From Soldadera to Adelita: The Depiction of Women in the Mexican Revolution

Delia Fernández
Grand Valley State University

Follow this and additional works at: http://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/mcnair

Recommended Citation
Available at: http://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/mcnair/vol13/iss1/6
From Soldadera to Adelita: The Depiction of Women in the Mexican Revolution

Abstract

Popular images of women during the Mexican Revolution (1911-1920) often depict them as dressed provocatively, yet wearing a bandolier and gun. Although the image is common, its origin is not well known. An examination of secondary literature and media will show the transformation in the image of the female soldier (soldadera) over the course of the Revolution from that of the submissive follower into a promiscuous fighter (Adelita). The soldaderas exhibited masculine characteristics, like strength and valor, and for these attributes, men were responsible for reshaping the female soldier (soldadera) into La Adelita. To this end, this paper examines the transformation of secondary literature and media on the plight of women and their status as second-class citizens. Next, I analyze the soldaderas themselves, including the different types of women who fought and their participation in the Mexican Revolution.

A gun is strapped to her back, as are bandoliers across her chest. She wears a flowing skirt, a revealing blouse, and a carefree expression on her face. This image has been reproduced repeatedly on shirts, calendars, address books, advertisements, and even in the media through movies, songs, and art (see Figure 1). She embodies the image of soldaderas, or women soldiers, who fought during the Mexican Revolution in the years between 1911 and 1920.¹ At this time in Mexican history, a patriarchal society constrained women and limited their lives in nearly every aspect. Women’s responsibilities to their families and the expectations of the Catholic Church stifled any possibility of equality with men. Whether intentional or not, becoming a soldadera allowed some women to leave behind part of their responsibilities and begin a journey that would ultimately help them gain equality with men. Over the years, the image of the soldadera has been misrepresented in popular culture. The brave, strong woman who fought for equality, such as the anonymous soldadera depicted in Figure 2, has been transformed into the promiscuous woman often referred to as La Adelita, described above.² Unlike the true soldadera, La Adelita hardly seems capable of fighting in a war. How and why has the image of the soldadera evolved into that of La Adelita? More importantly, why are the romanticized images of the soldadera perpetuated to this day in popular culture, including corridos (love songs) and movies? This paper examines the transformation of the soldadera into La Adelita. To this end, I provide an overview of Mexico during the Porfiriato (1876-1911), specifically focusing on the plight of women and their status as second-class citizens. Next, I analyze the soldaderas themselves, including the different types of women who fought and their participation in the Mexican Revolution. Finally, I

¹ The word soldadera has its origins in the Spanish Conquest. The soldaderas were responsible for aiding the army by finding food and caring for injured soldiers. The term has also been applied to Spanish women who fought during the Conquest. As Spanish became Mexico’s language after the conquest, the term soldadera was used to describe all women who fought and aided in the Mexican conflicts. The first time it appeared in print was 1865. For more information, see Elizabeth Salas’ Soldaderas in the Mexican Military: Myth and History (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990), 11-33.
² There are many myths surrounding the identity of La Adelita, however her true identity is unknown.

References


GVSU McNair Scholars Journal VOLUME 13, 2009

Co-localization of Histamine and eGFP in the Central Nervous System from pHdc-5'-UTR-eGFP Transformants of Drosophila melanogaster

Delia Fernández
McNair Scholar

Faculty Mentor

David Stack, Ph.D.
discuss the evolution of the soldaderas’ image over time in song and in film. What I found was that romanticized depictions of La Adelita are a result of men’s framing of these women soldiers in the way they recorded history. Men sought to recast the soldaderas’ legacy as strong, assertive, and in some cases, violent women because these women exhibited masculine characteristics that clashed with societal expectations of how women should act. Therefore men downplayed the accomplishments of soldaderas on the battlefield and instead emphasized their beauty and loyalty to the men in their lives. By rendering female soldiers in a romanticized manner, men effectively neutralized the threat these women posed to their masculinity.

The Porfirio and the Flight of Women

Porfirio Díaz, governor of Mexico from 1876-1880 and 1884-1911, created conditions that pointed towards revolution. His presidency was marred by deception, corruption, and violence. Upon seizing power in 1876, he espoused an anti-reelection platform that prohibited consecutive terms for a president. Diaz’s successor, Manuel González, had the constitution amended to permit presidential reelection, which allowed Diaz to be elected again in 1884 - a position he would hold until the outbreak of the Revolution. Diaz’s policies had a profound impact on Mexico, mostly benefiting the upper classes as well as foreigners in Mexico. Diaz was well known for favoring foreign interests over domestic ones. This was obvious in 1906 Cananea labor strike that killed over twenty five women to quell the disturbance, in effect undoing what Mexico had done to protect the laborers. Cananea labor strike that killed over twenty five women was also important for women, their lack of citizenship was more problematic. Without it, women lacked rights and were dependent on their husbands or fathers in ways that made life difficult. According to the civil code of 1884, married women could not enter into a contract, sell property, or oversee their children’s education. Moreover, a commercial code also prohibited them from working as teachers or attorneys for anyone except their husband or children.³¹ In 1910, Díaz also lost his job; Díaz, an upper-class land owner, challenged Díaz in the presidential election but was failed and subsequently lost the election. Nevertheless, Díaz also had the support of many Mexicanos, and the time was right for a change. The following year, the Mexican people rose up in revolt against the Porfiriao, the Revolution was underway.

Not all people fighting in the Revolution pursued the same goals, and neither were they all men. Some men took up arms in opposition to Diaz’s policies or in support of opposition leaders, such as Poncho Villa and Emiliano Zapata. There were, however, some women who joined in the fighting to advance their own causes. Not only were women’s lives limited by the law, but gender roles were also constraining to women. A woman remained under the control of a man her entire life: in her childhood, it was her father; in her adulthood, it was her husband, brother or uncle. If she joined the conflict, her life was regulated by the Catholic Church. Women were expected to serve their families faithfully, especially the men in their lives. Moreover, they were prohibited from entering a trade that they needed to contribute economically to the family’s income, and reproducers, because they were expected to bear children and serve as their primary caregivers. They accomplished all of this while upholding an image of innocence and purity, much like the Virgin Mary, who dutifully and faithfully accepted her destiny without complaint. This was the ideal woman in Mexican society.

Who Were the Soldaderas?

One way women were emancipated was by becoming soldiers in the Mexican Revolution. As soldaderas, women found they were able to rise above some of the limitations in their lives. When soldaderas left home to take up arms, they left behind their traditional roles at the same time. Women shed their docile image, strapped on bandoliers and wielded guns – much like men. The idea that a woman could take up a non-traditional profession as a soldier was a radical idea. Many women were active participants during the Revolution. Though it is not known how many women fought, they did so on behalf of the federal government (federals) and also on the side of those opposing the dictatorship, including the armies of Poncho Villa, Emiliano Zapata, and Venustiano Carranza.²² Each of these revolutionary leaders attracted a sizeable following of women soldiers. However, Poncho Villa was not as receptive to female soldiers as the other leaders, but they still figured among his troops. Because Villa used quick attacks and swift troop movements, he did not like to travel with soldiers.²³ There are also conflicting stories about Villa’s opinion of soldaderas and women in general. One story describes Villa as a man who wanted to protect women and relegate them to “the back of firing line to places of safety.”²⁴ Yet another story, Villa orders the massacre of ninety women and children prisoners under his command, believing that one of them conspired to kill him.²⁵ Villa’s views on the soldaderas are not clear; nonetheless, both stories suggest he likely did not want them fighting alongside his troops. Emiliano Zapata must have felt differently about the soldaderas because he included many women among his troops. Although some would assume that Zapata’s forces would attract lower-class women, he drew support from women of diverse backgrounds, including farmers and unmarried professors.²⁶ Venustiano Carranza also welcomed women from all social classes in his army. In addition to war, Carranza also looked for women’s support to advance his political career.²⁷ In exchange for their support, Carranza enacted social reforms benefiting women during his presidency.²⁸ Regardless of whom they supported, women’s participation was a key component of the Revolution. Some women fought in the Revolution did so for a variety of reasons. Elizabeth Salas provides a description of different soldaderas in her book Soldaderas in the Mexican Military: Myth and History.²⁹ Some women fought in support of revolutionary ideals like agrarian reform. Others fought because the man in their lives were fighting, and they wanted to support them. One example is Manuela Oaxaca, who was fifteen years old when she decided to follow her boyfriend into the war.³⁰ Salas describes other young girls, twelve and thirteen years old, who were forced to accompany their parents into war and later became soldaderas themselves.³¹ There were also women who did not become soldaderas of their own volition. Some women were forced to join the war after they were kidnapped by men in the Federal Army or the revolutionary forces.³² This was a common occurrence; many of the soldaderas joined the Revolution after seeing this happen to family members and friends. Angela Jimenez joined the war after watching her sister kill a soldier who attempted to rape her.³³ Jimenez’s sister subsequently killed herself after shooting the officer.³⁴ This prompted Jimenez to avenge her sister’s death by joining her father in the Revolution, where she eventually became an important leader of the revolution. Additionally, older women entered the war seeking revenge for the deaths or capture of their husbands, son, or brother. Examples of such soldaderas include Señora María Sánchez, who took her brother’s place in a rebel army after his death, and Señora Pimental, who freed her son from a Federal prison by killing two guards.³⁵ Thus, women of all ages actively participated as soldaderas, albeit for different reasons.

