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Delia Fernández
Grand Valley State University

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Delia Fernández
McNair Scholar

David Stark, Ph.D.
Faculty Mentor

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 soldadera's image into the ideal (docile, yet licentious) woman of the time.

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 t-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.

discuss the evolution of the soldaderas' image over time in song and in film. What I found suggests the 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 Porfiriato and the Plight of Women

Porfirio Diaz, 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 Cananea labor strike that killed over twenty people. Díaz 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, Díaz welcomed the arrival of U.S. troops into Mexico to quell the disturbance, in effect undermining Mexico's sovereignty.[3] Countless indigenous and peasants also suffered under Díaz. 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. Díaz'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.[4] 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.[5] Moreover, a Commercial Code also prohibited them from working as teachers or attorneys for anyone except their husband or children.[6] In 1910, Francisco I. Madero, an upper-class land owner, challenged Díaz in the presidential election but was jailed and subsequently lost the election. Nevertheless, Madero had the support of many Mexicans, and the time was right for a change. The following year, the Mexican people rose up in revolt against the Porfiriato; the Revolution was underway.

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 Díaz'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. If she joined a convent, 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 producers, in 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 caregiver. They

Figure 1. Reproduction of Angel Martin's "La Adelita" on Hecho en México Address Book, 1996.

Figure 2. *Soldadera*. Reprinted from Casasola, vol. 1, p. 263. Found in Shirlene Soto, *Emergence of the Modern Mexican Woman Her Participation in Revolution and Struggle for Equality, 1910-1940*. Denver, Colo: Arden, 1990.

[3] Soto, Shirlene Ann. *Emergence of the Modern Mexican Woman: Her Participation in Revolution and Struggle for Equality, 1910-1940*, (Denver: Arden Press, 1990), 24.
[4] Ibid.,10.
[5] Op Cit.
[6] Soto, 11.

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. Participation in the Mexican Revolution, however, would open 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.[7]

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.[8] 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."[9] Yet in another story, Villa orders the massacre of ninety 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 their aid in the Revolution, 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 ideals like agrarian reform. Others fought because the men 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.[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 freed 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

[6] Soto, 11.
[7] There is little information on the number of soldaderas who fought due to the vague definition of who was a soldadera. For example, camp aides and women fighters 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: 3).
[8] Salas, 45.
[9] Op Cit.
[10] Salas, 46.
[11] Soto, 45.
[12] Ibid., 49.
[13] Ibid., 58.
[14] Salas, Elizabeth. *Soldaderas in the Mexican Military: Myth and History*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990).
[15] Salas, 72.
[16] Ibid., 73.
[17] For more information on these soldaderas, see Salas, 40.
[18] Salas, 71.
[19] Op Cit.
[20] Salas, 68.
[21] "Women Fight on Both Sides." *New York Times* [Del Rio, Mexico] 3 Nov. 1913: 3.

pictures of soldaderas from this era, many of the women had a darker complexion, most likely indicating their indigenous or mixed ancestry. The pictures included in Shirlene Soto's book, *Emergence of the Modern Mexican Women*, reveal their tattered, worn clothing, which may attest to their lower class background or might simply be a reflection of inadequate supplies.[23] In most cases, social class also dictated the reasons why the women fought. An indigenous woman or mestiza woman's livelihood depended on farming. This woman was more likely to support Zapata and fight against Díaz or other presidential aspirants who did not embrace agrarian reform. However, a woman whose economic situation improved under the government in power was probably fighting on behalf of the Federal Army. One example of a soldadera from a higher class background was a woman referred to as La Neri, who was "a natural leader, with absolute command of her [all-women] forces."[24] Because of the conflicting stories surrounding La Neri, it is unclear on which side of the Revolution she fought. Due to her upper-class status, one might assume that she fought for the Federales, but it was common for such women to sympathize with the revolutionary forces and fight with their armies. Because of the different reasons for which women fought, it is important not to generalize about the soldaderas.

