could form a considerable part of the fighting forces in Mexico. Salas argues that it is hard to know the exact number of women in the armies for they frequently switched sides.[139] Therefore, this research makes an estimation of if the number of women in the Revolution was considerable or not. It will not provide an exact number, for the lack of evidence.[140]

The number of *soldaderas* differed within the variety of troops. They accompanied the armies of Zapata in the south, and both Carranza and Villa in the north. Nevertheless, fewer women fought in Villa's army than in the other ones, due to its swift cavalry movements.[141] Women, many times following the armies in order to perform the subsequent tasks, would therefore delay Villa's troops. Nevertheless, this does not mean no women joined Villa's army.

The guerrilla troops of Zapata contained more women, for he especially admired their healing abilities. Zapata brought his wounded men to these *curanderas* (healers) in

[135] Nicolás Durán in Pérez, Kallas & Kallas, *Those Years in the Revolution,* 156.
[136] Fernández, 'From Soldadera to Adelita', 55-56.
[137] Salas, *Soldaderas in the Mexican Military*, 38-39.
[138] O'Shaughnessy, *A Diplomats Wife in Mexico*, 57.
[139] Salas, *Soldaderas in the Mexican Military*, 40.
[140] Ibidem.
[141] Reed, *Insurgent Mexico*, 131.

the mountains by night, so he could continue the fight during the day.[142] On the other hand, Zapata drew a lot of female support for his charismatic persona, promising reforms that were alluring to women from all social backgrounds.[143] His claim for *tierra y libertad* (land and liberty) implied profound changes in Mexican society that many women desired.

Carranza likewise drew the support of women from various socioeconomic classes. He was in fact the first revolutionary leader to appeal directly to women for support. Due to this, a considerable amount of women joined the Constitutionalist Army. After his victory over Villa and Zapata, he drew female support for his political career as well.[144] Some women even became close trustees of Carranza. Hermila Galindo, for example, was one of the most respected *soldaderas* among his forces. Therefore, according to Sáenz Royo, she was even – to a certain extent – allowed to express her criticism on him.[145]

In short, due to a lack of sources it is impossible to provide an exact number of *soldaderas*. Nevertheless, a considerable amount of women partook in the Mexican Revolution. Moreover, it was for the first time so many women were involved in a political and violent struggle. Altogether, they participated in the both the federal troops as the troops of Carranza, Villa and Zapata. Therefore, in the words of Fernández: "Regardless of whom they supported, women's participation was a key component of the Revolution".[146]

As argued before, the *soldaderas* performed many different tasks during the Mexican Revolution. They were first recruited when armed confrontations began in 1910. In the first place, they were responsible for the food distribution to the soldiers. Both federal and revolutionary forces applied them to cook and take care of the men. They obtained food from either their personal provisions or from the commissary car on the military train. When the train stopped in villages, they would go to the local stores for food.[147] In case a shortage of food occurred due to limited supplies, women were expected to procure it by foraging or even looting.[148]

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[142] L. Hanke, *Latin America: A Historical Reader* (Boston 1967), 528.
[143] Marley, *Mexico at War*, 122.
[144] 'Ambición Presidencial de Carranza', *El Pueblo* (January 25, 1916), 3.
[145] A. Sáenz Royo, *Semblanzas: Mujeres Mexicanas, revolucionarias y guerreras, revolucionaries ideológicas* (Mexico City 1960), 36.
[146] Fernández, 'From Soldadera to Adelita', 55.
[147] Fuentes, 'Battleground Women', 541.
[148] Ibidem, 56.

Soldaderas were ordered to take the food, water and ammunition to the soldiers during battle. According to general Manuel Mendoza, a Villista, some women even sold food in the military camps. The meal preparation could be at any moment of the day, depending on where the troops would stop. According to Fernández, women made tortillas every chance they had, even when sitting on top of a moving train.[149] Part of the task was taking up arms and defending the men while they were eating. This resulted into many losses among the *soldaderas*. Lieutenant Durán, being witness of thousands of dead women in the battlefields, confirms this notion.[150]

Another way in which *soldaderas* were crucial in determining the course of the Revolution, is by taking care of the wounded soldiers. A major example is that of Francisco Madero's wife, Sara Pérez de Madero. They met during their years of college at Berkeley University, California. When the revolutionary fighting erupted, she organized nursing brigades and supervised sanitation crews. This way, she took personal charge of caring for the wounded.[151] The women in the armies providing food and nursing the wounded are often referred to as 'camp followers'. This practice had existed a long time before Revolution broke out in 1910. Other examples of responsibilities of camp followers were washing clothes and carrying equipment and supplies from one battle to the next.[152] Moreover, as their given title suggest, they set up the camps of the armies, for they had no official department managing this.[153]

Another burden a significant number of *soldaderas* had to bear, was the caretaking of their families. A correspondent of the *New York Times* writes about several occasions he had seen Carrancista military trains passing by, stating nearly half of the passengers were women and their children.[154] Another journalist of *The Sun* describes the Carrancista forces the following way: "so many soldiers are accompanied on campaigns by their families that Carranza's headquarters looks more like a great gypsy camp or an immense picnic than a military encampment".[155] The same proved to be true for Villa. An observer describes his *División del Norte*, counting many women and children riding on top of the

[149] Fuentes, 'Battleground Women', 56.
[150] Durán in Pérez, Kallas & Kallas, *Those Years in the Revolution*, 156.
[151] 'President's Wife organizes Medical Help for Wounded Soldiers', *New York Times* (May 11, 1911) 2.
[152] 'Funny Side to Mexican Wars', *Washington Post* (May 3, 1914), 1.
[153] Ibidem.
[154] 'Hundreds of Women and Children on Military Trains', *New York Times* (November 9, 1913) 1.
[155] 'Countless Revolutionaries accompanied by their Families', *The Sun* (November 16, 1913), 1.

trains.[156] The *soldaderas* had taken their children with them when they joined the armed forces. In addition, many of them were pregnant or became pregnant during their time in military service. Durán describes how these new-born babies were received in the most primitive surroundings. Women would give birth on the march, in the camps and even on the battlefields, after which they would "wrap him [the new-born child], protecting his small body with her own from the cold and dust of the roads, and then she would continue to follow the men".[157] John Reed illustrates the burden of the camp followers by describing a conversation he had with a *soldadera*. She told him:

> "I remember well when Fildadelfo called to me one morning… "Come! We are going out to fight because the good Pancho Madero has been murdered this day!" We had only been loving each other eight months, too, and the first baby was not born … and I said, "Why must I come?" And he answered: "Shall I starve then? Who shall make my tortillas for me but my woman?" It took us three months to get north, and I was sick and the baby was born in a desert just like this place, and died there because we could not get water".[158]

In contrast to the *soldaderas* performing supportive tasks as camp followers, a part of them took up weapons themselves and fought valiantly in the war. These women, from now on referred to as the female soldiers, fought alongside men in the battlefields. However most of them without official military ranks and quite soon forgotten, some *soldaderas* managed to establish important positions for themselves.

One of the most famous *soldaderas* holding a military rank is Petra Herrera. At the beginning of her military career, she disguised herself as a man and won over the other soldiers by demonstrating her competences. As "Pedro" Herrera, she blew up bridges and demonstrated her leadership skills. After gaining the respect from her fellow soldiers, she took off her disguise revealing her true gender. Herrera obtained a widely known and solidly established reputation. The *Mexican Herald* reported the following on her:

> "Rebel leaders here were pleased to receive the first report from Peda (*sic*) Herrera, a young Mexican woman who is commanding a force of 200 men in the state of Durango. She holds rank as captain in the rebel army".[159]

[156] Fuentes, 'Battleground Women', 39.
[157] Durán in Pérez, Kallas & Kallas, *Those Years in the Revolution*, 156.
[158] Reed, *Insurgent Mexico*, 189.
[159] *Mexican Herald*, January 7, 1914.

With 400 other women accompanying her in Villa's vanguard, Herrera took part in the battle of Torreón on May 30, 1914. According to Villista Cosme Mendoza Chavira, "she was the one who took Torreón".[160] However, due to Villa's lack of recognition for her and her fellow *soldaderas'* actions in battle, Herrera formed an independent brigade of female soldiers. It is unknown how many female soldiers joined her force. However, estimation ranges from twenty-five to one thousand women.[161] In 1917 Herrera had become an ally of Carranza, demanding not only to be recognized as general but to remain in active service after the Revolution as well. Nevertheless, general Jesús Agustín Castro made her a colonel, and sent her army away for it was unacceptable to lead an army of women.

