En La Sombra: Cinema Culture and Modern Women in Mexico City, 1917-1931

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Abstract

This dissertation is about cinema culture, modern femininity, and Mexico City between 1917 and 1931. It is a story about movie makers, movie spectators, and the movie texts that mediated between them. It is a study of on-screen divas, *pelonas*, and *indigenas*. It is also an account of an era that began with end of revolutionary bloodshed and ended with the beginning of Mexican sound cinema. The confluence of Mexican cultural nationalism and transnational modernity during this period prompted robust discourse around the categories "woman," "women," and "feminine," which meant that these terms were under constant revision at the same time that Mexican silent cinema culture was developing a foundation for the subsequent Golden Age (1940-1950). Accordingly, the discursive history that follows aims to elucidate the reciprocal relationship between women and silent cinema culture in Mexico City during the immediate postrevolution era.

While scholars of North American cinema have revealed that women played a more powerful role in film culture during the silent era than any other time since, and though studies of Latin American cinema have recently begun to interrogate the specific characteristics of silent cinema in the region, the assumption that Mexican gender ideologies barred women from participation in silent film culture persists. Moreover, Mexican silent film culture is often dismissed or bracketed from discussions of later cinematic developments in that country on the assumption that, because few silent films were made in Mexico, the influence of the era was similarly constrained. How, then, did women engage with the movies as spectators, filmmakers, and characters on screen? How did this engagement interface with Mexican gender ideals, and how did it help guide the development of Mexican cinema?

The discourses that articulated postrevolution cinema culture spoke also to the gendered balance of social and political power in modern Mexico, so my project joins a growing body of work that appraises the role of women and the significance of popular culture in the elaboration of Mexican modernity. Ultimately, my comparison of different aspects of cinema culture underscores the ambivalence that characterized postrevolution Mexico City – while cinema culture granted women new opportunities to participate in public life and to fashion their own identities, cinema also created representations and desires that channeled postrevolution ideas about women in a direction favorable to state power.

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En La Sombra:[1] Introduction

On April 27, 1917, Mexico City newspaper *El Universal* published an interview with Emma Padilla, the star of forthcoming Mexican feature film *La luz* [figure 1]. In the interview, Padilla expressed her admiration for "modern" European movie stars, professed her love for cinema above all other arts, and revealed her ultimate desire to "triumph in the cinema, but for Mexico because it is my homeland."[2]

By her own account, Padilla began acting only six months before granting the interview. Her film had yet to receive its premiere. Nonetheless, Padilla's interviewer (the film columnist Hipólito Seijas) treated her like a full-fledged star, going so far as to supply editorial commentary on Padilla's appearance and behavior to compliment the transcribed conversation. He noted that Padilla's blonde hair shimmered like "bubbling champagne drops," she laughed easily, and her teeth were perfectly white. Even after the interview was over, Padilla's "beautiful eyes…floated in [his] mind like fireflies." [3]

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[1] The title of this dissertation is taken from the lost 1917 film of the same name produced by, written by, and starring Mexican diva Mimí Derba. The title thus evokes the way women's engagement with silent cinema in Mexico has been obscured by patterns of historical inquiry that shed light on other aspects of ostrevolution culture while leaving the work of female film spectators, film producers, and film characters 'in the shade.'

[2] Hipólito Seijas, "Entrevista con Emma Padilla," *Universal* (Mexico City, MX), April 27, 1917.

[3] Seijas was among a new cadre of Mexican intellectuals – the professional film writer, a job description that did not exist until the late 1910s but which grew as both cinema and publishing expanded in the aftermath of the revolution. See Rielle Navitski, "Early Film Critics and Fanatical Fans: The Reception of the Italian Diva Film and the Making of Modern Spectators in Postrevolutionary Mexico," *Film History* 29, no. 1 (2017): 57-83.

Not twelve hours after the publication of the Padilla interview, the evening edition of competing newspaper *El Nacional* ran a harsh rebuke of Padilla, Seijas, and cinema itself. The unattributed piece argued cinema was a "disgrace," noting that on any patio in any given Mexico City neighborhood, one could find women making spectacles of themselves by imitating the styles and mannerisms of foreign film stars. The anonymous author(s) further argued that published interviews should be reserved for notable public figures, and concluded that, while Seijas may well have found Padilla to be a dream-like creature, it was time for Seijas (and everyone else enamored of the cinema, presumably) to "wake up."[4]

To what Seijas and his readers were to wake up was not explicitly stated, but one can imagine several current events of ostensibly greater consequence. In 1917, the devastation of WWI continued abroad while Mexico had emerged from the active fighting of its revolution (1910-1917) and entered into the critical period in which the ideals of the revolution were to be institutionalized. Specifically, the Mexican Constitution of 1917 – which defines citizenship, delimits the organization of government, and enumerates the basic human rights of Mexican citizens – was ratified just two months before the Padilla interview. [5]

Even so, the dour critic(s) writing for *El Nacional* were fighting a losing battle. From 1910 on, audiences for cinema grew despite the economic and political turmoil of the revolution. Even the assassination of revolutionary leader Francisco Madero in February 1913 did not entice theaters to close in mournful solidarity.[6] Moreover, the cinema audience included citizens of

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[4] *El Nacional* April 2, 1917 quoted in Manuel González Casanova, *Por la Pantalla: Génesis de la crítica cinematográfica en México, 1917-1919* (Mexico: UNAM, 2000), 431.

[5] This is the current constitution of Mexico.

[6] Laura Isabel Serna, *Making Cinelandia: American Films and Mexican Film Culture Before the Golden Age* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014), 23.

disparate demographics – "bourgeois, workers, foreigners, soldiers, ruffians, respectable women, secretaries, maids, and prostitutes"—in common screening venues.[7] Even if not explicitly acknowledged, the radical potential of a medium with such broad and durable appeal certainly motivated those who decried cinema as frivolous at best and insidious at worst.

Ultimately, the speed and strength of *El Nacional*'s rebuttal to the Padilla interview are telling: the interview was a puff piece, but the heavy criticism it provoked revealed how much was at stake. Women regularly attended the cinema and participated in the elaboration of film culture, which seemed to necessitate a disciplining of feminine desire. For many, this meant entering the contestatory realm of discourse to rhetorically neutralize the power of motion pictures themselves.[8] Competition to circumscribe the terms of public discourse in the tumultuous environment of postrevolution Mexico meant that the voices and images vying for public attention assumed foundational importance. The extent to which women participated in this discourse was delimited by longstanding Catholic-patriarchal norms, but simultaneously broadened by the egalitarian ideology of the revolution and the global spread of female-coded consumer culture.

This dissertation examines the reciprocal relationship between cinema and femininity in Mexico City from 1917-1931 through analysis of the discourses surrounding these concepts articulated in newspapers, the trade press, government documents, and literature, as well as how architecture, visual culture, and fashion (among other means) constituted a material embodiment of the ideas about cinema and femininity elaborated in the discursive realm. The confluence of

[7]Luis Reyes de la Maza, *Salón rojo: programas y crónicas del cine mudo en México.* (Mexico: UNAM, 1968), 144.

[8] Rielle Navitski, "Early Film Critics and Fanatical Fans," 64.

Mexican cultural nationalism and transnational modernity during this period prompted robust discourse around the categories "woman," "women," and "feminine," which meant that these terms were under constant revision while Mexican silent cinema culture was developing a foundation for the subsequent Golden Age. While in the Unites States, "women were more engaged in movie culture at the height of the silent era than they have been at any other time since," twenty-first century scholars of Mexican silent cinema have alleged that the silent film culture of that nation was entirely androcentric and often misogynist.[9] If Mexico's silent film culture was so radically different from that in the neighboring United States, it would be insufficient to pin the blame on the gender ideology of *machismo;* conversely, if women's engagement in Mexican silent film culture closely matched the configuration of gender and cinema in the United States, that, too, would require an explanation grounded in the particularity of the Mexican context. What, then, was the nature of women's engagement in Mexican silent film culture? How was that engagement predicated upon ideologies of gender and Mexican national identity, and how did women's engagement with cinema challenge those same beliefs?