Similar to the diversity in the soldaderas and their motivations, the responsibilities of these women also varied as they performed many of the necessary jobs that enabled the army to function on a day to day basis. Women were primarily responsible for two tasks. The first task involved taking care of the men, much like the women did at home. They cooked for the soldiers, nursed them back to health after injury, and carried their equipment and supplies from one battle to the next.[25] Among the supplies the soldaderas transported was bedding for the soldiers because they were not supplied with these materials.[26] At this time, the Federal Army did not have a department responsible for these tasks; neither did the revolutionary armies have the organization or manpower to arrange for these. Therefore, armies depended on the women to perform these tasks, especially to set up camp between battles. Women typically arrived at the camp site before the men to put up tents and begin preparing the food.[27] Without the benefit of a well-supplied army, soldaderas were responsible for procuring food by whatever means possible, even if it meant foraging and looting. Soldaderas in the Federal Army often bought food with a portion of the pay that the men received. Meal preparation occurred whenever and wherever the troops stopped for the day. Women were known to start making tortillas in the middle of a desert and even on top of moving trains.[28] Perhaps what is so remarkable about these women is that some brought along their families while they tended to the soldiers. Soldaderas brought their children with them to the camp sites and even accompanied the troops while pregnant.[29] An onlooker who wrote for an American newspaper recorded how impressed he was that women would carry all the equipment and their children. The author remarked, "without these soldaderas the army could not move..." as fast as they did.[30] The women's role in the war effort was integral, albeit frequently overlooked. Without the women's help, the men would have been slowed down with daily tasks that took time away from pursuing their military objectives.

There were women who became soldaderas in an effort to improve their own economic situations. Such women looked for a way to support themselves in an economy that did not provide for all citizens, and becoming a soldadera did this for them. Women became 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.[31] 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, they were still an important part of the Revolution.

The second way 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 colonels 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.[32] She earned fame for her fearlessness, skills on the battlefield, and temper.[33] Herrera did not reveal her

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[22] Salas, 70.

[23] Soto, Shirlene Ann. *Emergence of the Modern Mexican Woman: Her Participation in Revolution and Struggle for Equality, 1910-1940*, (Denver: Arden Press, 1990).

[24] "Mexico City Menaced." *Washington Post* 15 May 1911, Special ed.: 3. The name "La Neri" probably referred to Margarita Neri. There are many stories surrounding her identity as a soldadera, however there are conflicting accounts as to which side of the revolution she fought. For more information on Neri, see Soto, 45.

[25] "Funny Side to Mexican Wars." *Washington Post* [Real Mexico] 3 May 1914: M1.

[26] Salas, 59.

[27] "Funny Side to Mexican Wars." *Washington Post* [Real Mexico] 3 May 1914: M1.

[28] Herrera-Sobek, Maria. *The Mexican Corrido: A Feminist Analysis*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 80.

[29] Salas, 50.

[30] "Funny Side to Mexican Wars." *Washington Post* [Real Mexico] 3 May 1914: M1.

[31] Soto, 36.

[32] Ibid., 48.

[33] Op Cit.

true identity until she was a well-established member of Carranza's forces. When her secret was revealed, she was awarded command of an all-women regiment and led them to many battlefield victories.[34] 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 Herrera, and some of these soldaderas even caught the attention of foreigner observers. María Quinteras de Mares was one such soldadera. She was married to a captain in Pancho Villa's army, and their daughter accompanied them on all their campaigns. Coronela Quinteras de Mares was so committed to the Revolution that she refused to be paid.[35] 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."[36] Soldaderas' exploits were also documented in popular American newspapers like *The Washington Post* and *The New York Times*. For example, *The New York Times* referred to soldaderas in a 1913 piece entitled, "Women Fight on Both Sides."[37] The five hundred soldaderas were said to be "expert with both knife and rifle."[38] Also, another soldadera previously mentioned, La Neri, could "shoot and ride almost as well as men."[39] 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 deservedly liberated 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 for any reason, she could also 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..." killed.[40] 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.[41] Based upon these examples, there is no doubt that women fought heroically and died valiantly, as did men. Women's contributions and participation in the Revolution were a liberating experience, and their sacrifice was rewarded with equality.