Evidently, women frequently dressed up as man to be eligible for military promotions. Petra Ruíz, for example, joined the Carrancista army as well by disguising and calling herself Pedro. Being a fearless fighter with a bad temper, she obtained the nickname 'Echa Balas', meaning 'Bullets'. She became known for, dressed up as a man, protecting other women. When some soldiers were discussing over who would be the first to rape a young girl, "Pedro Ruíz" intervened and demanded the girl. Afraid of Ruíz's skills with guns and knives, the soldiers quickly let "him" take the girl. When the soldiers were gone, Ruíz released the girl unharmed. After Ruíz's battalion helped defeating the federal troops in Mexico city, she was promoted to the rank of lieutenant. After hostilities started to decrease in Mexico, she decided to leave the army. When she asked Carranza directly for her discharge, she said to him: "I want you to know that a woman has served you as a soldier".[162]

However fighting being the main occupation of the female soldiers, they performed other services as well. For example, they frequently engaged in the practice of espionage. Female soldiers would intermingle with the camp followers of the enemy to create a profound network of information. An example of this was 'Ángel' Jiménez, who recalls herself taking of her male disguise and "infiltrating the *soldaderas* of the Federal troops obtaining all kinds of information".[163] This operation seemed to have been a standard procedure among *soldaderas* in the Revolution. Another famous spy was María Martínez. According to general Francisco L. Urquizo, she was the best in the northeast. Nicknamed 'La Niña de los Velos' (the Child of the Veils), she was active in the by the *federales*

[160] Salas, *Soldaderas in the Mexican Military*, 48.
[161] Ibidem, 40.
[162] 'La Identidad de Pedro Ruíz', *El Nacional* (November 8, 1919), 4.
[163] Ángela Jiménez in in Pérez, Kallas & Kallas, *Those Years in the Revolution*, 41.

controlled regions of Monclova, Saltillo and Monterrey.[164] Nevertheless, federal troops made use of female spies as well. 'Chiquita', a young woman from the south, proved invaluable to them. By acting as if she was a trained nurse, she worked some time in Jiménez and Chihuahua during the Orozco rebellion. After taking care of the wounded for a while, she one day succeeded in obtaining and taking important maps, papers and documents of Pascual Orozco.[165]

In addition, female soldiers proved valuable as messengers as well. General Urquizo, for example, writes in his memoirs about a woman called Belem, whom served as a courier between general Pablo González and Venustiano Carranza.[166] Another example is that of the wife of Máximo Castillo, a Federal Officer who had been educated in the United States. She declared in an interview that she had been a messenger between her husband and general Victoriano Huerta.[167] Dolores Jiménez, not to be confused by the earlier mentioned city of Jiménez, was an important messenger for Zapata. When the Revolution broke out, she was already in her sixties. Having had a long revolutionary career and close ties to both the Maderistas and the Zapatistas, she worked directly with Zapata and Gildardo Magaña, a prominent Zapatista general. During her time in military service she obtained the rank of colonel. Furthermore, she undertook dangerous activities for Zapata, even carrying messages from him to Obregón. After Zapata's assassination in 1919, Jiménez retired from the army.[168]

Examining the responsibilities of the *soldaderas*, a few important notions stand out. Firstly, a seemingly subdivision exists between 'camp followers' and 'female soldiers'. Camp followers' daily tasks existed of providing food, water, clothing, ammunition and other supplies to soldiers. Another important responsibility of camp followers was the nursing of the wounded men. The *soldaderas* many times had brought their families or became pregnant. Therefore, they had the extra burden of taking care of their children as well. Female soldiers' main activity was fighting alongside the men on the battleground. Nevertheless, they performed other services as spying and messaging as well. Although may women were soon forgotten, some of them – disguised as a man – succeeded in

[164] 'La Niña de los Velos', *El Nacional* (March 5, 1954), 2.
[165] 'The Legend of "La Chiquita"', *The Sun* (September 21, 1913), 1.
[166] F. L. Urquizo, *Memorias de campaña: de subteniente a general* (Mexico City 1971), 135.
[167] 'La Historia de Máximo Castillo, Mensajera en la Revolución', *El Paso Morning Times* (February 19, 1914), 3.
[168] Soto, *Emergence of the Modern Mexican Woman*, 47.

establishing a reputation and obtaining an official rank in the military. Nevertheless, it is important to keep in mind that these women were the exception to the rule.

The life conditions and treatment of the *soldaderas* arouse compassion among contemporaries. Edith O'Shaughnessy commented in her memoirs that "a thick and heart-breaking book could be written upon the *soldadera*".[169] One cannot deny the harsh life conditions the *soldaderas* had to endure each single day. Observer Francisco Ramírez Plancarte describes the struggles of these women in great detail to John Reed:

> "Suffering had erased all graceful softness of line from their faces and all expressions of sweetness from their eyes, leaving in their place the august marks of grief and the sublimity of resignation. They were just starting the march and they already showed a marked feeling of fatigue and tiredness. It was a sad caravan of suffering. The women were miserably dressed; some went barefoot, most wore sandals and very few had rough, worn-out shoes … Many of them wept in a heartrending manner".[170]

With many responsibilities and little quality of life, it becomes clear the *soldaderas* had to sustain many hardships. In addition, they mostly received poor treatment from the male soldiers. During the course of the Revolution, the *soldaderas* were gazed upon in many different ways. Some soldiers idealized the *soldaderas* for combining their traditional roles as mother, wife, lover or domestic servant with their new responsibilities in military service. However, many officers felt they were disruptive for the troops. Not much time had passed before stories circulated that they were no more than prostitutes spreading immorality among the soldiers. Others argued that women only had minor roles as bringing food to the men, gravely downplaying their importance in the Revolution.[171] The different army leaders evidently had different perspectives on the *soldaderas* among their forces.

As explained before, Zapata particularly had respect for the *soldaderas* as healers of the wounded. He was known for including many women from a variety of social backgrounds among his troops. Nevertheless, the *soldaderas* in Zapata's army were not just camp followers taking care of the wounded. They actively participated in numerous Zapatista offensive forays. An example of this is a woman called 'La Neri', about whom

[169] O'Shaughnessie, *A Diplomat's Wife in Mexico*, 144.
[170] Reed, *Insurgent Mexico*, 106.
[171] Salas, *Soldaderas in the Mexican Military*, 44-45.

many stories circulate. Within Zapata's army, she rapidly became a high-ranking revolutionary officer, commanding large numbers of indigenous guerrillas in Guerrero and Morelos.[172] The *Mexican Herald* of September 2, 1912 confirms that Neri had Zapatistas under her command.[173] Furthermore, the earlier mentioned Dolores Jiménez and Juana Gutiérrez both held the rank of colonel in Zapata's army. Other prominent *soldaderas* among his forces were Margarita Mata, María Aguirre and María Luisa Escobar. The first two women obtained a military rank in the army. Margarita Mata, on the one hand, was a rebel leader and commander in the state of San Luis Potosí. María Aguirre, on the other, fought on the Costa Chica in the state of Oaxaca. María Luisa Escobar, however never attaining military rank, was recognized by Zapata for her propaganda and dynamiting skills.[174] In other words, women in Zapata's army seem to have had several opportunities, among which gaining prominence and even military ranks.