Diverse backgrounds also played a role in women’s motivation to take up arms. Most soldaderas came from the lower rungs of society. Some were the indigenous or mestiza, of mixed indigenous and Spanish ancestry, daughters of farmers or merchants.³⁶ In the

²² Salas, 68.
²³ Op Cit.
²⁴ Ibid., 39.
²⁵ Ibid., 58.
²⁶ Ibid., 58.
²⁷ Ibid., 58.
²⁸ Ibid., 58.
²⁹ Ibid., 58.
³¹ Ibid., 58.
³² Ibid., 73.
³³ For more information on these soldaderas, see Salas, 40.
³⁴ Ibid., 58.
³⁵ Ibid., 49.
³⁶ Ibid., 73.
³⁷ Ibid., 73.
³⁸ Ibid., 73.
The Porfiriato and the Flight of Women
Porfirio Díaz, governor of Mexico from 1876-1880 and 1884-1911, created conditions that pointed towards revolution. His presidency was marred by deception, corruption, and violence. Upon seizing power in 1876, he espoused an anti-reelection platform that prohibited consecutive terms for a president. Díaz’s successor, Manuel González, had the constitution amended to permit presidential reelection, which allowed Díaz to be elected again in 1884—a position he held until the outbreak of the Revolution. Díaz’s policies had a profound impact on Mexico, mostly benefiting the upper classes as well as foreigners in Mexico. Díaz was well known for favoring foreign interests over domestic ones. This was obvious in the 1906 Cananza labor strike that killed over twenty people. Diaz allowed the American mine owner to pay Mexican workers lower wages than their American counterparts at the same mine, which provoked the strike. When the miners went on strike and violence ensued, Diaz welcomed the arrival of U.S. troops into Mexico to quell the disturbance, in effect undermining Mexico’s sovereignty. ² Countless indigenous and peasants also suffered under Diaz. They experienced the loss of their lands at the hands of the landed elite through a series of agrarian laws. The peasants and indigenous lacked any feasible means to support themselves. Their exploitation increased and so did their anger at the government that ignored them. Diaz’s government also overlooked women and treated them as second-class citizens under the law. The Constitution of 1857 and Civil Code of 1884 greatly restricted women’s rights. For example, the Constitution did not define citizenship for women, and by law women without citizenship could not vote.³ Although suffrage was important for women, their lack of citizenship was more problematic. Without it, women lacked rights and were dependent on their husbands or fathers in ways that made life difficult. According to the Civil Code of 1884, married women could not enter into a contract, sell property, or oversee their children’s education. ⁴ Moreover, a Commercial Code also prohibited them from working as teachers or attorneys for anyone except their husband or children.⁵ In 1910, Francisco I. Madero, an upper-class landowner, challenged Diaz in the presidential election but was jailed and subsequently lost the election. Nevertheless, Madero had the support of many Mexicans, and this was right for a change. The following year, the Mexican people rose up in revolt against the Porfiriato; the Revolution was underway.⁶ Not all people fighting in the Revolution pursued the same objectives, and neither were they all men. Some men took up arms in opposition to Diaz’s policies or in support of opposition leaders, such as Pancho Villa and Emiliano Zapata. There were, however, some women who joined in the fighting to advance their own causes. Not only were women’s lives limited by the law, but gender roles were also constraining to women. A woman remained under the control of a man her entire life: in her childhood, it was her father; in her adulthood, it was her husband, brother or uncle.⁷ If she joined the war, her life was regulated by the Catholic Church. Women were expected to serve their families faithfully, especially the men in their lives. Moreover, they were pressured in that they needed to contribute economically to the family’s income, and reproduce, because they were expected to bear children and serve as their primary caregivers. They accomplished all of this while upholding an image of innocence and purity, much like the Virgin of Guadalupe, who dutifully and faithfully accepted her destiny without complaint. This was the ideal woman in Mexican society. Participation in the Mexican Revolution, however, opened an avenue to liberation from the patriarchal society.

Who Were the Soldaderas?

One way women were emancipated was by becoming soldiers in the Mexican Revolution. As soldaderas, women found they were able to rise above some of the limitations in their lives. When soldaderas left home to take up arms, they left behind their traditional roles at the same time. Women shed their docile image, strapped on bandoliers and wielded guns—much like men. The idea that a woman could take up a non-traditional profession as a soldier was a radical idea. Many women were active participants during the Revolution. Though it is not known how many women fought, they did so on behalf of the federal government (federales) and also on the side of those opposing the dictatorship, including the armies of Pancho Villa, Emiliano Zapata, and Venustiano Carranza.⁸ Each of these revolutionary leaders attracted a sizeable following of women soldiers. However, Pancho Villa was not as receptive toward female soldiers as the other leaders, but they still figured among his troops. Because Villa used quick attacks and swift troop movements, he did not like to travel with soldaderas.⁹ There are also conflicting stories about Villa’s opinion of soldaderas and women in general. One story describes Villa as a man who wanted to protect women and relegate them to “the back of firing line to places of safety.”⁴ Yet in another story, Villa orders the murder of women and children prisoners under his command, believing that one of them conspired to kill him.¹⁰ Villa’s views on the soldaderas are not clear; nonetheless, both stories suggest he likely did not want them fighting alongside his troops. Emiliano Zapata must have felt differently about the soldaderas because he included many women among his troops. Although some would assume that Zapata’s forces would attract lower-class women, he drew support from women of diverse backgrounds, including farmers and unmarried professors.¹¹ Venustiano Carranza also welcomed women from all social classes in his army. In addition to Carranza, he also looked for women’s support to advance his political career.¹² In exchange for their support, Carranza enacted social reforms benefiting women during his presidency.¹³ Regardless of whom they supported, women’s participation was a key component of the Revolution. Women who fought in the Revolution did so for a variety of reasons. Elizabeth Salas provides a description of different soldaderas in her book Soldaderas in the Mexican Military: Myth and History.¹⁴ Some women fought in support of revolutionary ideas like agrarian reform. Others fought because the man in their lives was fighting, and they wanted to support them. One example is Manuela Oaxaca, who was fifteen years old when she decided to follow her boyfriend into the war.¹⁵ Salas describes other young girls, twelve and thirteen years old, who were forced to accompany their parents into war and later became soldaderas themselves.¹⁶ There were also women who did not become soldaderas of their own volition. Some women were forced to join the war after they were kidnapped by men in the Federal Army or the revolutionary forces.¹⁷ This was a common occurrence; many of the soldaderas joined the Revolution after seeing this happen to family members and friends. Angela Jimenez joined the war after watching her sister kill a soldier who attempted to rape her.¹⁸ Jimenez’s sister subsequently killed herself after shooting the officer.¹⁹ This prompted Jimenez to avenge her sister’s death by joining her father in the Revolution, where she eventually attained the rank of lieutenant colonel.²⁰ Additionally, older women entered the war seeking revenge for the death or capture of their husband, son, or brother. Examples of such soldaderas include Señora María Sánchez, who took her brother’s place in a rebel army after his death, and Señora Pimental, who fired her son from a Federal prison by killing two guards.²¹ Thus, women of all ages actively participated as soldaderas, albeit for different reasons. Diverse backgrounds also played a role in women’s motivation to take up arms. Most soldaderas came from the lower rungs of society. Some were the indigenous or mestiza, of mixed indigenous and Spanish ancestry, daughters of farmers or merchants.²² In the