The soldaderas' newly acquired freedom led some women to reject the societal norms imposed on them. Women were able to engage in open relationships with men at this time. Liberated from the Catholic Church, many women chose to have sexual relationships with men they were not married to and had no plans to marry. They could behave like the men who had controlled them for so many years. Soldaderas sometimes formed sexual relationships with the soldiers they worked for or soldiers with whom they fought alongside. These relationships empowered women and may have made them more assertive, which helped in their military work. As a profession, becoming a soldadera unfettered women in ways that would have been impossible if they had remained at home and were still constrained by males. As much as fighting in the war helped the soldiers, it also helped women advance their position in society.

Upper-class women found ways to further their rights under the law. Although some upper-class women fought in the Revolution, most found ways to liberation through political activism. They formed groups seeking to obtain women's suffrage and greater access to education and contraception, and in support of political candidates. Examples of such groups include the Consejo Feminista [Mexican Feminist Council] and the Liga Feminista Mexicana [Mexican Feminist League].[42] The former worked for "the economic, social, and political emancipation of women," while the latter was dedicated to women's suffrage.[43] These groups exerted pressure on whatever presidential administration was in power to see that their objectives 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 fairness under the law.

Women were an integral part of the Revolution. They aided troops in every way imaginable, allowing the armies to carry out daily tasks that made the war possible. In fighting alongside men, women matched their bravery 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 liberated themselves from some of the restraints in their lives and achieved equality with men. Unfortunately for the women, their participation is often overlooked, unlike that of Pancho Villa or Emiliano Zapata.

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[34] Soto, 49.
[35] Ibid., 42.
[36] Op Cit.
[37] "Women Fight on Both Sides." *New York Times* [Del Rio, Mexico] 3 Nov. 1913: 3.
[38] Op Cit.
[39] "Mexico City Menaced." *Washington Post* 15 May 1911, Special ed.: 3.
[40] "Battle on at Night." *Washington Post* 23 May 1912: 3.
[41] Op Cit.
[42] Soto, 103.
[43] Op Cit.

The Image of the Soldaderas over Time

The soldaderas' legacy is clouded by misconceptions. Although women made progress by virtue of their accomplishments on the battlefield, the transformations in their gender roles were not always looked upon favorably. Women's participation and subsequent success threatened patriarchal structures. Men were supposed to be the strong figure in Mexican society. Successful women in the Mexican Revolution had to be remembered 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 soldadera highlights her sexuality and omits her bravery. Although the image retains the assertive traits of the woman, it also subtly undermines her with sexual overtones. Despite the soldaderas' efforts to support the Revolution and pursue equality, their memory has been replaced by the idealized one that men have conjured up in their imagination.

Additional sources for this over-sexualized image can be found in another type of woman who broke down gender roles: prostitutes.[44] Although soldaderas and prostitutes would seem very different, there are many commonalities. For example, prostitutes were some of the most liberated women 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 soldadera. 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 equality 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 E*l Eterno Femenino [The Eternal 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 society. Unmarried soldaderas therefore were also in this category of women. 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 *corrido*, or love ballad, created a more feminine image of beauty and devotion. The corrido was one of the primary methods for spreading information, especially about the war in this era. Dating back to the Spanish colonization, the Mexican corrido has maintained its validity for disseminating information throughout history.[46] Although these ballads have been used to circulate all types of information, at the beginning of the twentieth century they were used to tell stories about the participants and events in the Mexican 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, therefore, their interpretations are based upon a male point of view. Because these are men's views of the soldadera, they contributed to the depiction of the soldadera that was popularized at the time of the Revolution and that remains popular to this day. According to the research by Rosalva Resendiz, the corridos categorized 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 romanticized 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 Torreón.[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 ...

Que viva Petra Herrera
Que vivan los maderistas
Que mueran con los pelones
Los cobardes porfiristas!"

"The valiant Petra Herrera
In the heat of the battle
And even though she was taken prisoner
She doesn't surrender or give up ...

[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 Images and Representations of Soldaderas (Female Soldiers) in the Mexican Revolution 1910-1920." PhD dissertation, Texas Woman's University, 2001, pg. 7.
[47] Ibid., 8.
[48] Herrera-Sobek, 103.
[49] Ibid., 93.

Figure 3. María Félix in Doña Diabla. **Found in** *Mediating Two Worlds Cinematic Encounters in the Americas,* (Annapolis: British Film Institute. 1993) 155.