Carranza, according to Salas, had a relative goodhearted attitude towards the *soldaderas* in his army.[175] He, for example, recruited many female soldiers into his ranks and established a "pension fund for his soldiers' widows".[176] He personally made sure his field generals implemented this pension policy. This caused for many women joining his forces. In spite of the large number of women in Carranza's movement, many people questioned his intentions. Both his political vision and his personal attitude towards women caused for suspicion. According to Hermila Galindo, one of the most important *soldaderas* in Carranza's forces, he had a record of acceding to the demands of vulnerable groups as women, *obreros* (workers) and *campesinos* (peasants) only in times of need for support. The existing dubiety about Carranza's intentions proved to be just. After the Revolution he spoke out against a potential reorganization of the army, forbidding women to join in military service. Policymakers for Carranza and Obregón did not see any future for the *soldaderas* in the Mexican army. Under Carranza's rule, women were eventually banned from all military barracks in 1925.[177]

Villa proved the most vehement hater of the *soldaderas*. Apart from minor exceptions, he did not show much respect for the women serving his troops. An important reasons for this was Villa's vision on modern warfare. As briefly explained before, he

[172] 'La Neri' leading Guerrillas in Guerrero', *New York Times* (May 10, 1911) 2.
[173] 'La Neri, Female commander of the Zapatistas', *The Mexican Herald* (September 2, 1912), 1.
[174] Soto, *Emergence of the Modern Mexican Woman,* 45-46.
[175] Salas, *Soldaderas in the Mexican Military*, 47.
[176] Richmond, *Venustiano Carranza's Nationalist Struggle*, 157.
[177] Ibidem, 162-163.

desired a modernized army with greater troop mobility and a more efficient supply system. He felt that women, due to their following their men by foot, formed impediments to his warfare plans. Therefore, he felt women should not obtain line and staff positions in the army.[178] Villa explains this notion himself at the capture of Juárez in 1913. He said: "What made the surprise attack possible, what allowed us to move freely, rapidly and silently was that we had no cavalcade, we had no camp followers".[179]

It is no surprise that, over time, Villa started deliberately excluding *soldaderas* from the army ranks: "General Villa several times attempted to compel the women to leave the trenches and on numerous occasions had them escorted back of the firing line to places of safety, but when the rebel chief's attention was called to some other direction on the field, they hurried to the front and continued their firing".[180] Villa ordered his soldiers not to bring women into the army. However, some soldiers disobeyed his orders. When an officer tried to take his *soldadera* into battle, Villa made an example out of him by shooting him and sending his wife back behind the lines.[181]

The ongoing hostilities of Villa towards *soldaderas* culminated into a horrific climax in 1916, when Villa had captured the railroad station at Santa Rosalía Camargo, Chihuahua, from the Carrancistas. A bullet fired among the *soldaderas* hit Villa's sombrero, nearly killing him. Several versions of the story exist, with no decisive answer to the question who had made the shot. One version suggests that a widow who had lost her soldier in battle took it out on Villa. Another tells about a female colonel from a rival faction, hiding among the *soldaderas*, took the opportunity to try and kill Villa. Yet another story said that the wife of the station paymaster shot at him in "a moment of desperation".[182] Villa asked the *soldaderas* for the culprit. However, no one answered his question. Major Silvestre Cadena Jaramillo writes in his memoirs that Villa then "ordered his men to shoot the women. Nobody spoke up, they would rather die than tell who did it".[183] Over ninety women were slaughtered in that moment. After the massacre, one of

[178] Reed, *Insurgent Mexico*, 134.
[179] L.M. Garfías, Truth and Legend of Pancho Villa: Life and Deeds of the Famous Leader of the Mexican Revolution (Mexico City 1981), 60.
[180] 'Pancho Villa y las Soldaderas', *El Paso de Morning Times* (November 27, 1913), 1.
[181] Durán in in Pérez, Kallas & Kallas, *Those Years in the Revolution*, 157.
[182] Salas, *Soldaderas in the Mexican Military,* 46.
[183] Garfías, *Truth and Legend about Pancho Villa*, 143.

Villa's men found a baby, still living in his dead mothers arms. For he "wasn't doing any good", Villa ordered the soldier to shoot the child as well.[184]

Villa proved not the only one who treated the *soldaderas* with violence. In fact, other high-level commanders did similar things to these women. It was, for example, widely believed Obregón placed *soldaderas* and their children in front of the troops as a human shield. They were ought to protect the soldiers and the artillery, before the battle had even begun.[185]

Examining the sources, it becomes evident the *soldaderas* had to survive in difficult conditions. It seems that their 'double burden' of fighting alongside men on the one hand, and taking care of their families on the other, placed an even heavier weight on their shoulders. More often than not they were treated poorly by army commanders. Nevertheless, among the most important generals of the Revolution, a variety in attitude seems to have existed. Zapata had relative respect for his female followers, stimulating women from all social backgrounds to join his forces. Some of the women in his army even obtained military rank. Carranza treated the *soldaderas* well if they served his purpose. After his mission was achieved, he banned them from the army. Others, as Villa and Obregón, proved not so benevolent towards the *soldaderas*. Especially Villa disliked women among his troops, for they would delay his cavalrymen. He aimed to get rid of the *soldaderas* by excluding them from military service and forbidding his men to bring more women into his army. In 1916, tensions rose to a climax and Villa ordered his men to kill over ninety women after a single shot hit his sombrero.

In general, the *soldaderas* were left out of the Mexican historiography of the Revolution of 1910. Macias argues that women played a "very important and varied role in the Mexican Revolution, on the front, behind the lines, in favour or against one of the most significant social revolutions of the twentieth century".[186] Apart from a few exceptions, most historians have ignored the importance of the *soldaderas* after the Revolution. Only artists and novelist seem to have given serious attention to "the way the Revolution victimized millions of women".[187] The way the *soldaderas* have been portrayed by media and art, however, will be explained in the next chapter.

[184] Garfías, *Truth and Legend about Pancho Villa*, 143.
[185] Angel Jiménez in in Pérez, Kallas & Kallas, *Those Years in the Revolution*, 169.
[186] Macias, 'Women and the Mexican Revolution', 82.
[187] Ibidem, 82.

CHAPTER 3
SYMBOLIC MEANING OF THE *SOLDADERAS*

This chapter examines the other side of this research, namely the symbolic importance of the *soldaderas.* It is evident that the women of the Mexican Revolution have been the subject of countless of stories. At times, they were idealized and glorified for their bravery and loyalty. Nevertheless, they were looked down upon as being murderous creatures as well, guilty of immorality. This part analyses the symbolism of the *soldaderas* in various forms of expression. It firstly uses *corridos*, popular narrative Mexican love songs often regarding the Revolution. The love ballads helped to establish and maintain the fame of the *soldadera.* The songs 'la Adelita' and 'la Valentina' provide an insight on how *soldaderas* are portrayed in these love songs. The inspiration for 'la Adelita' was a Durangan women who had joined the Maderista movement at a very young age around 1911.[188] Traveling musicians playing the song transformed the protagonist into a nationwide emblem of the Revolution. Eventually the name of Adelita was celebrated to such an extent, her name was used as synonym for *soldadera*.[189] 'La Valentina' was based upon the life of Valentina Gatica, a *soldadera* from Sinaloa who decided to join Obregón's troops. The song received widespread popularity after the year 1914.[190] Many versions of the songs have been published, and verses at times seem to variate. The original writers of both songs remain anonymous. However, Jorge Negrete – a famous Mexican singer and actor – sings the most famous versions. Therefore, this chapter uses the interpretations of the song provided by Negrete. New *corridos* are made every day. However, they seem to focus more on recent developments. Current popular themes are for example the narco-traffic and violence against women.[191] The reason this research analyses the two songs of 'La Adelita' and 'La Valentina' in particular, is that they are the most famous and widely known *corridos* and therefore form a good example of the depiction of women in love songs.

In addition to the *corridos*, this chapter focuses on the reproduction of art, and how the *soldaderas* were exhibited in its different forms. Important to discover is how they

[188] Soto, *Emergence of the Modern Mexican Woman*, 44.
[189] Arrizon, ''Soldaderas' and the staging of the Mexican Revolution', 90-91.
[190] Soto, *Emergence of the Modern Mexican Woman*, 45.
[191] Fernández, 'From Soldadera to Adelita', 61.

were depicted in art, and why she looks a certain way. Over the years, the *soldaderas* received much notice in arts. They are portrayed in several ways, being both idealized and criticized. Regarding art, it is important to keep in mind the distinction between female soldiers and camp followers.

This research examines five paintings in order to provide a profound analysis on the symbolism of the *soldaderas*. The first one is called 'Calavera de Adelita' ('The Skull of Adelita') by José Guadalupe Posada and has been painted in the period of 1900-1913. Posada (1854-1913) was a Mexican illustrator from Aguascalientes. He is famous for drawing *calaveras*: skeletons in different kinds of costumes. He made for example satirical paintings criticizing the *Porfiriato*. However, after his death, his work became increasingly more associated with the *Día de los Muertos*, or the 'Day of the Death'. This is an internationally well-known festive day in Mexico honouring and remembering the death. Both Diego River and José Clemente Orozco – two famous Mexican muralists – were familiar with Posada's work, declaring him as one of the greatest Mexican artists of all time.[192] Another important painting was 'Las Soldaderas', painted by José Clemente Orozco in 1926. Orozco (1883-1949) was an important artist of the Mexican modernist movement. He was famous for his murals that were seen as an expressive form of social realism. Together with Diego Rivera and David Alfaro Siqueiros he formed the three most important representatives of this movement.[193] A third piece of art that will be discussed, is called 'Amor Guerrillero'. This painting is made by José Antonio Gómez Rosas in 1946. Gómez (1916-1977) was a Mexican painter originating from Orizaba, Veracruz and was famous for criticizing famous Mexican painters as Rivera, Orozco and Siqueiros in his works. He furthermore made numerous paintings of the *soldaderas* in the Mexican Revolution.[194]

A more recent painting used in this research is 'La Adelita', which has been created in 1996 by Miguel Ángel Martín Bordera (1966). This painter originates from Alicante, Spain, and is famous for his realist style of art. He is the founder of Carros de Foc, a company that builds giant sculptures.[195] The last painting that will be discussed in this chapter is 'My Adelita' by Maru Bautista in 2018. Maru Bautista is a Mexican artist from

[192] R. Barajas, *Myth and mitote: the political caricature of José Guadalupe Posada and Manuel Alfonso Manila* (Mexico City 2009), 34-37.
[193] M.B. Burke, Mexican Art Masterpieces (New York 1998), 94-95.
[194] C. Lira Saade, 'Gómez Rosas, *El Hotentote*, fue en su época un artista *incómodo*', *La Jornada* (2002) p. 1-3, 1.
[195] 'The Company', *Carros de Foc*. Consulted on May 12, 2020 via https://carrosfoc.com/compania/.