A less unruly research program might focus exclusively on how women directors navigated gendered notions of work and the effects of their labor on the structure of the nascent Mexican film industry, or how Mexican silent film actresses' star personae mediated the ideological imperatives of the age. Such narrowly-focused interventions would be welcome, if difficult to complete, owing to the character of the historical record in which women's activities were either poorly documented in their era or deemed irrelevant by subsequent generations of

[9] Shelley Stamp, "Women and the Silent Screen." *The Wiley-Blackwell History of American Film* (2011), 1; Rodríguez, Paul A Schroeder. "Latin American Silent Cinema: Triangulation and the Politics of Criollo Aesthetics." *Latin American Research Review* (2008): 33-58, 39.

thinkers (and as Jane Gaines has illustrated, both issues come to bear on the study of women in the silent cinema).[10] However, I have intentionally structured this project to trace multiple dimensions of cinematic engagement. The comparative approach deployed here brings questions of film consumption, film production, and film texts side by side to reveal common preoccupations surrounding the postrevolution recalibration of Mexican femininity (especially as gender intersects with race and class) as well as ways different aspects of film culture diverged in their social implications. To understand the complementary relationship between the Mexican silent cinema and postrevolution notions of femininity, then, it is necessary to lay out the basic terms of analysis, which are, for this project, femininity, nation, and modernity.

Mexican Femininity[11]

Early twentieth-century concerns about representations of specific women like Emma Padilla – and by extension, the category of "woman" in general – grew from the emergent question of woman as human agent. What was a woman's proper role in society? What were her abilities, her desires? Prior to the revolution, such queries would have seemed unnecessary. By holy writ and historical precedent, the primary (and all but exclusive) domain of the Mexican woman was domestic, as Elena María de Valdés explains: "From birth, [women] have been tutored in the unquestioned truth that their primary function in life is motherhood …by education, training, and custom, Mexican women are the primary guardians of the family and

[10] See Jane Gaines, *Pink Slipped: What Happened to Women in the Silent Film Industries?* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2018).

[11] I take "femininity" to describe all those qualities and characteristics which are associated with the idea of "woman." Woman is, in turn, is a transitory social notion often rhetorically conflated with biological sex. Thus, the interrogation of how women engaged with silent cinema encompasses the labor and experience of actual human beings who belonged to this class, as well as the symbolic notion of "woman," – and as this project shows, the symbolic category came to bear on the experiences of human agents in material ways.

they perform this role in the name of God."[12] This feminine cult of domesticity, or *marianismo*, holds that women are innately characterized by spiritual strength, moral purity, and dutiful subservience. The counterpart to this ideology is the well-known "cult of virility" called *machismo*, which defines men against women as both aggressive and arrogant, especially in sexual relationships. These interdependent and pervasive gender ideologies have informed assumptions about the proper domains of men and women in Mexico since colonization.[13]

However, the roots of Mexican gender dynamics trace back farther still. As Ana Macías emphasizes, the Mexica faith of the Aztecs and the Roman Catholic faith of their colonizers were remarkably similar in their religious and social positioning of women.[14] Both traditions revered the sacred feminine, but flesh-and-blood women - from residents of Tenochtitlán before first contact, to wives of colonial officials, to daughters of Porfirian high society - were expected to rear children and preside over the familial home to the exclusion of significant participation in

[12] Maria Elena De Valdés, *The Shattered Mirror: Representations of Women in Mexican Literature*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2010), 47. This was officially codified with the 1860 Reform Laws that prohibited feminine activity outside the "holy zone" of the bedroom, the kitchen, household chores, Mass, and the confessional.

[13] Evelyn P. Stevens, "Marianismo: The Other Face of Machismo," in *Confronting Change, Challenging Tradition: Woman in Latin American History*. Ed. Gertrude M. Yeager (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1997), 3-17. Stevens has been critiqued for her Mexicanist bias, which limits the application of her theory to other Latin American countries – a limitation not of concern here.

[14] Anna Macías, *Against All Odds: The Feminist Movement in Mexico to 1940.* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1982), 3.

politics, religion, and labor.[15] Over centuries, new intellectual currents necessitated new rationales for the social subordination and spatial segregation of women.[16] Colonial officials cited the Bible as proof that woman was created for the benefit of man, and so it was her duty to bear him sons and maintain the honor of her household. In the nineteenth century, the scientistic rhetoric of positivism asserted that biology dictated woman's role as a (re)productive member of society, still subordinate to man, whose duties were focused on the scientifically-optimized administration of the household.[17] Archetypes of Mexican femininity have necessarily been shaped in conversation with this reality.

The most influential Mexican female archetypes exist at opposite poles: either chaste, selfless motherhood, or dangerous sexual temptation. The former type is represented by the Virgin of Guadalupe. Legend holds that, on a hill outside of Mexico City, the Virgin Mary appeared to an indigenous peasant and instructed him to build a shrine to her there. As evidence of divine will, her appearance was made manifest on the peasant's *tilma*, or shawl. The Catholic Church accepted the tilma as a holy relic, the shrine was built, and *La Virgen de Guadalupe* became the icon of a distinctly Mexican faith in God, "an affirmation of the nation's spiritual and

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[15] I use the phrase "first contact" to describe the meeting of European and American cultures previously unknown to each other in the 16th and 17th centuries. This is in preference to the subjugating language of "discovery;" moreover, it should be emphasized that the subsequent Spanish conquest of the Americas did not eradicate indigenous cultures. For more on this subject, see Matthew Restall, *Seven Myths of the Spanish Conquest*. (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2003.)

[16] The Zapotec region of Oaxaca ('Mexico's matriarchy,' as documentarian Maureen Gosling calls it) is the exception that proves the rule. The residents of this community fascinated Mexican artists of the Postrevolution era including Frida Kahlo and Tina Modotti. See Analisa Taylor, "Malinche and Matriarchal Utopia: Gendered Visions of Indigeneity in Mexico," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 31, no. 3 (Spring 2006): 815-840.

[17] For a concise survey of the positioning of women in Mexican society, see Julia Tuñón Pablos. *Women in Mexico: A Past Unveiled,* (Austin, University of Texas Press, 1999).

even racial uniqueness."[18] Still today the tilma is on display at the Shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe in Mexico City, which is the most-visited Catholic pilgrimage site in the world. But the reverence for la Virgen also manifests in more organic, grassroots ways. Countless makeshift shrines to la Virgen can be seen on street corners, in parks, and adorning family homes. Even the *Salón Rojo* – Mexico's premiere movie theater in the silent era – featured a prominent stone niche containing a statue of la Virgen above its entrance [figure 2].[19] Today, la Virgen also appears on t-shirts and tattooed on the bodies of the faithful, among other places throughout Mexico City. This is to say that the Virgin of Guadalupe is centuries-old living tradition, and her presence in the consciousness of Mexicans has been a thread of continuity from the colonial past to the neoliberal present.

The second archetype of Mexican femininity is *la Malinche*, a Nahua woman who became the translator and lover of conquistador Hernán Cortés. Also called Malintzin or Doña Marina, Malinche today represents an iteration of Mexican femininity less esteemed but no less vital than her virginal foil. Malinche presents a cautionary tale about the threatening power of womanhood, because in addition to assisting Cortés' subjugation of her people, she bore Cortés children. Malinche's children were mestizos whose bloodline manifests the uneasy relationship between European and indigenous people. She is, in a sense, Mexico's very own Eve – a figure whose betrayal was also her gift. As both victim and traitor, Malinche's perverse hagiography persists at the expense of the historical facts that circumscribed her choices and defined her

[18]Steven D Morris, "Reforming the Nation: Mexican Nationalism in Context." *Journal of Latin American Studies* 31, no. 2 (1999): 370. Through Indian peasant Juan Diego's special communion with the Virgin, the Catholic Church was able to "indigenize" colonial religious dogma.

[19] Jesús Flores y Escalante, "Salón Rojo, Vida cosmopolita en la Ciudad de México*,"* in *Revista Relatos e Historias en México*, 19, March 2010.

agency. Nobel prize winner Octavio Paz went so far as to blame Malinche for the essential psychic distress at the heart of Mexican identity. In the celebrated long-form essay *Labyrinth of Solitude,* Paz dedicated an entire section to the subject, identifying the Mexican people as *hijos de la chingada* ("children of the fucked one").[20] He argued that the Mexican people experienced cognitive dissonance because they could not forgive Malinche for her betrayal, despite the fact that they owed to her their very existence. [21]

The relationship between la Virgen and la Malinche might appear to be nothing more than a local iteration of the virgin/whore dichotomy that has structured Western ideas about femininity for centuries, and it would be foolish to assume that the high cultural significance of these two figures corresponds to the uniqueness of the paradigm they represent. Nonetheless, the particular *way* that la Malinche and la Virgen represent gender is relevant. Whether as virgin or chingada, both images of womanhood are presented as subservient to the patriarchy, lacking in autonomy, and insistently heterosexual.[22] Moreover, these figures indigenize the whore/virgin binary, and tether these tropes to the character of the nation itself. How Malintzin actually thought and behaved, or whether la Virgen's miraculous appearance is verifiable by scientific inquiry – these facts are immaterial in light of the way the stories about these two feminine

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[20] Octavio Paz, "The Sons of La Malinche," *The Mexico Reader: History, Culture, Politics*. Eds. Joseph, Gilbert M and Timothy J Henderson. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), 20.