Long live Petra Herrera
Long live the Maderistas!
Let the baldies (Federales) die!
With the cowardly Porfiristas! "[50]

In these lyrics, Herrera does not share the spotlight with any other soldaderas or male soldiers. This illustrates the esteem the author had for his female subject. For Herrera to have a corrido dedicated to her as a woman, she must have been regarded as valiant as other revolutionary leaders, such as Emiliano Zapata and Pancho Villa. According to María Herrera-Sobek, Petra Herrera is only one of three women remembered in corridos by their first and last name.[51] 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 legacy than Herrera. Instead of being the work of a composer who was impressed by the soldaderas' 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, alluding 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 countries, that can best be described as tributes to the women soldiers. One particular song was so popular that the character's name, La Adelita, has now become a generalized name for all soldaderas.[52] The song titled "La Adelita" 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 return to good health after an injury.[53] 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:[54]

"...y una moza que valiente los seguía
Locamente enamorada 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"

In this particular excerpt, La Adelita is immortalized for her valor as well as her beauty, but the rest of the corrido describes how much the men desired her. She is described as being so beautiful "si Adelita se fuera con otro, la seguiría por tierra y por mar" [if Adelita left me for another, I would follow her by land and sea].[55] This woman was the perfect archetype for a soldadera because she was brave, although men still idolized her for her beauty.

La Valentina is another corrido that described women in the same way. The song gained popularity in 1914 and describes the depths of love the composer has for this soldadera.[56] The lyrics are as follows:

"Una pasión 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 reflect 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 soldadera 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 widely accepted that these women were fighters, their true legacy has been lost. For example, in another excerpt of La Adelita, she is noted for being respected by the colonel, but the composer goes on to describe how she is viewed as a love object rather than a soldier: "...Y si Adelita quisiera ser mi novia, y si

[50] Op Cit.
[51] Herrera-Sobek, 94.
[52] Ibid., 108.
[53] Salas, 92-93.
[54] Herrera-Sobek,107.
[55] Op Cit.
[56] Herrera-Sobek, 109.

Adelita fuera mi mujer, le compraría un vestido de seda, para llevarla a bailar al cuartel" [If Adelita would like to be my girlfriend, If Adelita would be my wife, I'd buy her a silk dress to take her to the barrack's dance.][57] The rest of the song goes on to describe her physical appearance, rather than her exploits in combat. Conservative Mexican society did not want to acknowledge that women broke free of the cultural expectations when they became soldiers, even when some achieved success as fighters. This helps explain why La Adelita and La Valentina are the models upon which the popular images of all soldaderas are based. These songs became popular throughout Mexico by word of mouth and also with the invention and the popularity of the radio. The prevalence and appeal of these songs led to the widespread acceptance of La Adelita as the embodiment of the soldaderas. 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 characteristics have evolved. For example, La Adelita is commonly portrayed as beautiful, brave, and passive. Whereas the songs spawned the characters, the movies created the storylines that were readily understood by Mexican viewers. Popular culture has given these women storylines that followed them, especially Mexican women, into the present day. They also exemplify other stereotypes that Mexican society has about women, including the labels of the good woman and the bad woman. These stereotypes and other categories of women can be seen in the movies examined in the following sections.

Mexican cinema and Hollywood were responsible for the perpetuation of these stereotypes and others beginning in the early twentieth century. Mexico and the United States were closely intertwined long before the Mexican Revolution, but in this era filmmakers in the United States started to use Mexican conflicts as inspiration for entertainment. Dating back to the onset of the Revolution, the film industry in the U.S. had produced many movies that shaped popular perception of the "Mexican wars" and society.[58] Hollywood created lasting stereotypes 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.[59] Moreover, the Americans were depicted as peacemakers and the Mexicans as unreasonable and savage. Many films made in this era adhere to this formula, including *The Americano* (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 Americano*, a Mexican woman spies 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 are 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 La Adelita (Figure 1). La Adelita appears sensual, subservient as she kneels, and her complexion is much lighter than many of the actual soldaderas from the Mexican Revolution. Even though these movies did not specifically depict the women as soldaderas, they established an archetype of a Mexican woman that has been transferred from the corrido to film.