Japanese descent living in Monterrey. She is a member of the organization 'Fine Art America' and is specialized in oil and pastel paintings. Her art focuses mainly on the history of Japan and Mexico.[196]

This research analyses these particular paintings for several reasons. Firstly, by being created in different periods varying from 1900 to 2018, they provide a broad chronological overview of artworks involving the *soldaderas*. Secondly, most painters have had a considerable influence on how art took shape in Mexico over the twentieth century. The reason this chapter chooses a piece by Orozco, and not by his fellow famous artists Rivera and Siqueiros, is simply because the latter do not focus on *soldaderas* when portraying the Revolution. Lastly, the underlined features in these five paintings each represent different themes regarding the cult figure of the *soldadera.* All of the briefly discussed paintings will be displayed and elucidated throughout this chapter.

Next, this chapter explains the role of photography in determining the symbolic identity of *las soldaderas*. Photography, as explained earlier, was a very important tool during the Mexican Revolution. Regarding the *soldaderas*, it demonstrated their presence in the Revolution. Photography, together with filmography, started playing a dominant role in Mexican society under Porfirio Díaz, for it formed a crucial part of his ideology of progress and modernization. During the Revolution, photography became an important means to capture various events. It is important to ask oneself two questions when examining pictures of the Revolution: First, how does the object on the photo present itself? In other words, one should focus on the perspective of the person or persons portrayed and find out if and how they wanted to be photographed. Second, what did the photographer want the picture to tell? Put differently, what did the maker of the picture want to show to the world and why? This research likewise uses five photos taken during the Mexican Revolution, that will be displayed throughout the chapter. They vary from pictures taken of traveling camp followers to portraits of female soldiers. The five photos have been selected for they represent a perspective on the different sides of the life of the *soldadera*. A part of these pictures have transformed into internationally famous photographic material of the Mexican Revolution and its female participation.

Furthermore, the focus will be on filmography and its significance in creating an image around the *soldadera*. Film was a new method of capturing events, and it was for

[196] 'Maru Bautista Art', *Fine Art America*. Consulted on May 12, 2020 via https://fineartamerica.com/profiles/maru-bautista

the first time in Mexican history it was used to such an extent. Film has been an important tool in spreading the importance of *las soldaderas*. Especially during the Mexican Cinematic Golden Age (1933-1964) the image of women in the Mexican Revolution received a significant impulse. According to Fernández, the Mexican film industry reached its height of popularity between the 1930s and 1950s.[197] Not surprisingly, two movies that attracted mass appeal in Mexico were *La Adelita* (1937) and *La Valentina* (1938), based on the stories of the *corridos*. In 1958, the movie *La Cucaracha* (literal translation: 'The Cockroach') was released and likewise obtained significant popularity in Mexican society.

In two more recently made movies *Desperado* (1995) and *Bandidas* (2006), the image of the *soldadera* seems very clear. Even though the films are not about the Revolution, the symbolism revolving the *soldaderas* has had a major impact on the creation of the protagonists. This paper analyses these particular movies for they all have obtained significant popularity in Mexico and in the rest of the world. It sets out the differences between the older movies of Mexico's Golden Age of Cinema and the more recently made Hollywood productions in order to demonstrate the developments in the depiction of *soldaderas* in film.

Lastly, this chapter takes into account theatre and its dramatization of the life and suffering of Mexican women in the Revolution. Theatre undeniably helped creating an established perspective on the *soldaderas.* On the subject of theatre, one play clearly stands out. Josefina Niggli's play *Soldadera*, written in 1936, stages the participation of women in the Mexican Revolution, characterizing Adela – the protagonist – as a hero of the Revolution.[198] According to Arrizon, Niggli's drama was the first theatrical representation of the participation of female soldiers in the Mexican Revolution.[199] For both its popularity and revolutionary writing, the play has been performed throughout the 20th and 21th century, with the most recent reproduction on its seventieth anniversary in 2006.[200] This research uses Niggli's theatre piece for it was ground-breaking in its time, and it set the tone for later plays on the subject. In addition, the full-length play provides a rich content illustrating opposing characteristics of the female soldiers.

[197] Fernández, 'From Soldadera to Adelita', 60.
[198] Arrizon, ''Soldaderas' and the staging of the Mexican Revolution', 98.
[199] Ibidem.
[200] Ibidem, 99.

Analysing the symbolic meaning of *soldaderas* in various forms of art, several features and characteristics stand out. One element that continuously returns is the cartridge belts strapped among her chest. According to Fuentes, the *soldaderas* were portrayed as "fearless women dressed in men's garb flaunting cartridge belts across the chest and a Mauser rifle on one shoulder".[201] The cartridge belts points to the armed and military aspects of the Revolution, however makes for complex identity politics. It were mostly female combatants that were displayed with the cartridge belts, and not the lower-class camp followers. Moreover, they are not only stereotypical to the *soldaderas* and the Mexican Revolution, but were used by men in other conflicts around the world as well. In other words, the cartridge belts were a part of an international trend of identity-making.[202]

Image 1: 'My Adelita', by Maru Bautista (2018).

Maru Bautista's recently painted 'My Adelita' seems to be a good example of what Fuentes describes (see image 1). In this particular piece of art, the *soldadera* is depicted as calm, however determined. As Fuentes describes, she is holding a rifle and is dressed with cartridge belts across her chest. While her hair is loosely waving in the wind, a certain light shines upon her face, creating a feeling of hope when observing the artwork.

[201] Fuentes, 'Battleground Women', 525.
[202] S. Esch, *Modernity at Gunpoint Firearms, Politics, and Culture in Mexico and Central America* (Pittsburg 2018), 222.

Studying other materials, it becomes clear this painting is inspired by photos of actual female fighters of the Revolution.

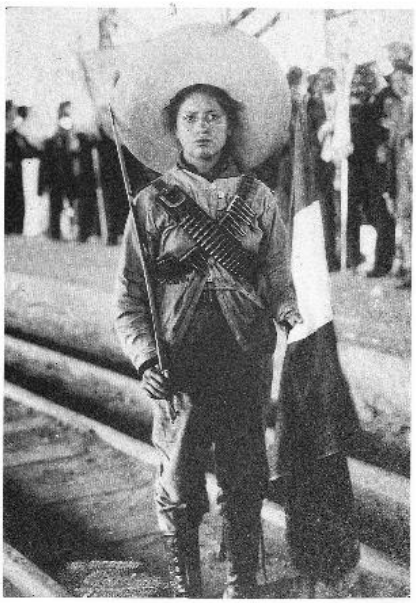

Image 2: Adela Velarde Pérez (possibly Adelita), 1910.

One of the most famous pictures taken of a *soldadera* is that of the alleged Adelita (see image 2). Holding a weapon in her right hand and wearing a double cartridge belt around the chest, she forms a symbol for female soldiers in the army. She is dressed in pants and a coat, a uniform typically worn by male soldiers in the Revolution. This way, the photo suggests how the *soldadera* is as brave and determined as the male soldiers. The photographer took it even further by portraying her with the typical Mexican *sombrero* on her head and the Mexican flag in her left hand. This way, he turned her into a symbol of the Mexican Revolution as a whole. Therefore, it is no surprise Adelita became the national emblem for the revolutionary struggles of the time. In this picture, the young girl is clearly aware of the photo being taken, for she is posing and looking directly at the camera. The way she glances at the camera demonstrates her fortitude.