[21] Chicana and feminist scholars have re-cast the story of la Malinche with sensitivity to the gender politics and power dynamics of Mexican society. For a recent survey of la Malinche's legacy, see Julee Tate "La Malinche: The Shifting Legacy of a Transcultural Icon." *The Latin Americanist,* 61, no 1 March 2017, p 81-92.

[22] Mia Lynn Romano, "Excessive Femininity as Resistance in Twentieth- and Twenty-First Century Mexican Narrative and Visual Art." (PhD dissertation, Rutgers The State University of New Jersey, 2015), 9.

figures have guided Mexican culture. The weight of history ensures that la Malinche and la Virgen retain structuring roles in Mexican consciousness, and especially the gendered dimensions of that consciousness.

The outbreak of revolution in 1910 expanded the binaristic pantheon of Mexican femininity with a new figure: the *soldadera*, or female revolutionary [figure 3]. In archival photographs, these women appear with long dark hair and solemn facial expressions. Against the backdrop of the Mexican countryside, their floor-skimming skirts are accessorized with guns and bandoliers. Soldaderas are recognizable as traditional images of the Mexican domestic landscape, but their assumption of implements of war suggests a substantial deviation from the status quo. Despite the soldadera's aggressive fashioning, however, only a few were known to engage in battle. Most of these women worked in support of the men at the front, where they performed duties a wife would otherwise fulfill were these itinerant men still rooted at home. [23] 'Soldadera' is actually a false cognate for the English 'soldier' – the term derives from the fact that these women worked for wages, called soldada, and thus implies no militancy in the traditional sense.[24] But even this was revolutionary: prior to the outbreak of war in Mexico, women who exchanged labor for money were disavowed by society and rendered invisible by its institutions, regardless of profession; in the decades preceding the revolution, "the vast majority

[23] See Andrés Reséndez Fuentes, "Battleground Women: Soldaderas and Female Soldiers in the Mexican revolution 1." *The Americas* 51.4 (1995): 525-53.

[24] Elizabeth Salas, *Soldaderas in the Mexican Military: Myth and History*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990), xii. Salas also dispels romantic notions surrounding soldaderas. Sometimes compelled to serve against their wishes, soldaderas were tasked with burying the dead and containing the violent impulses male soldiers might exert on the women and children of the defeated.

of women had no access to education or the public sphere."[25] The soldadera, by contrast, was widely photographed and robustly celebrated. This in part reflects the invaluable contribution these women made to the revolutionary effort, which Elena Poniatowska makes explicit when she asserts that "without soldaderas, there is no Mexican revolution."[26] One can plausibly extend Poniatowska's formulation to say that, without soldaderas, there would be no Mexican nation: not only did soldaderas prevent men from deserting (thereby facilitating the continuance of a protracted conflict), but the soldaderas' support allowed itineracy that fostered a lived sense of the nation as a shared geographic and cultural space, which in turn fostered the development of Mexican national (rather than regional) identity.[27]

Celebration of the soldadera solidified in the aftermath of the revolution with the popularization of the ballad *La Adelita.* This *corrido* (a Mexican folk song) is sung from the perspective of a male revolutionary fighter besotted with the "brave" and "beautiful" girl named

[25] Susie Porter, *From Angel to Office Worker: Middle-Class Identity and Female Consciousness in Mexico, 1890-1950.* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2018), 3. Women desired employment before it was socially acceptable for them to enter the workplace. This drove middle- and upper-class women to produce goods in their homes, and then delegate the public sale of those goods to women of lower social status. Carlos Monsiváis, "Foreward: When Gender Can't Be Seen Amid the Symbols: Women and the Mexican Revolution," in *Sex in revolution: Gender, Politics, and Power in Modern Mexico* eds. Mary Kay Vaughan, Gabriela Cano, and Jocelyn Olcott, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 3.

[26] Elena Poniatowska, *Las Soldaderas: Women of the Mexican revolution*. Trans. Dorado Romo, (El Paso, TX: Cinco Puntos Press 2006), 16. Women performed a variety of duties including tending fires and providing meals, which prevented men from deserting.

[27] I am grateful to Anton Rosenthal for bringing to my attention this additional (and underappreciated) dimension of the soldaderas' contribution.

Adelita.[28] Adelita's role in the conflict is not expounded upon by the lyrics, and such elaboration would be unnecessary given the pervasiveness of the soldadera in the Mexican imagination. Adelita was revered for her maternal qualities, insofar as she was imagined of as the lover, caregiver, and supporter of the revolutionary man. Later, in the mid-twentieth century, mythology dragged *Adelita* toward the Malinche side of the spectrum: 1940s pin-up images of a glamorous woman draped in bandoliers appealed to an audience still familiar with the ballad of Adelita.[29] Though the overt sexualization of Adelita occurred after the period under investigation in this dissertation, certain trends in the development of Mexican feminine types – from Malinche to Virgin to soldadera – are clear. Each story gains its foothold in the facts of the past, each takes on a larger-than-life significance through decades (or centuries) of mythology, and each secures her space in the Mexican imagination by exemplifying some supposedly "essential" feminine trait – maternal devotion or sexual temptation, modified for the needs of an era.

But for all that the Mexican feminine types la Virgen, la Malinche, and la soldadera have in common, only la Virgen appeared in the Mexican silent cinema.[30] Considering the invaluable work of soldaderas in the first social revolution of the twentieth century, these figures would

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[28] Elena Poniatowska, *Las Soldaderas*, 30. The most reliable of account of the corrido's origin refers to the real woman Adela Velarde Pérez, who ran away from home and joined the Carrancista troops at age 14. The song was then composed by a young captain in her honor. Adela went on to become an office worker in the Bureau of Industry and Commerce – a one-woman embodiment of the trajectory of the revolution itself.

[29] Mia Lynn Romano, "Excessive Femininity as Resistance," 64. Romano highlights how such images aided the "mythification of the soldadera through sexualized femininity and national imagery."

[30] The silent film *Tepeyac* (Carlos E. Gonzalez and Jose Manuel Ramos, 1917) specifically recounts the appearance of the Virgin to Juan Pablo, though the story of the indigenous peasant is subordinated to the parallel story of an upper-class Mexican family whose son has been sent to Europe on a dangerous mission. This film is also one of the few surviving Mexican silents. It has been restored and digitized for open access by the UNAM.

seem conspicuously absent from the silver screen – but, as Mexican film historian Emilio García Riera explains, Mexican filmmakers initially avoided representing the revolution for fear of playing into North American stereotypes about Mexican barbarism and banditry.[31] This unspoken prohibition meant that soldaderas would not appear on Mexican screens until the Golden Age, but it did *not* mean that Mexican cinema culture was inoculated from the influence of the soldadera: in fact, the soldadera was a direct predecessor of the *pelona* (a figure who would become the arch-modern icon of Mexican femininity in the postrevolution era).[32] On the advance guard of the twentieth century transformation of Mexican femininity, the soldadera provided a model of womanhood that included both the possibility of financial independence and visible participation in the direction of Mexican history.[33] Ultimately, both the soldadera and the pelona were defined by their financial independence: the soldadera literally so, and the pelona as a "militantly autonomous" middle-class consumer whose acquisitive embrace of the cosmopolitan flapper aesthetic constituted a direct (even revolutionary) threat to prevailing

[31] Emilio García Riera. *Breve Historia Del Cine Mexicano: Primer Siglo, 1897-1997*. (Mexico City: Instituto Mexicano de Cinematografía, 1998), 33.

[32] "Pelona" is literally translated as "bald woman," but the term in fact referred to a flapper. Both the women who adopted this style and those who opposed the style used this term. See Rubenstein, "The War Against Las Pelonas." As Andrea Noble notes, the Golden Age has as many periodizations as there are scholars, but all of these include the crucial decade 1940-1950 when the number of films produced annually reached an all-time high (123 in 1950) and Mexico's well-developed studio system (with its attendant stars and popular genres) became the dominant motion picture industry in the Spanish-speaking world (15). The film *Si Adelita se fuera con otro* (Urueta, 1948) is one example of an idealized depiction of the soldadera from the Golden Age cinema.