References
¹⁶ Ibid., 73.
¹⁵ Ibid. 73.
¹⁴ For more information on these soldaderas, see Salas, 40.
¹³ Salas, 71.
¹² Ibid. 73.
¹⁰ Ibid., 49.
⁹ Ibid., 58.
⁸ Salas, 46.
⁷ Ibid., 45.
⁶ Ibid., 49.
⁵ Ibid. 49.
⁴ Salas, 45.
³ Soto, 11.
² There is little information on the number of soldaderas who fought due to the vague definition of who was a soldadera. For example, camp aids and women soldiers might be counted differently. Also, the wives of soldiers who fought may not have been counted. Salas affirms that there were thousands of soldaderas, Salas, 39. A Washington Post reporter remembered over 500 soldaderas in one battle. (“Amazons Under Fire.” Washington Post [Del Rio, Mexico] 3 Nov. 1913: 5).
¹ Salas, 45.
¹⁰ Ibid.
⁹ Ibid, 49.
⁸ Ibid., 58.
⁷ Ibid., 49.
⁶ Ibid., 45.
⁵ Salas, 46.
⁴ Ibid. 49.
³ Salas, 45.
² Salas, 46.
pictures of soldaderas from this era, many of the women had a darker complexion, most likely indicating their indigenous ancestry. The pictures included in Shirlene Soto’s book, *Emergence of the Modern Mexican Woman: Her Participation in Revolution and Struggle for Equality, 1910-1940*, (Denver: Arden Press, 1990), revealed their dressed and armed. These pictures of soldaderas from this era, many of the women had a darker complexion, most likely indicating their indigenous ancestry. The pictures included in Shirlene Soto’s book, *Emergence of the Modern Mexican Woman: Her Participation in Revolution and Struggle for Equality, 1910-1940*, (Denver: Arden Press, 1990), revealed their dressed and armed. These pictures of soldaderas from this era, many of the women had a darker complexion, most likely indicating their indigenous ancestry. The pictures included in Shirlene Soto’s book, *Emergence of the Modern Mexican Woman: Her Participation in Revolution and Struggle for Equality, 1910-1940*, (Denver: Arden Press, 1990), revealed their dressed and armed. These pictures of soldaderas from this era, many of the women had a darker complexion, most likely indicating their indigenous ancestry. The pictures included in Shirlene Soto’s book, *Emergence of the Modern Mexican Woman: Her Participation in Revolution and Struggle for Equality, 1910-1940*, (Denver: Arden Press, 1990), revealed their dressed and armed. These pictures of soldaderas from this era, many of the women had a darker complexion, most likely indicating their indigenous ancestry. The pictures included in Shirlene Soto’s book, *Emergence of the Modern Mexican Woman: Her Participation in Revolution and Struggle for Equality, 1910-1940*, (Denver: Arden Press, 1990), revealed their dressed and armed. These pictures of soldaderas from this era, many of the women had a darker complexion, most likely indicating their indigenous ancestry. The pictures included in Shirlene Soto’s book, *Emergence of the Modern Mexican Woman: Her Participation in Revolution and Struggle for Equality, 1910-1940*, (Denver: Arden Press, 1990), revealed their dressed and armed. These pictures of soldaderas from this era, many of the women had a darker complexion, most likely indicating their indigenous ancestry. The pictures included in Shirlene Soto’s book, *Emergence of the Modern Mexican Woman: Her Participation in Revolution and Struggle for Equality, 1910-1940*, (Denver: Arden Press, 1990), revealed their dressed and armed. These pictures of soldaderas from this era, many of the women had a darker complexion, most likely indicating their indigenous ancestry. The pictures included in Shirlene Soto’s book, *Emergence of the Modern Mexican Woman: Her Participation in Revolution and Struggle for Equality, 1910-1940*, (Denver: Arden Press, 1990), revealed their dressed and armed. These pictures of soldaderas from this era, many of the women had a darker complexion, most likely indicating their indigenous ancestry. The pictures included in Shirlene Soto’s book, *Emergence of the Modern Mexican Woman: Her Participation in Revolution and Struggle for Equality, 1910-1940*, (Denver: Arden Press, 1990), revealed their dressed and armed. These pictures of soldaderas from this era, many of the women had a darker complexion, most likely indicating their indigenous ancestry. The pictures included in Shirlene Soto’s book, *Emergence of the Modern Mexican Woman: Her Participation in Revolution and Struggle for Equality, 1910-1940*, (Denver: Arden Press, 1990), revealed their dressed and armed. These pictures of soldaderas from this era, many of the women had a darker complexion, most likely indicating their indigenous ancestry. The pictures included in Shirlene Soto’s book, *Emergence of the Modern Mexican Woman: Her Participation in Revolution and Struggle for Equality, 1910-1940*, (Denver: Arden Press, 1990), revealed their dressed and armed. These pictures of soldaderas from this era, many of the women had a darker complexion, most likely indicating their indigenous ancestry. The pictures included in Shirlene Soto’s book, *Emergence of the Modern Mexican Woman: Her Participation in Revolution and Struggle for Equality, 1910-1940*, (Denver: Arden Press, 1990), revealed their dressed and armed. These pictures of soldaderas from this era, many of the women had a darker complexion, most likely indicating their indigenous ancestry. The pictures included in Shirlene Soto’s book, *Emergence of the Modern Mexican Woman: Her Participation in Revolution and Struggle for Equality, 1910-1940*, (Denver: Arden Press, 1990), revealed their dressed and armed. These pictures of soldaderas from this era, many of the women had a darker complexion, most likely indicating their indigenous ancestry. The pictures included in Shirlene Soto’s book, *Emergence of the Modern Mexican Woman: Her Participation in Revolution and Struggle for Equality, 1910-1940*, (Denver: Arden Press, 1990), revealed their dressed and armed. These pictures of soldaderas from this era, many of the women had a darker complexion, most likely indicating their indigenous ancestry. The pictures included in Shirlene Soto’s book, *Emergence of the Modern Mexican Woman: Her Participation in Revolution and Struggle for Equality, 1910-1940*, (Denver: Arden Press, 1990), revealed their dressed and armed. These pictures of soldaderas from this era, many of the women had a darker complexion, most likely indicating their indigenous ancestry. The pictures included in Shirlene Soto’s book, *Emergence of the Modern Mexican Woman: Her Participation in Revolution and Struggle for Equality, 1910-1940*, (Denver: Arden Press, 1990), revealed their dressed and armed. These pictures of soldaderas from this era, many of the women had a darker complexion, most likely indicating their indigenous ancestry. The pictures included in Shirlene Soto’s book, *Emergence of the Modern Mexican Woman: Her Participation in Revolution and Struggle for Equality, 1910-1940*, (Denver: Arden Press, 1990), revealed their dressed and armed. These pictures of soldaderas from this era, many of the women had a darker complexion, most likely indicating their indigenous ancestry. The pictures included in Shirlene Soto’s book, *Emergence of the Modern Mexican Woman: Her Participation in Revolution and Struggle for Equality, 1910-1940*, (Denver: Arden Press, 1990), revealed their dressed and armed. These pictures of soldaderas from this era, many of the women had a darker complexion, most likely indicating their indigenous ancestry. The pictures included in Shirlene Soto’s book, *Emergence of the Modern Mexican Woman: Her Participation in Revolution and Struggle for Equality, 1910-1940*, (Denver: Arden Press, 1990), revealed their dressed and armed. These pictures of soldaderas from this era, many of the women had a darker complexion, most likely indicating their indigenous ancestry. The pictures included in Shirlene Soto’s book, *Emergence of the Modern Mexican Woman: Her Participation in Revolution and Struggle for Equality, 1910-1940*, (Denver: Arden Press, 1990), revealed their dressed and armed. These pictures of soldaderas from this era, many of the women had a darker complexion, most likely indicating their indigenous ancestry. The pictures included in Shirlene Soto’s book, *Emergence of the Modern Mexican Woman: Her Participation in Revolution and Struggle for Equality, 1910-1940*, (Denver: Arden Press, 1990), revealed their dressed and armed. These pictures of soldaderas from this era, many of the women had a darker complexion, most likely indicating their indigenous ancestry. The pictures included in Shirlene Soto’s book, *Emergence of the Modern Mexican Woman: Her Participation in Revolution and Struggle for Equality, 1910-1940*, (Denver: Arden Press, 1990), revealed their dressed and armed. These pictures of soldaderas from this era, many of the women had a darker complexion, most likely indicating their indigenous ancestry. The pictures included in Shirlene Soto’s book, *Emergence of the Modern Mexican Woman: Her Participation in Revolution and Struggle for Equality, 1910-1940*, (Denver: Arden Press, 1990), revealed their dressed and armed. These pictures of soldaderas from this era, many of the women had a darker complexion, most likely indicating their indigenous ancestry. The pictures included in Shirlene Soto’s book, *Emergence of the Modern Mexican Woman: Her Participation in Revolution and Struggle for Equality, 1910-1940*, (Denver: Arden Press, 1990), revealed their dressed and armed. These pictures of soldaderas from this era, many of the women had a darker complexion, most likely indicating their indigenous ancestry. The pictures included in Shirlene Soto’s book, *Emergence of the Modern Mexican Woman: Her Participation in Revolution and Struggle for Equality, 1910-1940*, (Denver: Arden Press, 1990), revealed their dressed and armed. These pictures of soldaderas from this era, many of the women had a darker complexion, most likely indicating their indigenous ancestry. The pictures included in Shirlene Soto’s book, *Emergence of the Modern Mexican Woman: Her Participation in Revolution and Struggle for Equality, 1910-1940*, (Denver: Arden Press, 1990), revealed their dressed and armed. These pictures of soldaderas from this era, many of the women had a darker complexion, most likely indicating their indigenous ancestry. The pictures included in Shirlene Soto’s book, *Emergence of the Modern Mexican Woman: Her Participation in Revolution and Struggle for Equality, 1910-1940*, (Denver: Arden Press, 1990), revealed their dressed and armed.
pictures of soldaderas from this era, many of the women had a darker complexion, most likely indicating their mixed ancestry. The pictures included in Shirleen Soto’s book, Emergence of the Modern Mexican Woman, reveal their tattered, worn clothing, which may attest to their lower class background or might simply be a reflection of inadequate supplies.²⁸ In most cases, social class also dictated the role of women in the army to function on a day to day basis.²⁹ The motivations, responsibilities of the soldaderas both to serve soldiers and to provide for their own families. They received money from the soldiers to buy food and kept some of it for themselves. In doing so, the women would have enough money to feed themselves and even their children if they brought them along.³⁰ As noted above, the women and their children traveled with the troops wherever they went, providing services the soldiers needed in order to survive. Although these women did not participate in the war because of their ideals or to support their husband, lover, or son in the war, it is an important part of the Revolution.