Figure 4. María Félix and Jorge Negrete. *Los Dos Grandes Del Cine de Oro Mexicano***.** Nov. 1953. El Rapto (Film). <http://www.flickr.com/photos/chalio777/1416978400/>

The Mexican cinema was not far behind Hollywood in its depiction of Mexicans, especially women. Although it originated in the early 1920s, the Mexican film industry reached its height of popularity later between the 1930s 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 society's cultural norms, myths, and attitudes.[63] While Mexican movies lacked the American male as the hero, they did show 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

[57] Ibid., 107.
[58] King, John, Ana M. López, and Manuel Alvarado, eds. *Mediating Two Worlds Cinematic Encounters in the Americas*, (Annapolis: British Film Institute1993), 6.
[59] Ibid., 8, 12, 13.
[60] Ibid., 6.
[61] Ibid., 13.
[62] Op Cit.
[63] King, Lopez, and Alvarado, 143-145.
[64] Olcott, Jocelyn, *Revolutionary Women in Postrevolutionary Mexico*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 50; also King, López, Alvarado, 150.

woman). For the mostly Catholic Mexican population, the Virgin Mary is the most venerated woman in society.[64] She represents innocence, purity, and self-sacrifice. In contrast, La Malinche is one of the most despised women in Mexico. She is the indigenous woman who betrayed the Mexican people in helping the Spanish conquistador, Hernán Cortez, defeat the Aztecs. Additionally, she was Cortez's lover; their child was the first mestizo born in Mexico. Therefore, La Malinche represents betrayal and unbridled sexuality. Mexican movies often portrayed women as either of these archetypes. 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 María Félix was one actress who earned acclaim for her roles as the bad woman. She was a strong, assertive woman and even prone to violence toward her male counterparts.[65] In Figure 4, Félix's body language implies resistance, yet at the same she time 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, Felix'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 Hollywood and Mexican cinema portrayed, the soldaderas were often framed in a similar manner. A variety of films made between the 1930s and the 1970s offers strong messages about the women from this era. Most of the movies depict a brave soldadera who falls in love with a general, with the plot focusing 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.[66] Like the women in the corridos, the main characters were soldaderas, but the focus of the movie was about the women's relationships. Besides giving less attention to the women's participation on the battlefield, the other popular theme is the domestication or taming of women's behavior. Like American and Mexican movies which show the bad women transformed into the good women, popular films about the soldaderas were no different. In *La Cucaracha* (1958) the main character was 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.[67] Here we see that it was more acceptable for a woman to exhibit feminine qualities, rather than masculine traits. Mexican viewers wanted to see a woman 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 personalities of these protagonists have also transcended time. In present-day depictions of this revolutionary era, 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 Penelope 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) (Figure 6), also portrays her in similar attire and wielding a gun. All the women in the more recent movies are tough fighters, but those characteristics are overshadowed by their sexual imagery. Like the soldaderas who came before them, these women are typecast by the expectations that society has made for them.

Figure 5. Bandidas. The International Movie Database.<http://www.imdb.com/media/rm3156578816/tt0416496>.

Figure 6. Desperado. The International Movie Database. <http://www.imdb.com/media/rm3892811008/tt0112851.

[65] Salas, 99.
[66] Ibid, 98.
[67] Ibid., 100.

The Depiction of Women in the Mexican Revolution

The popular image of La Adelita does not do justice to the real-life soldadera. Glamorous characters in movies played by María Felix, Penelope 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 so 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 many 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 this image of women and the soldaderas over the course of the twentieth century. Corridos idolized beautiful, submissive women and established the archetype that was popularized. These corridos created female characters that would later be immortalized in American and Mexican movies as either the good woman (Virgin Mary) or the bad woman (La Malinche). Subsequent depictions of soldaderas fell victim to these same stereotypes. Successful films showed talented women-soldiers as they were tamed. Their transformation from the bad woman (soldadera) to the good woman (mother) satisfied conservative viewers who wanted to see women in this role.

The accomplishments of women on the battlefield are often overlooked or misrepresented in the media. Women overcame many obstacles and achieved limited forms of equality through their participation in the Revolution. However, Colonel Petra Herrera is now virtually unknown, while La Adelita remains a permanent fixture in our collective memory. Not many people can recall the heroics of Herrera 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 yet 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.[68] 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 overtly 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.

[68] Salas, 115-17.