[33] Mia Lynn Romano, "Excessive Femininity` as Resistance," 127.

norms of feminine behavior and independence.[34] Though the soldadera was the product of rural unrest and the pelona came to signify urban modernity, these two feminine icons were linked in their aggressive rejection of the totalizing logic of marianismo.

So, during the fighting of the revolution and in its immediate aftermath, la Virgen and la Malinche retained their centrality in the Mexican imagination – but new figures were on the horizon. As Mexico entered a period of modernization and urbanization, political, economic, and technological transformations destabilized the gendered organization of social experience. It was in this dynamic moment that the first female Mexican movie stars appeared. Over a dozen years, these women took on many guises, from operatic diva to Indian girl to free-spirited *pelona*. With each new manifestation, the struggle to define a new woman for the new Mexico is evident – and this struggle was replicated in all dimensions of film culture. Women filled movie theaters, wrote about films in the newspaper, and purchased fashions and beauty products they recognized as constitutive of modern femininity from their engagement with screen culture. Such activities were alternately critiqued by intellectuals and courted by capital, but whether the new feminine types appearing in Mexico City were deemed "good" or "bad," women's acts of self-determination were, in effect, a declaration of independence. Following the revolution, for the first time, middle- and working-class women exercised agency to determine their own identities – and they exercised that agency publicly. Female agency was previously assumed to function

[34] As Miriam Silverberg has illustrated in "The Modern Girl as Militant," the identity and motivations of the Japanese modern girl were extensively debated in the face of the social and cultural tumult of the 1920s. The iconic status of the modern girl in Japan stemmed from her distinctive look and consumptive habits, and her 'militancy' was the product of her aggressive rejection of traditional femininity (rather than military service or political agitation). I argue that a similar situation occurred in Mexico, where the pelona was discursively positioned as a threat to mexicanidad because she earned and spent her own money outside the home. See Miriam Silverberg, *Erotic Grotesque Nonsense: The Mass Culture of Japanese Modern Times.* (Oakland Univ of California Press, 2006), 54.

only in the realm of private/domestic life, so the new, modern way of being a Mexican woman brought about by transnational capitalism and revolutionary reform called to question the very ontology of womanhood. What was the heart of a woman, if not nurturing and serving as the source of stability in the home? Both Mexican nationalism and transnational modernity posed particular (and often conflicting) emphases on what it was to be feminine, Mexican, and modern, but together, these conflicts also helped to redefine what it meant to be a Mexican woman.[35]

Upon their observation of the "movie-struck girls" of late 1910's Mexico, leading male intellectuals decried the cinema as a corrupting influence on the nation's women.[36] In one anecdote shared among the city's Catholic community, Father Joaquín Cardoso described a friend who returned to Mexico City after being away on a mission for twelve years. As the two walked through the city, the missionary judged that they were spending a lot of time in scandalous barrios, and worse still, Father Cardoso seemed to have very cordial relationships with countless sex workers. Father Cordoso eventually deduced that his friend's absence from Mexico had made it impossible for the missionary to decode the modern language of women's fashion: the missionary evaluated 'indecent' Jazz Age styles and presumed all of the women he met were prostitutes, though in fact they were churchgoing, everyday Mexican girls who had adopted the newest cosmopolitan fashions.[37] Significantly, the moral of this story is *not* that the

[35] For a discussion of Mexican femininity in the 1920s and 1930s as seen through the diffuse media of visual culture, see Joanne Hershfield, *Imagining la Chica Moderna: Women, Nation, and Visual Culture in Mexico, 1917-1936.* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 43.

[36] The phrase "movie struck girls" is borrowed from Shelly Stamp's *Movie-Struck Girls: Women and Motion Picture Culture after the Nickelodeon* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000). As in Mexico, the North American movie industry courted female spectators, but the possibly dangerous allure of cinema and the medium's perceived ability to spark unruly desires made cinema culture the locus of anxieties about feminine sexuality and identity.

[37] Joaquín Cardoso, 'La madre cristiana', *Mensajero del Sagrado Corazón de Jesús de México* (May 1920): 261–7, quoted in Patience Schell. "Social Catholicism, Modern

religious man is out of touch with the realities of modern Mexico, but rather, that the female populace had been poisoned by Americanized consumer culture spearheaded by the cinema. In response, the Catholic Church and conservative reformers made bad-faith attempts to crystallize the nature of 'woman,' as a timeless subject against which deviant new alternatives could be measured, thereby refusing to recognize the fact that the very category of 'woman' is transitory.[38] The twentieth-century Mexican woman was very much of her time, and changed to keep up with the ever-mutating fashions of the modern era. Forceful reactions to changing norms of feminine appearance and behavior thus register the destabilizing emergence of a modern Mexican femininity - essentially, the redistribution of social and economic power.

So how did Mexican women's social position change over the course of the mid- to late-silent era, which coincided with the immediate postrevolution period? Much gender-oriented scholarship on the Mexican revolution argues that women who had actively participated in the war, or whose lives had been strongly affected by it, did not receive the benefits promised by revolutionary reform. Elizabeth Salas, for example, argues that the turbulent political situation of the revolution and postrevolution actually hampered the fight for women's rights: despite early gains, the women's movement was de-prioritized relative to open warfare and subsequent state formation.[39] Indeed, the administration of President Venustiano Carranza refused to pay pensions to widows and women who fought alongside men; the legions of women who found employment within state bureaucracies were denied the right to strike for better wages on the basis that public

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Consumption and the Culture Wars in postrevolutionary Mexico City." *History Compass* 5, no. 5 (2007): 1585-603. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1478-0542.2007.00465.x.

[38] Janet Staiger, *Bad Women: Regulating Sexuality in Early American Cinema*, (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1995), 13.

[39] Elizabeth Salas, *Soldaderas in The Mexican Military*, 42.

labor was distinct from work in the public sector; and women did not gain the right to vote until 1953. [40] Others have argued that the "revolutionary cultural project itself, rather than political instability and structural forces, greatly hindered the feminist cause."[41] However, Carlos Monsiváis blames History – the act of narrating the past – for the continued suppression of women. The conceptual unification of diffuse conflicts under the banner of "the Mexican revolution" is a convenient shorthand that has both supported state formation and obscured the complexity of the conflict. As a result, women (whose place within that conflict defies simple description) have been left out of history proper, which is imagined as "an exclusively masculine territory."[42] My project aims to help address the discursive erasure Monsiváis describes, with cinema as the specific site of intervention. In fact, the nationally-produced narrative cinema in the 1910s and 20s markedly enhanced the visibility of Mexican women as the protagonists and producers of films, and the practices associated with movie-going and movie-making gave women exceptional purchase of public life in the modern city.

The discourses of cinema culture both challenged and assimilated prevailing Mexican gender ideologies. New imaging technologies and the explosion of visual culture throughout the silent era guided the development and reception of modern images of "woman" in an

[40] Elena Poniatowska, *Las Soldaderas*, 13. Susie Porter, *From Angel to Office Worker*, 128.

[41] Ageeth Sluis. *Deco Body, Deco City: Female Spectacle and Modernity in Mexico City, 1900–1939.*(Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2016), 13.

[42] Monsiváis, "Foreward: When Gender Can't Be Seen," 4.

increasingly cosmopolitan Mexico City.[43] Women were unequal participants in any number of urban social institutions, including but not limited to the church, the press, the motion picture audience, the workforce, the state's administrative apparatus, and the nuclear family. Each of these groups supported definitions of 'woman,' 'women,' and 'femininity' that suited their particular interests, whether they were political, economic, cultural, or some combination thereof.[44] Thus, if Emma Padilla looks very different from competing contemporary icons of Mexican femininity like soldaderas and the Virgin of Guadalupe, the terms under which Padilla's achievements might be deemed (un)patriotic (as the competing newspaper accounts suggest) bear further scrutiny. While the notion of 'woman' was "socially constructed in discursive practices [like the Padilla interview, or the ballad *La* Adelita]," the modern Mexican woman also existed as

> "…a thinking, feeling, subject and social agent capable of resistance and innovations produced out of the clash between contradictory subject positions and practices. She [was] also a subject able to reflect upon the discursive relations which constitute[d] her and the society in which she live[d] and able to choose from the options available."[45]

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[43] My review of microfilm copies of *El Universal* and *Excélsior* in the Hemeroteca Nacional at the UNAM allowed me to observe a marked shift toward the visual from 1917-1931. The earliest periodicals are comprised almost exclusively of dense text, which with the passage of time was supplanted by drawings and photographs, as well as greater complexity in layout design and more varied typefaces. Also important, the few images that appeared in the earlier papers were tied to news items, but by the late 20s, advertisements for goods and services accounted for a plurality of images seen on daily newspaper pages.