The second women supported the war was to fight valiantly alongside the men. Women who did so did not limit their participation to tasks that they already performed in the home. Instead, the soldaderas took up arms and integrated themselves into the Federal Army as well as the opposition forces. Women were often among the lowest ranks of the soldiers; nonetheless, skilled, assertive soldaderas could become captains and generals. One example of a capitana (captain) was Petra Herrera. She fought for Venustiano Carranza’s forces disguised as a man for most of her military career. Using the nom de guerre of “Pedro Herrera,” she rose up through the ranks to become a captain and later a colonel.³¹ She earned fame for her fearlessness, skills on the battlefield, and tempora.³² Herrera did not reveal her true identity until she was a well-established member of Carranza’s forces. When her sex was revealed, she was awarded command of an all-women regiment and led them to many battlefield victories.³³ Thus, Herrera is an example of a woman who believed in the Revolution and allowed nothing to stand in the way of her participation.

There were other brave women like Herre- ra, a handful of these soldaderas even caught the attention of foreign observers. Maria Quintana de Mares was one such soldada- era. She was married to a captain in Pancho Villa’s forces and her daughter accompanied them on all their campaigns. Coronella Quintana de Mares was so committed to the Revolution that she refused to be paid.³⁴ Her skills on the battlefield caught the attention of many observers in Mexico and the United States. In 1914, a reporter from The El Paso Morning Star wrote that “she has led many desperate charges and her followers have come to believe she is endowed with some supernatural powers.”³⁵ Soldaderas’ exploits were also documented in popular American newspapers like The Washington Post and The New York Times. For example, The New York Times reported on soldaderas in a 1913 piece entitled “The Revolution’s All-Women Forces.” The five hundred soldaderas were said to be “expert with both knife and rifle.”³⁶ Also, another soldadera previously mentioned, La Neri, could “shoot and ride almost as well as men.”³⁷ These women were recognized for their talents and contributions at a time when women in the United States were not allowed to participate in armed combat. Although these were only a few examples of women who fought, they are representative of the soldaderas’ motivations for fighting and how their actions were viewed by onlookers. Through their participation in the war, these soldaderas were to achieve equality from cultural norms and achieved equality in ways that went beyond the ideals of the Revolution. Even if a soldadera took care of the troops, she had left her home, where society wanted and expected her to remain. Soldaderas received payment for their work, but more importantly, they were released from the house and the attachment to a man. If she wanted to work for a particular soldier, she could; if she wanted to move on to another reason, she could do that. There were no rules or expectations that governed her movement. She was free to do as she pleased. By virtue of such actions women were able to attain equality with men in Mexican society, if only in this context. Their equality was derived from having fought alongside men, taking “machetes and [killing] as many as the federal men...”³⁸ killed. Moreover, female soldiers died like their male counterparts, as described in the article “Battle on At Night,” in which a woman was bound with her child and thrown into a burning building along with other male soldiers.³⁹ Based upon these examples, there is no doubt that women fought heroically and died valiantly, as did men. Women’s contribu- tions and participation in the Revolution were a liberating experience, and their sacrifices were met. However, it was not until the 1920s and 1930s, after the revolution had ended, that these groups were successful. Even though these women were not physically fighting for equality like the soldaderas, they were still working to obtain freedom and faireness under the law.

Women were an integral part of the Revo- lution. They aided troops in every way imag- nable, allowing the armies to carry out daily tasks that made the war possible. In fighting alongside men, women matched their brav- ery and valor. Some women ultimately became famous colonels and generals. In doing so, they challenged common stereotypes of docile and submissive Mexican women. Both as a camp aide or combatant, the women gener- ated themselves from some of the restraints in their lives and achieved equality with men. Unfortunately for the women, their par- ticipation is often overlooked, unlike that of Pancho Villa or Emiliano Zapata.
The Image of the Soldaderas over Time