The posed picture of the pretended Valentina (see image 3), although less of a prominent one, seems to follow the course of the Adelita photo. Valentina, likewise holding a weapon and wearing the cartridge belt and hat, forms an emblem of female soldiers in the Revolution as well. According to Soto, Valentina's military outfit was what attracted particular attention. She explains that – according to the stories – her outfit

existed of "two cartridge belts slung across her chest and a rifle hanging from her shoulder".[203]

Image 3: Valentina Ramírez (possibly Valentina), 1913.

As Adelita, she wears men's clothes, pointing out her valour for being a woman fighting as a man. She seems steadfast and ready to fight. While posing for the camera, the look on her face points out the maker's emphasis on the steadfastness and courage of the *soldaderas*. In other words, the photographer underlines more the phenomenon of women fighting in the Mexican Revolution than the *soldaderas* being a national emblem for it. Therefore, a slight difference occurs between the images of Adelita and Valentina.

Stories revolving the bravery of the *soldaderas* are not limited to visual art. The female soldiers are likewise praised for their determination in the *corrido* 'La Adelita':

> "On the heights of a steep mountain range
> a regiment was encamped,
> and a young woman bravely follows them,
> madly in love with the sergeant".[204]

In addition to being idealized for other aspects of her character, Adelita – in this case symbol for the *soldaderas* – is described as a young woman respected for her bravery in joining the regiments.

[203] Soto, *Emergence of the Modern Mexican Woman*, 45.
[204] Lyrics Translate: La Adelita. Consulted on https://lyricstranslate.com/nl/la-adelita-adelita.html-0 Translation from Spanish. Original text: *En lo alto de la abrupta serranía, acampado se encontraba un regimiento, y una moza que valiente los seguía, locamente enamorada del sargento.*

It increasingly seems as if *soldaderas* are especially glorified for their bravery because they are women, for they connect the traditional role of a Mexican woman with that of a determined fighter. This contrast is subject to the picture of *soldaderas* holding rifles while wearing their traditional dresses (see image 4). Their hair is put up in a nice way, demonstrating the women originate from a higher societal class. They are practicing with their rifle, pointing it simultaneously in the same direction. The majority of the group exists of young women, for the females on the ground seem to be no older than children.

Image 4: *Soldaderas* practicing with their rifles while wearing traditional Mexican dresses.

The women are possibly posing for the camera. Imaginably the women are coincidently practicing while being photographed. However, it is likely that the women are demonstrating their qualities to the photographer, for it seems to be too 'flawless' of a picture to have been made spontaneously. Therefore, the *soldaderas* in this picture show their discipline and drive to fight in the Revolution. The maker seems to have the same intentions. The fact that the women are wearing their traditional dresses in combination with the rifles, shows the contrast between the 'feminine' and 'military' side of the *soldaderas*. Both the photographer and the photographed underline this contrast. Noteworthy is that the traditional dresses usually belong to the middle and upper classes of Mexican women.

The feminine aspects of the *soldaderas* are more often than not emphasized in different types of art. For example, in the song 'La Adelita', the protagonist is said to be as beautiful as she is brave:

> Popular among the troop was Adelita,

the woman that the sergeant idolized,
and besides being brave she was pretty,
so that even the colonel respected her".[205]

In this particular *corrido*, vulnerability seems to be a subject associated with femininity as well:

And after the cruel battle had ended,
and the troops returned to their camp,
the voice of a weeping woman
and praying were heard throughout camp.

And upon hearing it, the sergeant
was overcome with the thought of losing his beloved forever,
with his pain hidden beneath his cover
he sang to his beloved in this way...

And he could be heard saying that he was dying...
and if should I die in the war,
and my body be taken and buried,
Adelita, for God's sake I beg you,
that for me you do not mourn".[206]

The *corrido* speaks of a woman crying and praying, and the sergeant telling her not to mourn over his death. In short, the song reveals different perspectives on the *soldaderas*. In spite of being brave and loyal, the *corrido* lays the emphasis on Adelita's softer, 'more feminine' side. In Bautista's painting (image 1 *supra*), the *soldadera*'s femininity is revealed in the softness of her face and hair. This is the same in for example the picture of Adela (image 2 *supra*). Therefore, according to Soto, the heroine of the Revolution Adelita was considered the "essence of Mexican femininity".[207]

For their beauty, bravery and loyalty, the *soldaderas* were often desired by the army men within the different forms of expression. Therefore, love is an important theme

[205] Lyrics Translate: La Adelita. Consulted on https://lyricstranslate.com/nl/la-adelita-adelita.html-0 Translation from Spanish. Original text: *Popular entre la tropa era Adelita, la mujer que el sargento idolatraba, que además de ser valiente era bonita, que hasta el mismo coronel la respetaba.*
[206] Lyrics Translate: La Adelita. Translation from Spanish. Original text: *Y después que terminó la cruel batalla, Y la tropa regresó a su campamento, Por la voz de una mujer que sollozaba, La plegaria se oyó en el campamento. Y al oírla el sargento temeroso, De perder para siempre su adorada, Escondiendo su dolor bajo el rebozo, A su amada le cantó de esta manera... Y se oía que decía aquel que tanto se moría...Y si acaso yo muero en la guerra, Y mi cadáver lo van a sepultar, Adelita, por Dios te lo ruego, Que por mí no vayas a llorar.*
[207] Soto, *Emergence of the Modern Mexican Woman*, 44.

within the symbolization of these women. For example, in 'La Adelita' the artist serenates Adelita in the following way:

> "If Adelita were to leave with another man,
> I'd follow her by land and sea—
> if by sea, in a warship;
> if by land, in a military train.
>
> If Adelita would like to be my wife,
> if Adelita would be my woman,
> I'd buy her a silk dress
> to take her to the barrack's dance".[208]

In this part of the song, the singer – probably a soldier – seems to be in love with Adelita. He clearly expresses his dedication to her, wherever she may go. Furthermore, he desires her to be his girlfriend and eventually, his wife. In this *corrido*, Adelita is always connected to the sergeant. The story is about their love and their mutual devotion. Consequently, it is not a story about a 'strong and independent' female soldier in the Mexican Revolution. As for 'la Adelita', a love obsession likewise seems to exist around 'la Valentina':

> "A passion dominates me
> and that is what brought me here,
> Valentina, Valentina...
> I would like to tell you.
>
> They say that for your love
> My life will turn bad for me
> it does not make them much of men
> I also know how to fight.
>
> Because I drink tequila
> tomorrow I drink sherry,
> Because they see me drunk
> They do not see me tomorrow.
>
> Valentina, Valentina,
> I am at your feet,
> if they have to kill me tomorrow

[208] Lyrics Translate: La Adelita. Translation from Spanish. Original text: *If Adelita were to leave with another man, I'd follow her by land and sea—if by sea, in a warship; if by land, in a military train. If Adelita would like to be my wife, if Adelita would be my woman, I'd buy her a silk dress to take her to the barrack's dance.*

that they kill me at once".[209]

This particular suitor seems to literally be drunk of both alcohol and love. Moreover, he seems to be very passionate, maybe even a little desperate for her. In other words, this *corrido* likewise emphasizes the love the soldier has for the *soldadera*. Once again, the emphasis is on his feelings about her, and not about her particular life story.

The two most famous songs written about *soldaderas* during the Mexican Revolution, reveal several similarities. Firstly, both Adelita and Valentina are idealized strongly. Moreover, both women are passionately loved by army men trying to gallant them. In other words, the *corridos* depict these women as an object of desire. Lastly, both songs are written from the perspective of the men, downplaying the importance of the *soldaderas* life and agency.