[44] My parsing of the way gender was alternately conceived by multiple social sectors and refracted through mass media representations is indebted to the work of Julie D'Acci, whose *Defining Women: Television and the Case of Cagney and Lacey.* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000) provides an excellent model for studying the nuances of femininity regardless of era or geographic situation.

[45] The quoted passages are from Chris Weedon, *Feminist Practice and Poststructuralist Theory,* (Oxford and New York: Blackwell, 1987), 54.

In fact, the discourses around cinema and women in postrevolution Mexico assumed a vital role in molding the direction of motion pictures in Mexico – and these discourses, from the fairy tales of history to the fairy-tale promise of modern motion picture stardom – unfolded within the broader elaboration of postrevolutionary cultural nationalism.

Mexican Nation

The work of defining the modern Mexican woman was structured within the overarching project of postrevolution nationalism. The Mexican revolution was an armed civil conflict fought from 1910 to 1917 between state power, represented by then-President and dictator Porfirio Díaz, and agrarian rebel forces, led most notably by Francisco Madero, Álvaro Obregón, Pancho Villa, and Emiliano Zapata. Significantly, the Mexican revolution was not a conflict between unified 'liberators' and 'oppressors,' but rather, "a bitter factional strife of shifting allegiances and political agendas in which the chief protagonists ….became the victims of political assassination at the behest of their rivals."[46] The fighting of this conflict (and therefore the casualties) were shouldered principally by peasants and rural workers, who were led by alienated members of the upper and middle classes.[47] The revolutionaries were not without common cause, however. As Katherine Bliss explains, many revolutionaries – those who went to battle, and the social sectors who supported these efforts – felt that the decades-long Díaz dictatorship had been a dark age for Mexico in which social ills including poverty, vice, ignorance, immorality, and corruption flourished under authoritarian governance, unjust economic policy, exploitive relations with foreign businesses, and the greed of the urban elite.[48] Thus, alongside

[46]Andrea Noble, *Mexican National Cinema.* (London: Routledge, 2005), 9-10.

[47] John Lear, *Workers, Neighbors and Citizens: The revolution in Mexico City.* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2001), 3-4.

postrevolution legislative reform designed to redistribute land, augment civil liberties, increase political participation, and extricate Mexico from foreign influence, complementary efforts aimed to effect a wholesale transformation of Mexican social life, including a notion of femininity appropriate for the 'new' Mexican nation-state. These reforms were shaped both by reformers' ideas about gender and class, and, on the other hand, female reformees' own ideas about citizenship, women's rights, national identity, and social change.

The material and political gains of the Mexican revolution were decidedly ambivalent and ultimately failed to unify a diverse Mexican public, so revolutionary leadership worked to unify Mexicans around another cause: *mexicanidad,* literally translated as "Mexicanness." Of course, the desire for a unifying national identity (à la the imagined community described by Benedict Anderson) was not new to the postrevolutionary era. Similar efforts dated at least to the postindependence era, when in 1821 the nation-state formerly known as "New Spain" christened itself *Mexico,* which means 'land of the Mexica' (the indigenous group also called Aztecs). However, as Claudio Lomnitz notes, Mexico's independence was more the product of imperial collapse than it was the result of an overwhelming popular demand for sovereignty, so nationalism was not well-developed at that time.[49] Even over the course of the 33-year-long Porfiriato, Alan Knight writes, Mexico was "less a nation than a geographical expression, a mosaic of regions and communities, introverted and jealous, ethnically and physically

[48] Katherine Bliss, *Compromised Positions: Prostitution, Public Health, and Gender Politics in revolutionary Mexico City.* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2001), 4-5.

[49] Claudio Lomnitz*, Deep Mexico, Silent Mexico: An Anthropology of Nationalism*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 26.

fragmented, and lacking common national sentiments."[50] The group that emerged to govern postrevolution Mexico was a coalition comprised of holdovers from the old Porfirian regime, the urban, middle-class opposition, and the rural popular movement. These groups still lacked a unifying political vision, and so the transformation of Mexico in the immediate aftermath of revolution were largely cultural.[51] Consequently, the Mexican revolution has assumed immense importance in the characterization of contemporary national identity, to the degree that it can be considered the essential metanarrative of modern Mexico.

Through an ambitious slate of state-disseminated educational and popular cultural initiatives, the quest for the "recovery" of the essential mexicanidad became a defining feature of the postrevolution era. This was a project of invention as much as discovery, and it was led by urban intellectuals including the philosopher, educator, and film producer-turned-statesman José Vasconcelos through his "Forging the Fatherland" initiative.[52] This period was marked by the rejection of Eurocentric traditions, exploration of folk forms, and a conscious attempt to make art accessible to the masses.[53] The postrevolution massification of folk customs was most prominently articulated as *indigenismo,* a form of internalized exoticism that equated the distinctive landscape of the Mexican countryside with indigenous people (especially indigenous

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[50]Alan Knight, *The Mexican Revolution: Porfirians, Liberals, and Peasants* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 2.

[51] Joanne Hershfield, *Imagining la Chica Moderna,* 26. Also Alan Knight, "Popular Culture and the Revolutionary State in Mexico, 1910-1940."

[52] Jonathan Kandell. *La Capital: The Biography of Mexico City*. (New York: Random House, 1988), 443-484.

[53] For a survey of the (often contradictory) nation building efforts undertaken by the postrevolutionary state, artists, businesses and various social groups, see Mary K. Vaughan and Stephen E. Lewis, *The Eagle and the Virgin : Nation and Cultural revolution in Mexico, 1920-1940.*(Durham N.C. Duke University Press, 2006)

women), the historical past, and the essence of national identity.[54] Prior to the revolution, such imagery was of little interest to urban Mexicans who fancied themselves more closely connected with the "civilized" cultures of Europe than the people in neighboring Mexican states, and it was only *after* the revolution that such imagery became an endorsed preoccupation of the state.[55] This is perhaps why, even as regional/indigenous customs were celebrated, these same customs were viewed by Vasconcelos and others as "raw material that should be sanitized and refashioned to conform to implicitly Western aesthetic norms."[56] Mexican intellectuals thus positioned themselves as the gatekeepers of Mexican cultural life, and the 'popular' character of the arts they endorsed tended to obscure the actual character of the Mexican state as an instrument of capitalist modernization.[57]

Mexico City was the staging ground for numerous postrevolutionary reforms, cultural and otherwise, but this is only one of many reasons that I have placed Mexico's largest urban center and capital city as the heart of this dissertation. The city's built environment concentrated people and resources, but perhaps more importantly, the city was an imagined place in which Mexico's indigenous heritage and its modern potential were overlaid. The social and geographic

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[54] Natasha Varner. *La raza cosmética: Beauty, race, and indigeneity in revolutionary Mexico,* PhD diss, University of Arizona. 2016. "Pioneering anthropologist Manuel Gamio was the first major evangelist of Indigenismo, the complex network of policies and practices that valorized select components of Indigenous heritage while also imposing—often misguided--reforms intended to better Indigenous lives."Gamino was famous for influentially "arguing that Indigenous culture needed to be documented, salvaged, celebrated, and incorporated into broader society" 17.

[55] Jonathan Kandell, *La Capital,* 387.

[56] Rielle Navitski, "Early Film Critics and Fanatical Fans," 69.

[57] Jean Franco, *Plotting Women: Gender and Representation in Mexico*. (London, Verso, 1989), xix.

entity today called Mexico City began in the fourteenth century, when (as the legend goes) Aztecs searching for a promised land recognized the fated place by the appearance of a sign: an eagle, perched on a cactus, with a serpent in its mouth.[58] There, on the shores of Lake Texcoco, the Aztecs established what would become the seat of their empire, a city called Tenochtitlán. Hernán Cortés arrived in the Americas two centuries later. Recognizing the strategic and symbolic value of Tenochtitlán, Cortés established Mexico City on the site of the razed Aztec metropolis. During the colonial era, Mexico City was the seat of Spanish power and the Archbishop of Mexico. The city was also a trade hub, which allowed the city to grow in population and power. Following Mexican independence in 1821, Mexico City was declared the national capital. When this republic briefly reverted to a monarchy under the influence of Napoleon III in the mid-nineteenth century, the short-lived and ill-fated rulers Emperor Maximillian and Empress Carlota chose Mexico City as their home, taking up residence at Chapultepec Castle.[59] Mexico City was also favored by the Porfirian elite, who remodeled their city in the style of Paris. Following the revolution, the city became home to both new public institutions and hundreds of thousands of new *capitalinos* (as residents of the capital were called). All of this is to say that Mexico City is a place unique in Mexican history, and the confluence of politics, economics, culture, and religion that made the city a durable locus of national life also ensured that it became a crucible of modernity. Postrevolution Mexico City was a "twentieth century cornucopia" of running water, electricity, refrigeration, telephones, and automobiles (two thirds of the 55,000 automobiles in Mexico in 1925 were on the streets of the

[58] This emblem appears at the center of the tri-color Mexican flag, and various iterations of this emblem have appeared therein since before Mexican independence.