The soldaderas’ legacy is clouded by misconceptions. Although women made prog- ress by virtue of their accomplishments on the battlefield, the transformations in their gender roles were not supposed to be the strong figure in Mexican society. Successful women in the Mexican Revolution had to be remem- bered in a way that would not threaten the men's masculine characteristics. Therefore, men recast the image of women in a way that allowed the men to retain their dominance in society and that subjugated the soldaderas to a subordinate role. Soldaderas were portrayed in a romanticized manner that was at odds with who they were in real life. The woman in Figure 1 has come to embody the image of the female soldier. Clearly this woman does not resemble the actual soldadera, like the one in Figure 2. This romanticized depiction of the soldaderas highlights her sexuality and omits her bravery. Although the image re- tains the assertive traits of the woman, it also subtly undermines her with sexual overtones. It epitomizes the aftereffects of support to the Revolution and pursues equality, their memory has been replaced by the idealized one that men have conjured up in their imagination. Additional sources for this over-sexual- ized image can be found in another type of woman who broke down gender roles: prostitutes.⁴⁴ Although soldaderas and prostitu- tutes would seem very different, there are many commonalities. For example, prostitutes were some of the most liberated wom- en in Mexico at the time of the Revolution. They rejected the cultural norm that women were supposed to be under male control for the duration of their lives, that they were not permitted to come to man through marriage or sex, as was the case of the soldadera. Also, these women fought equality by emulating the sexual behavior of men. The soldadera and the prostitute were able to have sexual relationships with whomever they pleased. Also, the soldaderas were fighting for equal- ity on the battlefield, while the prostitutes achieved equality by other means. Some people even saw prostitution as the logical result of feminism, which most people associated with female soldiers. In a review of Rodolfo Uribé’s play El Eterno Feminismo [The Ever- nal Feminine], Georges Batailles argues that “not every woman is a potential prostitute, but prostitution is the logical consequence of the feminine attitude.”⁴⁵ Although the play was written in the 1950s, it shows that many people previously equated feminism with prostitution or simply the idea of a “loose” woman. Any unattained woman was considered “loose” or “easy” in Mexican so- ciety. Unmarried soldaderas therefore were accorded the same status in the world of women.⁴⁶ They 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. The prevailing image of the promiscuous soldadera is probably derived from the sexual behavior associated with the prostitute.

Popular Culture: Corridos (Love Ballads) and Film

While prostitution bestowed a promiscuous image upon the soldaderas, the Mexican cor- ridos, or love ballads, created a more feminine image of beauty and devotion. The corrido was one of the primary methods for spread- ing information, especially about the war in this era. Dating back to the Spanish coloni- zation, the Mexican corrido has maintained its validity for disseminating information throughout history.⁴⁷ Although these ballads have been used to circulate all types of infor- mation, at the beginning of the twentieth century they were used to tell stories about the participants and events in the Mexi- can Revolution. One of the most prevalent topics was that of the women soldiers. The soldaderas were remembered in many ways. Men wrote most of these corridos and, there- fore, their interpretations are based upon a male point of view. Because these are men’s views of the soldaderas, they contributed to the depiction of the soldadera that was popu- larized at the time of the Revolution and that remains popular to this day. According to the research by Rosalva Resendi, the corrid- dos categorized women into different archetypal types: “good mother, goddess, the lover, and the soldier.”⁴⁸ The female soldier is usually remembered in the corridos as either brave or a love interest. By examining the different depictions of the soldaderas in corridos we can see how they contributed to the roman- tized image of La Adelita in history. The brave soldaderas’ accomplishments as well as their beauty were described in corridos. Depending on the composer, the portrayal of these women varied. There are more songs that describe how gorgeous these women soldiers were than how fiercely they fought.⁴⁹ For example, Petra Herrera was one of the soldaderas whose exploits in war granted her a corrido. Herrera’s song dates back to 1911 and the battle of Torreon. An excerpt of the song follows:

“La valiente Petra Herrera
En el fragor del combate
Ni se dobla ni se abate …
En el fragor del combate
La valiente Petra Herrera
Ni se dobla ni se abate …
Que viva Petra Herrera
Que vivan los maderistas
Que mucan con los pelones
Los cobardes porfiristas?”

“In these lyrics, Herrera does not share the spotlight with any other soldaderas or male soldiers. This illustrates the esteem the au- thor had for his female subject. For Her- reña to have a corrido dedicated to her as a woman, she must have been regarded as val- iant as other revolutionary leaders, such as Emiliano Zapata and Pancho Villa. Accord- ing to Maria Herrera-Sobek, Petra Herrera is only one of three women remembered in corridos by their first and last name.⁵⁰ The mere mention of this soldadera by her full name is indicative of the level of acclaim she received, especially from a male composer. Unfortunately, the popularity of this type of soldadera was limited to that time period, as there was no lasting legacy of her like there is of the other type of woman soldier. The inspiration for the famous picture of the soldadera (Figure 1) probably has its origins in the corridos that describe how beautiful the women were. Unlike Petra Herrera, the women in these songs were not mentioned by their first and last name. Often they were referred to by a nickname and were probably fictional characters. The lack of a real name for these women downplays their significance. However, the woman in this type of song has a more prominent leg- acy than Herrera. Instead of being the work of a composer who was impressed by the solda- deras’ bravery, these songs were written by soldiers who were most likely love sick and writing about the women with whom they wanted to be. Such ballads described the extent of women’s beauty and femininity, al- luding to the prevailing standard of women’s physical appearance in Mexican society. There are two popular corridos, not only in Mexico, but in other Latin American coun- tries, that can best be described as tributes to the women soldiers. One particular song was written about Petra Herrera. La Adelita, has now become a generalized name for all soldaderas.⁵¹ The song titled “La Adel- ita” was most likely written at the beginning of the Revolution. There are several theories about the identity of La Adelita, including that she was a soldier in Porfirio Díaz’s army, or a nurse who helped a soldier re- turn to good health after an injury.⁵² There is no way of verifying who she really was, but we are left with the following lyrics excerpted from The Mexican Corrido that describe who she could have been:

“…y una moza que valiente los seguí... Lo fui de valiente, de soldadera Popular entre la tropa era Adelita, La mujer que el sargento idolatrabar Porque además de ser valiente, era bonita

And a young woman who valiantly followed
Madly in love with the sergeant
Popular among the troops was Adelita
The woman the sergeant adored
Because she was not only valiant but beautiful”

The composer’s passion for this woman gives the reader the impression that La Valentina was beautiful. She was inspired by a fierce woman fighter; however, the lyrics do not re- flect that. It is obvious by the omission of her accomplishments on the battlefield that La Valentina was best remembered as a beautiful woman, rather than as a heroic participant in the Revolution. This misrepresentation of the solda- dera fits better with how Mexican society and men in particular, viewed women at that time. They were objects of desire, rather than equals on the battlefield. Although it is wide- ly accepted that these women were fighters, their true legacy has been lost. For example, in another excerpt of La Adelita, she is not- ed for being respected by the colonel, but the composer goes on to describe how she is viewed as a love object rather than a sol- dier: “…y si Adelita quisiera ser mi novia, y si

⁴⁴ Castillo, Debra A. Easy Women: Sex and Gender in Modern Mexican Fiction, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998).
⁴⁵ Ibid., pg. 7.
⁴⁶ Resendiz, Rosalva, “Female Subjectivity and Agency in Popular Mexican Corridos (Ballads): An Examination of Im- ages and Representations of Soldaderas (Female soldiers) in the Mexican Revolution 1910-1920.” PhD dissertation, Texas Woman’s University, 2001, pg. 7.
⁴⁷ Ibid., pg. 8.
⁴⁸ Herrera-Sobek, 103.
⁴⁹ Ibid., 93.
⁵⁰ Herrera-Sobek, 94.
⁵¹ Ibid., 108.
⁵² McNair, Sarah. “Tropical Alas: Race, Sex, and Class in the Exposicion de Alas y Prisionera of Pancho Villa’s Army in Mexico, but in other Latin American coun- tries, that can best be described as tributes to the women soldiers. One particular song was written about Petra Herrera. La Adelita, has now become a generalized name for all soldaderas.⁵¹ The song titled “La Adel- ita” was most likely written at the beginning of the Revolution. There are several theories about the identity of La Adelita, including that she was a soldier in Pancho Villa’s army, his lover, or a nurse who helped a soldier re- turn to good health after an injury.⁵² There is no way of verifying who she really was, but we are left with the following lyrics excerpted from The Mexican Corrido that describe who she could have been:

• “Una pasión me domina
Es lo que me hizo venir a Valentina, Valentina
Yo te quisiera decir…”

• “A passion dominates me
That’s what brought me here
Valentina, Valentina
I wish to tell you so”