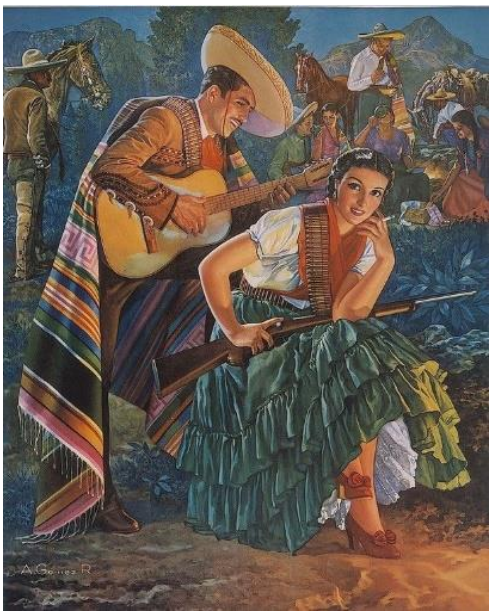

Image 5: 'Amor Guerrillero', by Antonio R. Gómez (1946)

An equally romanticized image of the *soldadera* has been given by Gómez (see image 5). In this painting, more people are portrayed. In the front one observes a *soldadera*, playfully laughing while holding her rifle and wearing the cartridge belts. She wears the traditional Mexican dress, characteristic for the middle- and upper class women of

[209] Lyric Translate: La Valentina. Consulted on https://lyricstranslate.com/en/la-valentina-la-valentina.html-0. Own translation from Spanish. Original text: *Una pasión me domina, y es la que me hizo venir, Valentina, Valentina... yo te quisiera decir. Dicen que por tus amores, la vida me han de quitar, no le hace que sean muy hombres, yo también me sé pelear. Si porque tomo tequila, mañana tomo jerez, si porque me ven borracho, mañana ya no me ven. Valentina, Valentina, rendido estoy a tus pies, si me han de matar mañana, que me maten de una vez.*

Mexico. She is serenated by the man next to her, holding the guitar. In the background several men and women are sitting together, while a man with a horse on the left is observing them. The men holding the guitar seems to be courting the *soldadera*. The look upon his face clearly reveals his affection towards her. In other words, this painting is an homage to the love between the soldiers and their *soldaderas*. This optimistic depiction of female soldiers forms a visualization of both the songs 'La Adelita' and 'La Valentina', where the men are hopelessly in love with the *soldaderas* as well.

Love formed a significant film topic as well. Not surprisingly, two movies that attracted mass appeal in Mexico were *La Adelita* (1937) and *La Valentina* (1938), based on the stories of the *corridos*. However, in these films the story seems to be the other way around. This time, it is not the *soldaderas* that are loved and idealized, but them desiring someone else's heart. The protagonists are two *soldaderas* in the Revolution who both fall hopelessly in love with the general. The plot emphasizes more the love interest of the *soldaderas* than their participation on the battlefield.[210] In other words, once again they focus more on the relationship between the *soldadera* and the soldier than on the accomplishments of these women themselves. This corresponds with the earlier mentioned stereotypes in the representation of women in the Mexican Revolution.

Over time, the depiction of *soldaderas* in movies has not changed much. In point of fact, one could argue that the stereotypes of women in the Revolution have become more present. In both two movies *Desperado* (1995) and *Bandidas* (2006), the image of the *soldadera* seems very clear. Even though the films are not about the Revolution, the symbolism revolving the *soldaderas* has had a major impact on the creation of the protagonists. In *Bandidas*, Salma Hayek and Penélope Cruz play two characters in search for love while carrying guns and wearing a revealing blouse.[211] By using their female strength and following their heart in the search for love, they visibly replicate the image of women in the Mexican Revolution that the *corridos*, artworks and earlier movies have portrayed. In *Desperado* one of the main characters is played by Salma Hayek as well. In this film, she falls in love with a *mariachi*, a Mexican band member who forms a national cult figure as well. She is wearing a similar revealing outfit as she had in *Bandidas*, and is likewise wielding a gun.[212] In both more recent movies, the love of the '*soldadera*' for her

[210] *La Adelita* (1937), *La Valentina* (1938).
[211] *Bandidas* (2006).
[212] *Desperado* (1995).

male counterpart is central to the plot. Even though the women played in these films are assertive characters, they tend to be oversexualized continuously. As put by Fernández: "All the women in the more recent movies are tough fighters, but those characteristics are overshadowed by their sexual imagery".[213] In other words, in the two latter films, the emphasis is laid on the *soldadera's* sexuality and desirability.

Fernández argues that women in Mexican society draw their inspiration from two archetypes: The Virgin Mary, who represents the good woman, and La Malinche, who denotes the bad woman. She explains how for the mostly Catholic Mexican population, the Virgin Mary – materialized in the cult of the so-called Our Lady of Guadalupe– is the most venerated woman in society for she stands for innocence, purity and self-sacrifice. In contrast, La Malinche is a despised figure in Mexico. According to the stories, she is the indigenous woman who betrayed the Mexican people by helping the Spanish conquistador, Hernán Cortez, in defeating the Aztecs. Afterwards, being Cortez's lover she bore his child, the first *mestizo* (half Spanish-half indigenous) in Mexico. Therefore, La Malinche represents "betrayal and unbridled sexuality".[214]

The oversexualizing of the *soldaderas* in the more recent movies, however, is not consistent with the ideal of the Virgin Mary. This can be explained by two factors. First, the later discussed films were released from the 1990s onwards. In these times, the presence of sexuality had become more accepted in society and particularly in the film industry worldwide. Second, the later discussed films were released by American production companies instead of Mexican ones. Even in current society, the majority of Mexicans is still very religious. The fact that the movies portraying the *soldaderas* as more assertive, sexual characters are not made by Mexicans corresponds with their devotion to the Catholic Church.

Sexuality and desire are important themes in Ángel Martín's art as well. He painted a more controversial image of the *soldadera* in 1996 (see image 6). In his artwork, Adelita evidently forms an object of sexual desire. With her wild hair waving in the wind, she is proudly holding the Mexican flag and trumpet. With the same cartridge belts, she seems to form a symbol for the victory of Mexico in the Revolution. The sombrero next to her, a national emblem of Mexico, reinforces this. Martín demonstrates her femininity, however in a different way than Bautista. In Bautista's depiction of a female soldier, the woman

[213] Fernández, 'From Soldadera to Adelita', 60.
[214] Ibidem, 60-61.

portrays an example of female sexual morality and innocence, for her clothes cover her body, not revealing anything that might contradict her maidenly imagination. In this case, the artist chose to demonstrate her sexuality by painting her with much revealing clothes, underlining her feminine forms.

Image 6: 'La Adelita', by Ángel Martín (1996)

In great contrast to the formerly discussed themes and artworks, *soldaderas* were accused of being violent, rude and murderous. Particularly during the Revolution itself, pamphlets were circulating accusing the *soldaderas* of being bloodthirsty murderers. An example of this is the painting 'Calavera de la Adelita' ('Skull of la Adelita') of José Guadalupe Posada (see image 7). A skeleton wearing a dress on a black horse is frightening away the smaller persons on the bottom of the painting. The monstrously large skeleton, or *soldadera*, is violently chasing away seemingly innocent villagers. In other words, the *soldadera* is depicted as an evil and deadly woman, ravaging anything that comes to her path.

Image 7: 'Calavera de la Adelita', by José G. Posada (1900-1913)

In the Mexican film industry, certain types of *soldaderas* were criticized as well. In the 1958 film *La Cucaracha* (literal translation: 'The Cockroach') the main character was a ill-mannered, rude and even violent young woman who was rejected by the general because of her behaviour. Nevertheless, she becomes more likable when expecting a child, underlining her femininity. After her child is born, she dedicates herself to taking care of the wounded as camp follower, instead of returning to the life of a fighting *soldadera*.[215] It becomes clear that the domestication or taming of a woman's behaviour was a popular theme in Mexican cinema. In these types of movies women trade in their masculine qualities for feminine ones. The transformation of a bad woman into a good one was a widely known subject matter in the Mexican film industry. Put differently, Mexican viewers preferred watching a woman in love with a man or as a mother over a gun-wielding, successful soldier.

Following Fernández's earlier discussed argumentation, it is not evident all *soldaderas* portrayed in movies represent either the Virgin Mary or La Malinche. Nevertheless, certain thoughts on how a bad woman behaves and a good woman should behave are very present in Mexican cinematography. In the Mexican Golden Age filmography, women are expected to follow the path of the Virgin Mary (concretely the Virgin of Guadalupe), for they have to be obedient wives and good mothers.

The contrast between *soldaderas* as ruthless, violent and murderous as opposed to brave, virtuous and innocent is very well set out in Niggly's play. The drama involves a group of *soldaderas* supporting the Villistas. Their responsibility was to guard the rebels' ammunition, stored at the military camp. The main character is Adelita, whereas the indisputable leader of the group *soldaderas* is Concha. She is a fearless, combative and violent women. However, she is strongly associated with 'Mother Earth' as well:

> "As dirty as the rest of them, there is strength that flowers in her body and sets her above and beyond them. Born of the earth, it is the earth's pulse that she has for her heart. She is the one who keeps these fighting, snarling women together … who can punish with a sure, cold hand, but at the same time can heal their wounds. As merciless as the wind and rain, she is as warm and healing as the sun".[216]

[215] *La Cucaracha* (1958).
[216] Niggli, *Soldadera*, 74.