[59] For a narrative history of Mexico City, see Jonathan Kandell. *La Capital.*

capital).[60] The city also became the hub of Mexican film culture: upwards of 80 percent of Mexican silent films were produced in the city, foreign film production companies housed their distribution offices in the capital, and city-based officials were nominally responsible for censoring films for the whole of the republic, which led the writers at North American trade publication *Film Daily Year Book* to conclude that "the entire picture trade is supplied through Mexico City."[61]

Over the fourteen-year period discussed in this dissertation, Mexico City changed rapidly and radically, generating conditions that brought previously isolated sectors of Mexican society into close contact and fomenting opportunities for alternate configurations of economic, cultural, and social life. In the Porfiriato, the city had become conspicuously lopsided: one third of the city's half-million inhabitants lived in the slums east of the Zócalo Plaza in a space that comprised only fifteen percent of the city's total landmass, while wealth was housed in the more expansive west side of the city.[62] From 1910 to 1930, the city's surface tripled in size while the population more than doubled; this unfurling of the city across the valley of Mexico was facilitated by the paving of streets and development of an extensive electric streetcar network that was "the main public transportation of workers, day laborers and the emerging middle classes, becoming an essential factor in the integration of the urban economy."[63] The new

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[60] Ibid, 449.

[61] *Film Daily Year Book,* "Bureau of Foreign and Domestic Commerce Reports: Mexico," (New York, Wid's Films and Film Folk, Inc, 1925), 657. Accessed via Archive.org.

[62] John Lear, *Workers, Neighbors, Citizens,* 9 and Ageeth Sluis, *Deco Body, Deco City:* 4.

[63] Patricia Gómez Rey, and Héctor Ignacio Martínez Álvarez. "Los Tranvías Eléctricos De La Ciudad De México: Transformaciones Urbanas Y Los Conflictos De Los Tranviarios," in *La Electricidad y el Territorio. Historia y Futuro*. (Barcelona: Universitat de Barcelona, 2017):6 http://www.ub.edu/geocrit/Electr-y-territorio/GomezMartinez.pdf

denizens of Mexico City also included an appreciable number of indigenous migrants. In the absence of specific data on the racial demographics of postrevolution urbanization, census records are illustrative: while the 1900 census registered just over 300 speakers of indigenous languages within the Mexico City limits, the 1921 census added a new category for data collection – race – and found that the populace of Mexico City was 19 percent indigenous, 55 percent mixed race, and 23 percent white.[64] While the criteria used to define these groups are unclear, and while using language as a proxy for race is an imperfect basis of comparison, the available data do suggest a considerable increase in the number of indigenous people residing in Mexico City over the first two decades of the twentieth century.

By 1930, the total population of Mexico City was 1,029,068. The number of new capitalinos was extraordinary in and of itself, but the influx of migrants – many rural – was also remarkable in that 53 percent were women.[65] The profile of the group varied, though revolutionary violence was a common motivator. Some migrants were the daughters of wealthy families who felt that relocating to the capital was safer than remaining at home, while others relocated to seek opportunity and shelter in the city following the loss of the men who had provided for them before war broke out.[66] Though revolutionary violence did occasionally spill onto the streets of the capital, the city remained relatively insulated from the revolution's most

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[64] John Lear, *Workers, Neighbors and Citizens,* 53-54.

[65] Population statistics from Joanne Hershfield, *Imagining the Chica Moderna,* 24-26. The rapid increase in Mexico City's population is even more extraordinary when one considers that, between 1910 and 1930, the national population of Mexico experienced its smallest growth in nearly half a century, largely due to the loss of 2.1 million people to violence and US-bound immigration during the revolution. See Robert McCaa, "Missing Millions: The Demographic Costs of the Mexican revolution." *Mexican Studies/Estudios Mexicanos* 19, no. 2 (Summer 2003): 367-400.

[66] Katherine Bliss, *Compromised Positions*.

destructive impulses. The hardship of war was instead felt via economic recession and the loss of male labor, and many women in the city met these challenges by going to work. Some worked in middle class jobs as office workers, teachers, and in shops; others worked in factories, or as street vendors, domestics, or prostitutes. In the postrevolution era, the feminization of the Mexican workforce continued. Middle-class 'pink collar' workers especially challenged traditional notions of women as "angels of the home," and moreover, these upwardly-mobile young women filled the offices of bourgeoning government bureaucracies to the extent that they "made the state function."[67]

The above survey of the Mexican revolution, its political dimensions, and the ensuing sociocultural transformations is necessarily cursory. It would be impossible for any survey of the literature to be otherwise; the literature on the Mexican revolution and the postrevolution cultural project is enormous.[68] Even so, the bulk of academic work on postrevolution Mexico focuses on the topics surveyed above: the crystallization of the state, the modernization of the nation's economy and institutions, and the invention of a particular brand of nationalism that came to be associated with a set of symbols under the umbrella of *mexicanidad*. While this knowledge has proven vital to contemporary understanding of modern Mexico, María Theresa Fernández-Aceves rightly criticizes existent historical work on the Mexican (post)revolutionary era insofar as it has been both gender-blind and ignorant of the ways that everyday living allowed people to

[67] Susie Porter, *From Angel to Office Worker*, 7.

[68] For a detailed survey of the Mexican revolution, see Alan Knight, *The Mexican Revolution: Porfirians, Liberals, and Peasants*, and *Counter-revolution and Reconstruction*, (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1986).

practice new national and social identities.[69] In fact, the question of gender in twentieth century Mexico would be unanswerable without recourse to the overarching question of mexicanidad both posed and answered by the revolution and its subsequent political and cultural practices. Conversely, the question of mexicanidad cannot be meaningfully addressed without considering the construction of femininity, as 'the feminine' has been used to represent the nation itself in Mexico and elsewhere.[70] Within the broad consonance between woman and nation, sociologists Nira-Yuval Davis and Floya Anthias taxonomize five ways women are instrumental to imagining the nation: as agents of biological reproduction, reproducers of ethnic and national boundaries, transmitters of culture, symbols of ideologies, and as participants in national struggles – and indeed, all of these modes of imagining were employed in the service of postrevolution Mexican nationalism (though the linkage of woman and nation long predated that particular moment).[71] From first contact between indigenous Americans and European colonizers, through the colonial era, and continuing in the age of Mexican independence, it was assumed that women are directly responsible for the stability and continuity of social order.[72] Thus, the vitally important

[69] For a survey of historical works on Mexican women, see María Teresa Fernández-Aceves, "Imagined Communities: Women's History and the History of Gender in Mexico." *Journal of Women's History* 19, no. 1 (2007): 200-205. Accessed Feb 10, 2018. doi:http://dx.doi.org.www2.lib.ku.edu/10.1353/jowh.2007.0010

[70] Francie Chassen-López, "The Traje De Tehuana as National Icon: Gender, Ethnicity, and Fashion in Mexico." *The Americas* 71, no. 2 (2014): 287. accessed 11 Nov 2018. http://www2.lib.ku.edu/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.www2.lib.ku.edu/docview/1627868788?accountid=14556

[71] Nira Yuval-Davis and Floya Anthias, "Introduction," *Women-Nation-State,* (Basingtone: Macmillian, 1989), 1-15.

[72] Julia Tuñon de Pablos, *Women in Mexico,* 22.

discursive and visual linkage of 'nation' and 'woman' ensured that female representations - including those in and around the cinema – enjoyed tremendous symbolic power.

Modernity

Significantly, nationalist efforts to connect Mexico's spirit to its indigenous history were contemporaneous with the arrival of "an overtly transnational, capitalist modernity."[73] Consequently, discourses surrounding the modern suffused both politics and popular culture – though not without ambivalence. The modernization of infrastructure, for example, was more enthusiastically welcomed than what was understood as the 'modernization' of women, and residents of early twentieth century Mexico City experienced modernity – here understood most simply as the state of being modern – as both an opportunity and a liability. This sentiment was perhaps amplified by the fact that modernity arrived 'late' in Mexico. Scholars of European modernity identify the major discursive shift that signified the arrival of modernity on that continent around 1900.[74] However, as Rubén Gallo shows, this shift came to Mexico in 1920. Though open warfare concluded in 1917 and the formation of the Constitutionalist government provided some closure to the defining conflict of modern Mexico, 1920 signaled the opening of the postrevolution era and the beginning of a self-consciously 'modern' nation. That year, Obregón became president, and the government began a modernization campaign designed to bring Mexico to parity with those countries that had reached modernity two decades earlier – an

[73] Ageeth Sluis. *Deco Body, Deco City*, 12.