The composer’s passion for this woman gives the reader the impression that La Valentina was beautiful. She was inspired by a fierce woman fighter; however, the lyrics do not re- flect that. It is obvious by the omission of her accomplishments on the battlefield that La Valentina was best remembered as a beautiful woman, rather than as a heroic participant in the Revolution. This misrepresentation of the soldad- era fits better with how Mexican society and men in particular, viewed women at that time. They were objects of desire, rather than equals on the battlefield. Although it is wide- ly accepted that these women were fighters, their true legacy has been lost. For example, in another excerpt of La Adelita, she is not- ed for being respected by the colonel, but the composer goes on to describe how she is viewed as a love object rather than a sol- dier: “…”y si Adelita quisiera ser mi novia, y si

55 Op Cit.
56 Herrera-Sobek, 94.
57 Ibid., 108.
58 Ibid., pg. 13.
59 Herrera-Sobek, pg. 107.
60 Ibid.
61 Herrera-Sobek, pg. 109.
The Image of the Soldaderas over Time

The soldaderas’ legacy is clouded by misconceptions. Although women made prog-
ress by virtue of their accomplishments on the battlefield, the transformations in their gender roles were not supposed to be the strong figure in Mexican society. Successful women in the Mexican Revolution had to be remem-
bered in a way that would not threaten the men’s masculine characteristics. Therefore, men recast the image of women in a way that allowed the men to retain their dominance in society and that subjugated the soldaderas to a subordinate role. Soldaderas were portrayed in a romanticized manner that was at odds with who they were in real life. The woman in Figure 1 has come to embody the image of the female soldier. Clearly this woman does not resemble the actual soldadera, like the one in Figure 2. This romanticized depiction of the soldaderas highlights her sexuality and omits her bravery. Although the image re-
tains the assertive traits of the woman, it also subtly underlines her with sexual overtones. It depicts the aftereffects of the war by supporting the Revolution and purely equality, their memo-
rily has been replaced by the idealized one that men have conjured up in their imagination.

Additional sources for this over-sexual-
ized image can be found in another type of woman who broke down gender roles: prostitutes.⁴⁴ Although soldaderas and prosti-
tutes would seem very different, there are many commonalities. For example, prostit-
tutes were some of the most liberated wom-
men in Mexico at the time of the Revolution. They rejected the cultural norm that women were supposed to be under male control for the duration of their lives, in that they were not committed to one man through marriage or sex, as was the case of the soldiera. Also, these women sought equality by emulating the sexual behavior of men. The soldadera and the prostitute were able to have sexual relationships with whomever they pleased. Also, the soldaderas were fighting for equal-
ity on the battlefield, while the prostitutes achieved equality by other means. Some people even saw prostitution as the logical result of feminism, which most people associated with female soldiers. In a review of Rodolfo Usigli’s play El Eterno Feminino [The Eter-
nal Feminine], Georges Batailles argues that “not every woman is a potential prostitute, but prostitution is the logical consequence of the feminine attitude.”⁴⁵ Although the play was written in the 1950s, it shows that many people previously equated feminism with prostitution or simply the idea of a “loose” woman. Any unattached woman was considered “loose” or “easy” in Mexican so-
ciety because they were unable to control their sexuality and thus needed to be under a man’s control. The prevailing image of the promiscuous soldadera is probably derived from the sexual behavior associated with the prostitute.

Popular Culture: Corridos (Love Ballads) and Film

While prostitution bestowed a promiscuous image upon the soldaderas, the Mexican cor-
rido, or love ballad, created a more feminine image of beauty and devotion. The corrido was one of the primary methods for spread-
ing information, especially about the war in this era. Dating back to the Spanish coloni-
zation, the Mexican corrido has maintained its validity for disseminating information through history.⁴⁶ Although these ballads have been used to circulate all types of infor-
mation, at the beginning of the twentieth century they were used to tell stories about the participants and events in the Mexi-
can Revolution. One of the most prevalent topics was that of the women soldiers. The soldaderas were remembered in many ways. Men wrote most of these corridos and, there-
fore, their interpretations are based upon a male point of view. Because these are men’s views of the soldaderas, they contributed to the depiction of the soldadera that was popu-
larized at the time of the Revolution and that remains popular to this day. According to the research by Rosalva Resendez, the corrido cat-
dorized women into different archetypes: “good mother, goddess, the lover, and the soldier.”⁴⁷ The female soldier is usually remembered in the corridos as either brave or a love interest. By examining the different depictions of the soldaderas in corridos we can see how they contributed to the roman-
ticized image of La Adelita in history.

The brave soldaderas’ accomplishments as well as their beauty were described in corridos. Depending on the composer, the portrayal of these women varied. There are more songs that describe how gorgeous these women soldiers were than how fiercely they fought.⁴⁸ For example, Petra Herrera was one of the soldaderas whose exploits in war granted her a corrido. Herrera’s song dates back to 1911 and the battle of Toreon.⁴⁹ An excerpt of the song follows:

"La valiente Petra Herrera
En el fragor del combate
Aunque cayó prisionera
Ni se dobla ni se abate …"

In these lyrics, Herrera does not share the spotlight with any other soldaderas or male soldiers. This illustrates the esteem the au-
thor had for his female subject. For Her-
re to have a corrido dedicated to her as a woman, she must have been regarded as val-
iant as other revolutionary leaders, such as Emiliano Zapata and Pancho Villa. Accord-
ing to María Herrera-Sobek, Petra Herrera is only one of three women remembered in corridos by their first and last name.⁵⁰ The more mention of this soldadera by her full name is indicative of the level of acclaim she received, especially from a male composer. Unfortunately, the popularity of this type of soldadera was limited to that time period, as there was no lasting legacy of her like there is of the other type of woman soldier.

The inspiration for the famous picture of the soldadera (Figure 1) probably has its ori-
gins in the corridos that describe how beautiful the women were. Unlike Petra

---

⁴⁴ Castillo, Debra A. Easy Women: Sex and Gender in Modern Mexican Fiction, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998).
⁴⁵ Ibid., 21.
⁴⁶ Resendez, Rosalva, “Female Subjectivity and Agency in Popular Mexican Corridos (Ballads): An Examination of Im-
⁴⁷ Ibid., 8.
⁴⁸ Herrera-Sobek, 103.
⁴⁹ Ibid., 93.
⁵⁰ Op Cit.
⁵¹ Herrera-Sobek, 94.
⁵² Ibid., 108.
⁵³ Ibid., 113.
⁵⁴ Herrera-Sobek,107.
⁵⁵ Op Cit.
⁵⁶ Herrera-Sobek, 109.

---

Long live Petra Herrera
Long live the Maderista!
Let the baldie (Federale) die!
With the cowardly Porfirista!⁵⁶

---

“Una pasion me domina
Es la que me hizo venir
Valentina, Valentina
Yo te quisiera decir”

---

“A passion dominates me
That’s what brought me here
Valentina, Valentina
I wish to tell you so”

The composer’s passion for this woman gives the reader the impression that La Valentina was beautiful. She was inspired by a fierce woman fighter; however, the lyrics do not re-
fect that. It is obvious by the omission of her accomplishments on the battlefield that La Valentina was best remembered as a beautiful woman, rather than as a heroic participant in the Revolution.

The misrepresentation of the solda-
dera fits better with how Mexican society and men in particular, viewed women at that time. They were objects of desire, rather than equals on the battlefield. Although it is wide-
ly accepted that these women were fighters, their true legacy has been lost. For example, in another excerpt of La Adelita, she is not-
ed for being respected by the colonel, but the rest of the corrido describes how she is viewed as a love object rather than a sol-
dier: “…y una moza que valiente los seguidos Localmente examinada de su sargento Popular entre la tropa era Adelita, La mujer que el sargento idolatraba Porque además de ser valiente, era bonita”

"And a young woman who valiantly followed
Madly in love with the sergeant
Popular among the troops was Adelita
The woman the sergeant adored
Because she was not only valiant but beautiful"
United States were closely intertwined long histories examined in the following sections. Including the labels of the good woman and especially Mexican women, into the present spawned the characters, the movies created beautiful, brave, and passive. Whereas the songs La Adelita is commonly portrayed as beautiful of the Mexican society. In this way, the corridos had a lasting impact on the image of the soldaderas and women in Mexican society.