Evidently, Niggli demonstrates qualities considered as 'good' and 'bad' to be part of the same woman. The main character, Adelita, is described in the following way: "She is the poetry of the Revolution, and the beauty, and she who has seen almost nothing of death finds life very gay".[217] Niggli's use of Adelita as a symbol of the Revolution is confirmed by the inclusion of the famous *corrido* about her. As the *corrido*, the play represents Adelita and the other *soldaderas* in a romantic way.

The enemy forces, known as *pelones* during the Revolution, are the 'rich ones' in the play. A spy, indicated as 'The Rich One', is captured by the *soldaderas* and being held prisoner in the camp. In an argument between Concha and The Rich One, The Rich One argues how women are not strong enough to win the Revolution. Concha, strongly believing in equality between men and women, rejects his presumption regarding the weakness of the female sex:

> "Are we women? Sometimes I wonder. The Old One who cooks our food [...] she saw her son crucified by men of your kind [... and] another one saw her son hunted down by dogs for the sport of it. That doesn't make women, my friend. That makes something worse than the devils in hell".[218]

Here, Concha reveals her tough and ruthless side, while at the same time admitting it was caused by tragic events she repents of. Adelita, in contrast, is depicted as more childlike and vulnerable. As goodhearted as she is, she believes The Rich One when he tries to win her over. To save his life, she aims to convince her fellow *soldaderas* that the prisoner is trustworthy. Concha however, responds in the following way to her young, innocent protégée:

> "Yes, this is the Revolution. We had to forget how to weep, and how to be kind and merciful. We are cruel, because the Revolution is cruel. It must crush out the evil before we can make things good again".[219]

Adelita clearly struggles with the cruelty of the other female soldiers:

> "I don't want to touch you. I don't want to touch any of you. You are not the women I used to know... you're not the women who used to carry me around on your backs when

[217] Niggli, *Soldadera*, 57.
[218] Ibidem, 94.
[219] Ibidem, 71-72.

> my mother died. You've changed, all of you, horribly changed! Why, you're just like you're dead to me. All of the goodness and sweetness that used to be in you...it's dead! (Crouches on the ground, crying bitterly)".[220]

In this scene, Niggli succesfully displays two well-known characteristics of the *soldaderas*. Both characters, nevertheless, have an ideal image in their head of what the Revolution should be. However, the feminist ideology personified by Concha demonstrates the *zeitgeist* regarding independent women. In the early times the play was written and performed, feminism was many times equated with the idea of a 'loose' and 'uncontrolled' woman. Unmarried *soldaderas*, therefore, were seen as "a potentially disruptive force within society because they were unable to control their sexuality and thus needed to be under a man's control".[221] At times the prevailing image of the promiscuous *soldadera* was even linked to the practice of prostitution.

Later in the play, Concha discovers that the enemy troops are on their way to the camp to destroy the ammunition the women were protecting. The *soldaderas* decide that, to defend the ammunition, one of them must sacrifice herself and throw a bomb at the federal troops. By showing herself throwing the bomb, the *soldadera* in question will be shot by the *federales*. In other words, this means certain death for the woman who agrees to the deed. Cricket, one of the more experienced female soldiers, initially took upon herself the task of defending the ammunition. However, at the last moment she becomes immobilized by fear. As an utmost act of bravery, young Adelita steps in and takes Cricket's place, giving up her own life for the Revolution without hesitation:

> "CRICKET (screams): No! Not me! (Runs down, flings herself on her knees and throws both arms about Concha's knees). I wouldn't have a chance in a landslide. I don't want to die. Not me! I was only fooling. I didn't mean what I said. Please, Concha, not me, please. I don't want to die.
> ADELITA (running toward them): Wait! I will throw it. (She snatches the bomb from Concha).
> CONCHA (horrified): No!
> ADELITA (running up the path): Long live the Revolution!"[222]

[220] Niggli, *Soldadera*, 71.
[221] Fernández, 'From Soldadera to Adelita', 58.
[222] Niggli, *Soldadera*, 113.

Adelita is killed, but the ammunition is safe. The innocent and sweet Adelita sacrifices her life for the Revolution. This final act represents Niggli's idealization of Adelita's character. After her death, the other *soldaderas* continue their adventures, singing verses of the *corrido* 'La Adelita' to express their eternal gratitude to her sacrifice.[223] The message of Niggli's play is therefore very clear. Despite her childlike qualities, Adelita proved a strong woman and a valiant hero. Central to the drama are the courage, bravery and most importantly the self-sacrifice of the *soldadera*.

Image 8: 'Las Soldaderas', by José C. Orozco (1926).

Self-sacrifice and suffering are central to Orozco's *mural*[224] as well. Seemingly, the world of art prefers the portrayal of female soldiers over 'simple' camp followers. Nevertheless, José Clemente Orozco provides his perspective on them, in his 'Las Soldaderas' of 1926 (see image 8). According to Fuentes, camp followers "received their share of attention too. They were depicted as loyal, self-sacrificing companions to the soldiers or, in less sympathetic renderings, as enslaved camp followers".[225] For this artwork does not reveal the facial expressions of the characters, it is hard to find out their feelings. It seems that the woman in the pink skirt is the central figure of the painting. The *soldadera* is carrying bags on both her back and in her hand, revealing her burden. She follows the male soldiers, carrying weapons and cartridge belts, and all wearing hats. In this case, Fuentes' description seems to apply. The fact that she is literally following the men from the light to the darkness, demonstrates her loyalty and self-sacrifice. It is not clear from the painting if the camp follower is carrying the load voluntarily or as a slave. All the same, it

[223] Niggli, *Soldadera*, 115.
[224] Famous wall paintings of the Mexican Modernism.
[225] Fuentes, 'Battleground Women', 525.

is not an optimistic portrayal of the life of the camp follower. The painting evokes feelings of sorrow and compassion.

Image 9: *Soldaderas* walking next to a Zapatista Army, ca. 1914.

Image 9 shows *soldaderas* walking next to cavalry forces of the Zapatista army. While some men on horses are smiling at the camera, the women keep a straight face forwards, carrying some of the load for the soldiers. The camp followers wear simple dresses and their hair is covered. Therefore, it is likely these women belonged to the lower classes of Mexican society. Their faces show hardship and suffering. For they are not posing or paying any attention to the camera, it is clear that these women did not particularly wanted their picture taken. Possibly, they were not even aware of it. The photographer seems to purposely want them in his picture for several reasons. The most important seems to be to show the suffering of the camp followers. The men sitting comfortably on their horses are right next to the walking women in the photo. This reveals the self-sacrifice of the *soldaderas*. While at the time this image would have been accepted as normal, the maker – probably unaware of it – demonstrates the literal distinction between the men and women in the army during the Revolution. Furthermore, he shows the loyalty of the women following the male soldiers. Instead of complaining about the circumstances, they persevere while keeping a straight face.

Image 10 portrays camp followers on a train, the utmost important vehicle of the Mexican Revolution. In this photo, seven women are on the train, sharing their space with food reserved for the troops. As the last discussed photo, these women originate from a lower background, wearing simple clothes and some of them having their hair covered.

Image 10: *Soldaderas* on the platform at the Buenavista train station, April 1912.

The woman on the left of the image tries to take a glance past the side of the train. The rest of the women stare in different directions. Evidently, these women were not posing for the photo. The older women in the middle of the backrow seems to be noting a picture is being made, for she is staring the direction of the camera. However, these women were not having their picture taken for a specific purpose. The photographer, however, does have certain intentions with his work. The fact that these women were photographed while still being on the train, is not a coincidence in this case. The maker tries to capture the connectedness of the *soldaderas* and the train. Both being a symbol of the Mexican Revolution, they both helped in the military struggle by carrying the load and traveling to the front with the armed forces. Many *soldaderas* traveling stayed on top of the train or in the intermediate parts, while the men and supplies found themselves in the compartments. This being the case in image 7 (*supra*) as well, it demonstrates the camp followers self-sacrifice and determination in following their men.

In short, several important themes create the symbolization of the *soldadera*. Many times, she is idealized for her bravery, beauty and loyalty. Consequently, she is often an object of love or even sexual desire. These notions, however, mostly apply to the *soldadera* as a female soldier. Photographic evidence constructed the tragic reality for camp followers, displaying their suffering. In both cases, self-sacrifice is an important topic. Furthermore, a difference seems to exist according to the outfits and haircuts of the *soldaderas*. Camp followers, with their simple dresses and their hair covered in a cloth, are more pitied than glorified. These women clearly came from lower backgrounds. The visualized women in traditional dresses originate from the middle- and upper classes,

demonstrating the ideal of the female soldier. While in older works their hair is put up, more recently painted arts display her with wild hair waving in the wind. Whereas in earlier days these women would be condemned for being too loose, nowadays they symbolize her freedom and female empowerment.