[74] See Friedrich A.Kittler, *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*. (Berlin: Brinkmann & Bose, 1986)

effort supported by initiatives from education to urban development.[75] It was precisely the instability of revolution and the energy of transformation that conflict entailed that made the confluence of Mexican modernity and postrevolutionary Mexican nationalism so powerful.

Emphasis on the postrevolution era as *self-consciously* modern bears repeating, because modernity, as Rita Felski observes, "refers not simply to a substantive range of sociohistorical phenomena – capitalism, bureaucracy, technological development, and so on – but above all to particular (though often contradictory) experiences of temporality and historical consciousness."[76] Shifts in consciousness are, of course, less amenable to documentation than are material transformations, and this is perhaps why some opt to describe modernity by highlighting (as Ageeth Sluis does) the appearance of automobiles, airplanes, cameras, radios, and typewriters – e.g., visible manifestations of a technological modernity – across Mexico the late 1910s and early 1920s.[77] So doing helpfully highlights Mexican participation in transnational flows of goods and ideas, and suggests how such inventions fueled the imaginations of a rising generation of Mexican artists and writers who would go on to shape the nation's cultural lexicon in the

[75] Accepting Gallo's timeline means that this dissertation, and the era of silent cinema it examines, spans Mexico's initial apprehension of, and entree into, modernity proper. Rubén Gallo, *Mexican Modernity: The Avant-Garde and the Technological Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005), 21.

[76] Rita Felski, *The Gender of Modernity*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009), 10.

[77] Ageeth Sluis, *Deco Body, Deco City*, 11.

aftermath of revolution.[78] In *Mexican Modernity,* Gallo analyzes technological artifacts of modernity (including cameras, typewriters, radio, cement, and stadiums, but *not* cinema) and the influence of those artifacts on artists and intellectuals to reveal the development of modern modes of representation that constituted a cultural revolution in their own right. However, there are limitations to privileging the creative class, foregrounding technological emblems of modernization, and considering the interplay between them as Gallo does. In particular, highlighting professional writers and artists threatens to obscure how modernity re-organized the social distribution of creative labor. Prior to the revolution, writing and visual art were essential tools for the articulation and preservation of culture (or perhaps better 'Culture' which was the domain of the ruling class, as opposed to the 'culture' of peasants). Writing and the visual arts were indeed "popularized" in the twentieth century via the expansion of the press and the installation of public artworks, but the creators of modern Mexico were a more diverse group than a paradigm privileging classical arts and artists allows. This is true both in terms of the kinds of media involved (cinema being the most obvious example) and in the social groups engaged with that work (women being the focus of this project). Moreover, while new technologies of mobility and communication symbolized the arrival of modernity in Mexico, so too did romanticized images of Indians. These putatively anti-modern images proliferated across Mexico City alongside more obvious markers of modernity like electric streetlights and paved roads, and the valorization of rural characters and scenery in fact responded to perceived ills of

[78] Ruben Gallo, *Mexican Modernity*, 5. One of the cultural revolutionaries Gallo discusses in this book is Italian-born photographer Tina Modotti. Though Modotti did act in US silent films before she arrived in Mexico, I have found no evidence of her participation in silent film production activities in Mexico. Certainly Modotti's thematic and aesthetic fascinations – *mexicanidad,* gender, and modernity among them – overlap with the concerns of this dissertation and suggest a promising direction for future research.

modernity. Indigenismo was simply a different presentation of the same modern condition.

One of the features of Mexican modernity that was celebrated as "qualitatively different" from even recent Mexican history was the promised integration of Mexico as an equal on par with the world's most developed nations.[79] At the time, a Europeanized version of modernity did in fact seem immediately accessible in Latin America, to such a degree that European immigrants flocked to the region to "hacerse la America" - that is, to pursue the material bounty of burgeoning consumer capitalism in the New World.[80] However, the lingering hold of colonialism was at odds with the nation's perception of itself as a rising global power, and the passage of time further proved reality to be different from the ideal. The relatively faster ascendance of industrial capitalism in Europe exacerbated the center-periphery relationship established by colonialism, with enduring dependency as the result.[81] Persistent dependency, however, should not be taken to suggest that Mexico failed to gain purchase of modernity. Rather, this inequality was a feature of modernity as defined by the West, which conceived of itself "precisely through its difference from (and in some cases colonization of) the non-

[79] "La Raza Cosmica" goes a step farther and posits that Mexico is the vanguard of a new, utopian world order based on the racial mixing of its population. Vasconcelos, Jose. "The Cosmic Race." In *The Mexico Reader: History, Culture, Politics*, edited by Gilbert M Joseph and Timothy J Henderson, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), 15-19.

[80] Arturo Andrés Roig. "Xiv La 'Conciencia Americana' Y Su 'Experencia De Ruptura.'" In *Teoría Y Crítica Del Pensamiento Latinoamericano*. (Mexico: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1981)

[81] Joanne Hershfield, *Imagining the Chica Moderna*, 12. As Walter Mignolio argues, modernity and coloniality are two sides of the same coin. "Progress, development and growth are key words of the rhetoric of modernity," he writes, "But more often than not, these words hide the logic of coloniality, the logic that produce and reproduce un-justices covered up by the illusory promises of the rhetoric of modernity…" See *Coloniality: The Past and Present of Global Injustice*. http://waltermignolo.com/coloniality-the-past-and-present-of-global-unjustice/ Nov 21, 2012.

modern." As Aaron Gerow explains, this self-serving oppositional relationship *seemingly* precludes the non-West from achieving the "subject position of modernity"; in this view, societies on the periphery can, at best, ride the wake of Western innovation to achieve technological modernization.[82] Significantly, however, the West's construction of modernity is not the same as the thing itself; modernity is in fact a site of conflict. It follows that modernity is not an essence that a given society achieves or does not, instead, it is a range of "real, multiple, and sometimes conflicting possibilities, none more 'truly modern' than the others, that were narrowed down through struggles, particularly in the discursive sphere."[83]

Mexicans living through the early twentieth century were not naïve of modernity's contradictions; and if anything, the discursive battle to define "modern" Mexico shows an acute preoccupation with this very problem. The conflicts of defining Mexican modernity were multiple and seen as coterminous with the definition of Mexican identity: if there was to be a national identity, it was impossible for it to be other than modern. Critics have highlighted the ways sexism and elitism guided the construction of postrevolutionary mexicanidad, thereby ensuring that the "new" version of Mexican pride served the social order that predated the revolution. However, as Charles Ramírez Berg explains, these critiques are the product of modern historiography's confusion of masculine and elite activity with the raw material of history. Too often, conventional accounts fail to consider how other constituencies plotted the course of mexicanidad – though the uneven power dynamics of this process also must be borne

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[82] Aaron Andrew Gerow, *Visions of Japanese Modernity: Articulations of Cinema, Nation, and Spectatorship, 1895-1925*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), 38. Though the 'non-modern' in Gerow's study is Japan, Gerow's insights are readily applicable to the Latin American context once one accounts for the colonial legacy and perpetually uneven power dynamic between the West and the global south.

[83] Ibid 37-38.

in mind. [84] In the immediate postrevolution era, the imperative to celebrate the national over the foreign, and the drive to elevate long-neglected aspects of local (often indigenous) culture were radical transformations in their own right, and to adequately appraise the role of women (or Indians, or any other marginalized group) in this transformation, one must adopt as a frame of reference the potentially liberating indeterminacy of the 1920s, when "the Mexican state was a chaotic, multiauthored work in progress."[85] Such a historical perspective recognizes the inequity that defines Mexican gender relations to this day, without reifying the contingent (and therefore mutable) social conditions that have structured that disparity over time.

Cine Silente Mexicano

The twentieth century can be distinguished by its broad affinity for the visual, and in Mexico the visual realm assumed central importance in both modernization and the historicization of revolutionary ideals.[86] From the first projection of motion pictures at 9 Plateros Street (now Madero Avenue) in Mexico City in August 1896, cinema attracted the attention of statesmen, entrepreneurs, and audiences alike.[87] Dictator Porfirio Díaz was fond of mounting spectacular displays of his own power, and "quick to take advantage of the new visual technologies of film and photography to document that power" – a practice that led historian

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[84] Charles Ramirez Berg, "Figueroa's Skies and Oblique Perspective." *Spectator* 13 no 1 (2002): 24-41.