The new version of the soldadera that emerged from the corrido has continued to live on through film. Several themes and stereotypes have evolved. For example, the ideal image of the Mexican woman in the film industry has changed. Looking at Figure 1 and Figure 5, one can notice many similarities. The Mexican viewers want- ed and as a mother rather than a gun-wielding, successful soldier. Thus, soldaderas were no exception from the stereotypical attitudes that governed the film industry.

The physical descriptions and personality of these protagonists have also transcended time. In present-day depictions of the soldadera, women are continually shown as over-sexualized, yet assertive characters. Based upon a visual examination of these women, one can see that not much has changed. Looking at Figure 1 and Figure 5, one can notice many similarities. The promotional posters for Bandidas (2006), starring Salma Hayek and Penélope Cruz and set in the early 1900s, replicate the image that the corridos and earlier films used to portray women in this era. Hayek and Cruz are both carrying guns and bullets and wear a revealing blouse, much like the woman in Figure 1. There is no doubt that these images were taken from the descriptions that were in- formed by corridos and movies. Another film featuring Hayek, Desperado (1995) (Fig- ure 6), also portrays her in similar attire and wielding a gun. All the women in the most recent movies are tough fighters, but those characteristics are overshadowed by their sexual imagery. Like the soldaderas who came before them, these women are types that are meant to fulfill the expectations that society has made for them.

66 Ibid., 100.
67 Ibid., 6.
68 Ibid., 13.
69 Ibid.
70 King, López, and Álvarez, 143-145.
71 Olcott, Jocelyn, Revolutionary Women in Postrevolutionary Mexico, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 50; also King, López, Álvarez, 150.

For the mostly Catholic Mexican population, the Virgin Mary is the most vener- ated of all the saints. She represents Dating back to the picture of the Revolution, the film industry in the U.S. has produced many movies that shaped popular perception of the “Mexican wars” and society. Hollywood created listened to the Spanish conquistador, Hernán Cortez, defeat the Aztecs. Additionally, she was Countess; her child was the first mestizo- za born in Mexico. Therefore, La Malinche represents betrayal and unbridled sexuality. Mexican movies often portrayed women as either villains or heroines. It is also common in Mexican movies for the bad woman to be portrayed in the beginning, to be tamed or domesticated as the movie progresses, and transformed into a good woman by the end of the film. The aforementioned Maria Félix was one actress who earned acclaim for her role as a bad woman. She was a strong, assertive woman and even prone to violence toward her male counterparts. In Figure 4, Félix’s body language implies resistance, yet at the same time she allows a man to embrace her. If we recall that the ideal image of the Mexican woman embodies both the Virgin Mary and La Malinche, Félix’s resistance represents La Malinche, while her softness is representative of the Virgin. This theme is persistent throughout Mexican cinema and other forms of popular entertainment as well as in society. Hollywood influenced Mexican society in the creation of images for women that have followed them throughout the twentieth century.

The soldaderas suffered equally from the stereotypes of women in the film industry. Much like the images of women that Hol- lywood and Mexican cinema portrayed, the soldaderas were often framed in a similar manner. A variety of films made between the 1920s and the 1970s offers strong mes- sages about the women from this era. Most of the movies depict a brave soldadera who falls in love with a general, with the plot fo- cusing more on the love interest rather than the soldadera’s accomplishments. La Adelita (1937) and La Valentina (1938) were two movies that followed this same pattern. These movies also looked to gain popularity from the fame of the two corridos with the same name. 72 Like the women in the corrido, the main characters were soldaderas, but the focus of the movie was about the women’s relationship with the men. In contrast, the women’s participation on the battlefield, the other popular theme is the domestication or taming of women’s behavior. Like Ameri- can movies, the ideal image of the Mexican woman transformed into the good woman, popular films about the soldaderas were no different. In La Cucaracha (1958) the main character is a rude, violent soldadera that subsequently is passed up as the love interest of the general because of her behavior. She only becomes a more appealing woman after she becomes pregnant. Ironically, after giving birth she becomes a camp aide and does not return to the life of a fighting soldadera.

Here we see that it was more acceptable for a woman to exhibit feminine qualities, rather than masculine traits. Mexican viewers want- ed this way, in a relationship with a man and as a mother rather than a gun-wielding, successful soldier. Thus, soldaderas were no exception from the stereotypical attitudes that governed the film industry.

The physical descriptions and personality of these protagonists have also transcended time. In present-day depictions of the soldadera, women are continually shown as over-sexualized, yet assertive characters. Based upon a visual examination of these women, one can see that not much has changed. Looking at Figure 1 and Figure 5, one can notice many similarities. The promotional posters for Bandidas (2006), starring Salma Hayek and Penélope Cruz and set in the early 1900s, replicate the image that the corridos and earlier films used to portray women in this era. Hayek and Cruz are both carrying guns and bullets and wear a revealing blouse, much like the woman in Figure 1. There is no doubt that these images were taken from the descriptions that were informed by corridos and movies. Another film featuring Hayek, Desperado (1995) (Fig- ure 6), also portrays her in similar attire and wielding a gun. All the women in the most recent movies are tough fighters, but those characteristics are overshadowed by their sexual imagery. Like the soldaderas who came before them, these women are types that are meant to fulfill the expectations that society has made for them.
before the Mexican Revolution, but in this era filmmakers in the United States started to use Mexican conflicts as inspiration for entertainment. Due to the pre-Revolution, the film industry in the U.S. had produced many movies that shaped popular perception of the “Mexican wars” and society. Hollywood created literal and symbolic types of Mexican men and women, the state of the country, and society as a whole. One theme that emerged often portrayed mestizo men as villains, a white American male as the hero, and the Mexican woman as strong and assertive, yet easily tamed by the hero. Moreover, the American cinema depicted as peacemakers and the Mexicans as unreasonable and savage. Many films made in this era adhered to this formula, including The Americans (1917) and Captain Alvarez (1914).⁶⁰ The depiction of women in these movies left a lasting impression that continues to shape the perception of women today. Mexican women in American movies were a true paradox: strong and beautiful, yet they could be docile and easily seduced. In The Americans, a Mexican woman spits on a man who appears to be Mexican but is an American in disguise. He appears more chaste and sensitive than his Mexican counterparts in the movie.⁶¹ Because of these characteristics, he is the obvious choice as the love interest for the Mexican woman. The women in these movies were not representative of the majority of Mexican women. For example, the actress María Félix (depicted in Figure 3) is not mestiza like many women in Mexico, but instead is fair-skinned, denoting her Spanish ancestry.⁶² Perhaps she was more appealing to an American audience, as opposed to a mestiza woman. The actresses in the movies clearly resemble the famous picture of the soldadera’s accomplishments. Additionally, she was considered the child of the first mestiza born in Mexico. Therefore, La Malinche represents betrayal and unbridled sexuality. Mexican movies often portrayed women either as strong and assertive, or even prone to violence toward her male counterparts.⁶³ In Figure 4, Félix’s body language implies resistance, yet at the same time she allows a man to embrace her. If we recall that the ideal image of the Mexican woman embodies both the Virgin Mary and La Malinche, Félix’s resistance represents a song. But La Malinche, while her softness is representative of the Virgin, this theme is persistent throughout Mexican cinema and other media. Hollywood influenced Mexican society in the creation of images for women that have followed them throughout the twentieth century. The soldaderas suffered equally from the stereotypes of women in the film industry. Much like the images of women that Hollywood and Mexican cinema portrayed, the soldaderas were often framed in a similar manner. A variety of films made between the early 1920s and the 1950s. Using Hollywood as a model for success, Mexican cinema tried to imitate every aspect of filmmaking including plots and, most importantly, characters. However, the Mexican cinema exploited its own cultural systems, norms, myths, and attitudes.⁶⁴ While Mexican movies lacked the American male as the hero, they did not portray strong Mexican men in their place, and the role of the woman did not change. Women in Mexican society draw their inspiration from two archetypes: The Virgin Mary (good woman) and La Malinche (bad woman). For the mostly Catholic Mexican population, the Virgin Mary is the most venerated of all saints.⁶⁵ She represents Dating back to the pre-Revolution, the film industry in the U.S. had produced many movies that shaped popular perception of the “Mexican wars” and society. Hollywood created literal and symbolic types of Mexican men and women, the state of the country, and society as a whole. One theme that emerged often portrayed mestizo men as villains, a white American male as the hero, and the Mexican woman as strong and assertive, yet easily tamed by the hero. Moreover, the American cinema depicted as peacemakers and the Mexicans as unreasonable and savage. Many films made in this era adhered to this formula, including The Americans (1917) and Captain Alvarez (1914).⁶⁰ The depiction of women in these movies left a lasting impression that continues to shape the perception of women today. Mexican women in American movies were a true paradox: strong and beautiful, yet they could be docile and easily seduced. In The Americans, a Mexican woman spits on a man who appears to be Mexican but is an American in disguise. He appears more chaste and sensitive than his Mexican counterparts in the movie.⁶¹ Because of these characteristics, he is the obvious choice as the love interest for the Mexican woman. The women in these movies were not representative of the majority of Mexican women. For example, the actress María Félix (depicted in Figure 3) is not mestiza like many women in Mexico, but instead is fair-skinned, denoting her Spanish ancestry.⁶² Perhaps she was more appealing to an American audience, as opposed to a mestiza woman. The actresses in the movies clearly resemble the famous picture of the soldadera’s accomplishments. Additionally, she was considered the child of the first mestiza born in Mexico. Therefore, La Malinche represents betrayal and unbridled sexuality. Mexican movies often portrayed women either as strong and assertive, or even prone to violence toward her male counterparts.⁶³ In Figure 4, Félix’s body language implies resistance, yet at the same time she allows a man to embrace her. If we recall that the ideal image of the Mexican woman embodies both the Virgin Mary and La Malinche, Félix’s resistance represents a song. But La Malinche, while her softness is representative of the Virgin, this theme is persistent throughout Mexican cinema and other media. Hollywood influenced Mexican society in the creation of images for women that have followed them throughout the twentieth century. The soldaderas suffered equally from the stereotypes of women in the film industry. Much like the images of women that Hollywood and Mexican cinema portrayed, the soldaderas were often framed in a similar manner. A variety of films made between the early 1920s and the 1950s. Using Hollywood as a model for success, Mexican cinema tried to imitate every aspect of filmmaking including plots and, most importantly, characters. However, the Mexican cinema exploited its own cultural systems, norms, myths, and attitudes.⁶⁴ While Mexican movies lacked the American male as the hero, they did not portray strong Mexican men in their place, and the role of the woman did not change. Women in Mexican society draw their inspiration from two archetypes: The Virgin Mary (good woman) and La Malinche (bad woman). For the mostly Catholic Mexican population, the Virgin Mary is the most venerated of all saints.⁶⁵ She represents the role of the woman did not change. Women in Mexican society draw their inspiration from two archetypes: The Virgin Mary (good woman) and La Malinche (bad woman). For the mostly Catholic Mexican population, the Virgin Mary is the most venerated of all saints.⁶⁵ She represents the role of the woman did not change. Women in Mexican society draw their inspiration from two archetypes: The Virgin Mary (good woman) and La Malinche (bad woman). For the mostly Catholic Mexican population, the Virgin Mary is the most venerated of all saints.⁶⁵ She represents the role of the woman did not change. Women in Mexican society draw their inspiration from two archetypes: The Virgin Mary (good woman) and La Malinche (bad woman). For the mostly Catholic Mexican population, the Virgin Mary is the most venerated of all saints.⁶⁵ She represents the role of the woman did not change. Women in Mexican society draw their inspiration from two archetypes: The Virgin Mary (good woman) and La Malinche (bad woman). For the mostly Catholic Mexican population, the Virgin Mary is the most venerated of all saints.⁶⁵ She represents