Other works, in contrast, condemn the *soldaderas* for being violent and devastating. 'Good' women versus 'bad' women is a much contested topic within film, visual art and theatre. However, Niggli's play shows that women can possess both good and bad qualities. Furthermore important to keep in mind is that Posada's pamphlet, containing Adelita as a skeleton chasing Mexicans, is the only one that has been made during the Revolution itself. Later artistic expressions arouse compassion and, more importantly, glorification of the cult figure. It seems that after the Revolution the symbol of the *soldadera* was more idealized for her beauty and sexuality than during. In other words, during and just after the Revolution, the portrayal of *soldaderas* was much less optimistic and romanticized than in later periods.

CONCLUSION

Undeniably, the *soldaderas* have had an important impact on both the Mexican Revolution and the depiction of female soldiers worldwide. This research has set out the two sides of the *soldadera*, to wit her role in the Revolution on the one hand, and her symbolic meaning afterwards on the other. Furthermore, it has concluded both camp followers and female soldiers in the definition of a *soldadera*. Substantial to this paper was the question of who the *soldaderas* were during the Revolution, and whom they have become during the aftermath in both Mexico and the rest of the world.

The first chapter has provided a contextualization of the Mexican Revolution. In other words, it has explained the causes, developments and results of the revolutionary period of 1910-1920. The revolutionary period was characterized by various alternating powers with different ideologies in combination with nation-wide violence. For the course of the war changed continuously, armies changed with it. Noteworthy is that presidents Díaz, Madero and Carranza in some way all made the same crucial mistake by residing their power in a too narrow base, excluding the majority of Mexicans.

The second chapter placed the *soldaderas* within the context of the Revolution. It has demonstrated their motivations to participate, their circumstances and their life conditions and treatment. The most significant motivations for *soldaderas* were force, vengeance, for ideological reasons, loyalty to their male counterparts and protection from the violent situation in their home towns. The Revolution created the first opportunity for women to take control over their own actions. By going into military service, women broke with their traditional roles in Mexican society. It is impossible to provide an exact number of *soldaderas* fighting in the Revolution, for they were not registered and frequently switched sides. This points out the symbolic presence of soldaderas is more important than their statistical presence in the Mexican folk imaginary. Nevertheless, women, welcome or not, evidently formed a considerable part of the armies in the civil war. Therefore, the *soldaderas* undeniably were a key factor in determining the course of the Revolution, as supported by Soto and Salas.

Women performed various tasks during the Revolution. Camp followers' first and foremost responsibility was the provision of food, water, ammunition and equipment for the soldiers. This way, Salas' emphasis on women performing supporting tasks seems

accurate. In addition, they took care of the both the wounded soldiers and their families, demonstrating their double burden. The other category of *soldaderas*, the female soldiers, fought alongside men in the battlefields. Soto and Arce, in contrast to Salas, underline the importance of the *soldadera* in the warfare. However, following the analysis of this research many of them did not hold military rank. Next to fighting, female soldiers frequently engaged in the practice of espionage and delivering personal messages. The latter two practices need to be positioned between the provision of food and medical care on the one hand, and the actual fighting on the other. Therefore, although a division exists between camp followers and female soldiers, more responsibilities rested upon their shoulders which cannot be categorized exclusively in one of the two types of *soldaderas*. One cannot deny the hardship the *soldaderas* had to endure. They suffered from bad living conditions and received poor treatment from the soldiers. The commanders of the largest armies differed in opinion about the *soldaderas*, ranging from widely based respect to a cruel massacre.

The last chapter analysed the cult figure of the *soldadera* by examining *corridos*, visual art, photography, film and theatre plays. A widely-supported trend is the underlining of favourable features of them in the different forms of expression. Noteworthy is that during the civil war, *soldaderas* were portrayed in a much more dark and gloomy way, whereas afterwards they were romanticized internationally.

Striking are the connections between the type of *soldadera* and the social classes of the women. Arrizon, Arce and Soto all to some extent agree on how women from lower social backgrounds commonly fought alongside the men, while women from the middle and higher classes performed supporting tasks. Following the examination of the photos, the opposite seems to be true: camp followers, carrying the supplies and traveling by train seem to be of lower origins than the female fighters practicing shooting in their traditional dresses. Although the photos of the *soldaderas* write them into history – as argued by Poniatowksa, Rueda-Acedo and Soltero Sánchez – one should remain objective. Pictures can be taken for a certain motive. Thus, next to the clear existing difference between female soldiers and camp followers, pictures of the Revolution show the difference between 'posed' and 'spontaneous' photos as well. Noticeable is the fact that the 'spontaneous' photos are taken of camp followers, and the 'posed' pictures seem to correspond with the description of female soldiers. Especially the portraits of Adelita and Valentina are widely known, for they have transformed into cult figures representing the

Mexican Revolution as a whole. Fernández claims that the *soldaderas* were portrayed in a way they would no longer form a threat to male dominance in Mexico. However this being accurate in many cases, it does not correspond to the pictures of Adelita and Valentina. These two pictures, portraying *soldaderas* in male clothing, seem to rebel against the idea of male dominance in the army.

Furthermore, even though not every *soldadera* in film represents either the Virgin of Guadalupe or La Malinche, combinations of their features are expressed. However, as demonstrated by Bos, the depiction of female soldiers as a saintly virgin versus an immoral prostitute does not limit itself to the case of Mexico. Whereas movies of the Mexican Cinematic Golden Age praise women for being obedient wives and good mothers, more recent and international movies demonstrate the presence of their sexuality. This does not coincide with Fernández' argumentation on how, over time, the cult figure of the *soldadera* was more connected to independence than sexuality. Over the years, independence and sexuality are both increasingly linked to the *soldadera*'s identity.

Niggli's play sets out several types of *soldaderas* with different characteristics. Although Niggli demonstrates several perspectives portrayed by different characters, Adelita is obviously the hero of the story. The play caused for new discussions on various topics as gender, social classes and the Revolution itself. Nowadays, when examining Dean's argumentation regarding the Kurdish female fighters, debate revolving gender topics remains to exist. Furthermore, art and media production continue to favour the more suitable features as opposed to the overshadowed elements that are downplayed or even ignored. This is the case for the *soldaderas* as well. Not a single *soldadera* was the same. Nevertheless, cultural reproductions portray them in a certain way. However, as Legrás argues, the image of the *soldaderas* is ever-changing according the political climate of a given time, for renewed criticism transforms existing ideas.

This research has focused on two aspects of the *soldaderas*. The first is who they were and what part they played in the Mexican Revolution. The *soldaderas* were the women from different social backgrounds participating in the Revolution, ranging from camp followers performing supporting tasks to female soldiers fighting alongside men in the battlefield. For they held various significant responsibilities and upheld the moral of the men, they were a key factor in the course of the Revolution. The second part of this paper has focused on whom the *soldaderas* have become in art and media productions. A solid answer to this proves impossible, for – as explained earlier – their image is ever-

changing. Over the years, they were praised for their bravery, beauty, loyalty, femininity and virtue. However, they were also criticized for their rudeness, immorality, masculinity and bloodthirstiness.

This research has created a better understanding of the similarities and differences between the *soldadera*'s daily life during the revolutionary period and the symbolization of the cult figure. It has both confirmed and disproved existing notions within the historiographic debate, and has furthermore filled in the existing lacuna between her two much discussed sides. Firstly, their double burden points out the *soldadera*'s bravery and heroism on the one hand, and her femininity and loyalty on the other. This palette of different characteristics was later renovated in cultural and artistic expressions. Secondly, even though a division existed between the responsibilities of camp followers and female fighters, various women performed a combination of tasks. Therefore, *soldaderas* were not limited to solely one of the two categories. In addition, the backgrounds of the *soldaderas* did not exclusively determine their responsibilities. In other words, even though a certain propensity is visible, women from both lower and higher origins could be both camp followers and female soldiers. Lastly, this research shows that suitable features are emphasized while others are downplayed or ignored. This phenomenon, however, keeps on changing over time. In the present, the *soldaderas* are a symbol of independence, courage and female agency. They are an example of female empowerment for many worldwide generations of women to come.

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