⁶⁰ Ibid., 6.
⁶¹ Ibid., 107.
⁶³ Ibid., 8, 12, 13.
⁶⁴ Ibid., 6.
⁶⁵ Ibid., 13.
⁶⁶ Op Cit.
⁶⁷ King, López, and Alvarado, 143-145.
⁶⁸ Oclott, Joscelyn, Revolutionary Women in Postrevolutionary Mexico, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 50; also King, López, Alvarado, 150.

Figure 4. María Félix and Jorge Negrete, Los Dos Grandes Del Cine de Oro Mexicano, (1938). El Rancho (Film). <http://www.flickr.com/photos/chall77/14469774000/>
The Depiction of Women in the Mexican Revolution

The popular image of La Adelita does not do justice to the real-life soldaderas. Glamorous characters in movies played by María Felix, Penélope Cruz, and Salma Hayek, among others, are romanticized representations of the real women soldiers. The true women fighters battled adversity in Mexico at a time when the dominant patriarchal society restricted their actions with gendered expectations and cultural norms. Becoming a soldadera provided these women with an opportunity to break away from the control of men and assert their equality with their male counterparts.

The idea of participating in the Revolution was liberating in itself because it meant the women were not forced to stay at home in their traditional gendered roles. Although some women performed the same tasks on the battlefield as they did in the home, it was by their choice. Soldaderas also fought valiantly alongside the men in every rank of both the Federal Army and the revolutionary forces. They became feared soldiers and advanced through the ranks, some even becoming generals. Though many women gained acclaim for their accomplishments on the battlefield, their efforts were soon forgotten or misrepresented after the Revolution.

Women’s actions on the battlefield were framed in such a way that they fit with societal expectations. As soldaderas, women posed a threat to the male’s dominant position in society. Assertiveness, bravery, and violence were male attributes, and their presence in women made men uncomfortable. Thus, men began to portray soldaderas in a non-threatening way by emphasizing the female soldiers’ beauty and depicting them as objects of desire. The image of the strong women fighters was neutralized in such a way that coincided with males’ expectations of women. This resulted in a paradox that was at odds with Mexican gender roles.

Popular culture, in particular, corridos and films, was an effective way to disseminate the accomplishments of women. This resulted in a paradox that coincided with males’ expectations of women. The image of the strong female soldiers’ beauty and depicting them as objects of desire. The image of the strong women fighters as heroines like they can those of Emiliano Zapata or Pancho Villa; instead, La Adelita has come to embody the myriad women with varying backgrounds, motivations, and accomplishments who fought in the Revolution. La Adelita represents a sexual ideal at the same time brave woman during Mexican cinema’s golden age (1930s-1950s) and in the years following. She symbolizes all the characters in the corridos and movies that depicted women in that manner. Even though her image is still controversial, with the birth of the Chicano movement in the 1960s, the name of La Adelita began to represent more of who the soldaderas really were. Some Mexican women have begun to take pride in La Adelita because she represents a strong fighter, working for equality; if she chooses, she can appear overly sexual, but she no longer is forced into that role. She stands for independence from any oppressive force. She is less associated with the image of the women in the revealing blouse, than she is aligned with her own image of a remarkable woman, much like who the soldaderas really were.

The world without language becomes unimaginable, since language makes the articulation of our thoughts and the human experience possible. Through an interactive connection with symbols, signs, and sounds, language enables us to express complex concepts while allowing us to process and convey the abstract, thus creating an environment of communication through the exchange of ideas.

The human need for expression and contact with one another connects us with the origin of language. Once the connection takes place, the cultural components of language begin to develop an interactive relationship between our traditions and our verbal living experiences as a society. It is through this association that our world begins to take shape, and the perception of our world becomes outlined by culture and language. This bond between language and human thought becomes our cultural reality, as well as the medium through which we relate to one another. Through the interrelated nature of language and its cultural components, the way we learn and recognize the world becomes predetermined and dependant on our specific system of symbols and sounds used within our communities, developing our sense of reality and cultural identity.

My main argument explores the relationship between language and its cultural components from a linguistic anthropological and philosophical perspective and investigates the role language and culture play in shaping our perception and epistemological understanding of the world as well as the development, recognition, and acceptance of knowledge. If our cultural identity originates through language, then the foundation for learning and development of worldview also relies on the existence of language.

Edward Sapir’s speaks about the power of language and culture as he warns us that our cultural traditions potentially imprison our thoughts as well as our acceptance of reality. He states, “Once they had become a part of a linguistic system, they would then be more likely to be imposed on it because of the tyrannical hold.