[85] Mary Kay Vaughan, "Introduction: Pancho Villa, the Daughters of Mary, and the Modern Woman: Gender in the Long Mexican Revolution," in *Sex In Revolution,* 27.

[86] John Mraz*, Looking for Mexico: Modern Visual Culture and National Identity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009).

[87] Carl Mora, *Mexican Cinema,* 6. The popularity and potentially broad reach of cinema surely appealed to *cultural caudillo* Jose Vasconcelos, who tried his hand at film production prior to assuming his role as the architect of the Mexican state's nationalistic cultural enterprise.

Federico Dávalos Orozco to refer to Díaz as the first "star" of Mexican cinema.[88] As early as 1906, German immigrant Jacob Granat constructed Mexico City's first purpose-built movie theater, the Salón Rojo, a three-screen venue that also boasted the city's first electric escalators, a dance hall, a restaurant, and an upstairs balcony that wrapped around the facility that allowed patrons a novel vantage point to see and be seen by their fellow citizens [figure 4].[89] The Salón Rojo would remain a fixture of the Mexican film exhibition circuit throughout the silent era and beyond, but the pictures shown there changed considerably: from documentaries about the revolution, to European narratives and then Hollywood features, Mexican audiences' appetite for cinema was undiminished by the revolutionary conflict and only grew in the postrevolution period. Journalists routinely deployed loanwords and neologisms to describe cinema (for example, *película*r, a verb concocted from the noun for movie, *película*), which served to rhetorically emphasize the newness of motion pictures – a characteristic that could be used to elevate or denigrate cinema, depending upon the context.

But of course, cinema is not only a social or artistic phenomenon; it is also an economic commodity – and any interrogation of the successes, failures, and influences of a given film industry will require consideration of structuring economic conditions. Indeed, in the eyes of the Mexican government, cinema was initially seen only as a money-making diversion: "operas,

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[88] Andrea Noble, *Mexican National Cinema*, 27; Federico Dávalos Orozco, *Albores Del Cine Mexicano*. (Mexico City: Clio, 1996), 14.

[89] Jacob Granat was an entrepreneur who pursued multiple ventures, including the sale of Mexican curios and the production of Mexican postcards. Granat, a native of what is now Ukraine, eventually sold his theater holdings in Mexico City and returned to Europe, where he was murdered by the Nazi regime in a concentration camp. See Alicia Gojman Goldberg, (2010). "Los inmigrantes judíos frente a la Revolución Mexicana". *XIII Reunión de Historiadores De México, Estados Unidos y Canadá* México - Santiago de Querétaro.

dramas, and ballet were classified as 'cultural shows,' zarzuela, revue, and the cinematograph were defined as 'pure diversion,' entertainment aimed at ticket-purchasing consumers who paid for the right to enter with the aim of 'distracting and amusing themselves.'"[90] Film scholars conventionally identify three phases in the manufacture of films and the extraction of profit from those films: production (in which the movie is conceived, filmed, and assembled), distribution (in which rights to project the finished film text are contracted to exhibitors), and exhibition (in which films are shown for a paying audience). The structure of the Mexican film industry changed considerably over the years 1917-1931, but the general trend was toward greater North American control of images projected on Mexican screens, and well as augmented North American influence on distribution and exhibition.[91]

Film Production

Narrative feature film production was forestalled by the instability of the revolution, but in 1917, "in spite of grave domestic and international problems, the epic phase of the revolution was winding down," which allowed for the establishment of a fledgling film industry.[92] Mexican filmmakers eagerly embraced narrative film production with an eye toward reforming Mexico's image abroad, and fourteen narrative features were made in 1917 alone. While foreign audiences

[90] Paulina Suárez-Hesketh,"The Frivolous Scene: Cosmopolitan Amusements in Mexico City's 1920s." *Global South* 9, no. 2 (2015): 103-30.

[91] Throughout this dissertation, I use the term "film industry" to refer to the constellation of business interests surrounding the production, distribution, and exhibition of motion pictures in Mexico City. This is distinct from the *mode of production* of films during the period 1917-1931, which was artisanal rather than industrial (industrial here implying a level of capitalization, standardization, and scale not achieved in Mexico until the 1930s).

[92] Carl Mora, *Mexican Cinema*, 22. Locally-produced films that delivered images of the revolution to Mexican audiences included the feature-length *Sangre Hermana* (Blood of Brothers, 1914) and short items documenting various battles.

had been fascinated by the violence of the revolution, North American-manufactured documentaries and narrative films often played into the presumed barbarism and backwardness of Mexicans [figure 5]. Efforts to develop a domestic film industry in Mexico pushed back against the nation's unfavorable international image, and critics and filmmakers alike sought to infuse the Mexican cinema with innovations from European and Hollywood productions, which were widely accepted as the exemplars of cinematic excellence. Filmmakers in Mexico City thus sought 'to remind the world that they ha[d] not been absent in the process of shaping the course of Western civilization,"– a task perpetually imposed upon Mexican intellectuals and artists, as Claudio Lomnitz observes. [93] When a new Mexico City motion picture production studio, Estudios Camus, held its grand opening celebration on November 17, 1920, attendees including Emma Padilla and José Vasconcelos (then Rector of the National Autonomous University of Mexico) heard studio head Germán Camus expound upon the imminent achievements of his enterprise. Camus told the crowd that his films would show "the importance and true value of Mexico to foreigners."[94] However, Camus' optimistic, patriotic rhetoric did not prove prophetic. His studio closed in 1921, ending the brief "Golden Age Of Mexican silent cinema."[95]

This was in part because Mexican films arrived late to a crowded field already populated by European and American features, but more importantly, because Mexican filmmakers failed to secure access to the broad, international distribution channels that would ultimately make

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[93] Claudio Lomnitz, *Deep Mexico, Silent Mexico*, 235.

[94] Aurelio de los Reyes. *Cine Y Sociedad En México 1886-1930. Bajo El Cielo De México. Volumen II (1920-1924),* (Mexico City: UNAM and Cineteca Nacional, 1993) 50.

[95] Antonia Del Rey, *El Cine Mudo Mexicano: Tribulaciones De Una Industria Emergente.* (Valencia: Ediciones Episteme, 1996) 8; and Emilio García Riera, Breve Historia Del Cine Mexicano, 43.

Hollywood a world-dominant industry. Without a reliable audience, and relying on foreign manufacturers for all filmmaking technologies (from cameras to film), the high expense of film production became unfinanceable, and thus untenable.[96] Following the optimistic "boom" in Mexican production between 1917 and 1921, the number of films produced annually declined precipitously – only two nationally-produced narrative features premiered each year in 1928 and 1929, and none reached Mexican screens in 1930. In the pages to follow, essential to bear in mind that Mexican film production failed to establish itself not based on the quality of its products, but because of its status on the periphery of an already developed international motion-picture market. An integrated, industrial national cinema with robust production and reliable distribution and exhibition did not begin to crystallize until the 1930s. In that decade, the Mexican state began to take a more direct role in the promotion of cinema as a vehicle for national values, and Mexico enjoyed the cooperation of the United States in securing exclusive access to international markets.[97]

Distribution and Exhibition

In the prerevolution era, and continuing through the first few years of the postrevolution era, Mexican film distribution and exhibition were in the hands of independent local business ventures. These two prongs of the film industry were often held in common, for example, Jacob Granat owned the Salón Rojo and Granat Bros. distribution, which distributed Fox and Goldwyn films. However, by the mid-1920s, much of this power had been transferred to foreign

[96] Paulo Antonio Paranaguá, "Ten Reasons to Love or Hate Mexican Cinema." *Mexican Cinema* (1995): 1-13, 1.

[97] The state's subsidization of the new CLASA movie studio complex (Cinematografico Latino Americana, SA) in 1935 was a major step. For succinct history of Mexican cinema's industrial contexts, see Andrea Noble, *Mexican National Cinema*, 14.

companies via newly-established branch offices in Mexico City.[98] Hollywood branch offices extended their influence by establishing exclusive relationships with Mexican exhibitors. The Cine Olimpia circuit screened Paramount films, and Universal rented the Cine San Hipólito to exclusively exhibit its films beginning in the early 1920s.[99] These trends expanded over the late silent and early sound era: Columbia established a branch office in Mexico City in 1928, and in 1934, the Teatro Iris came under the control of Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer. One might decry the cultural imperialism apparent in these moves, but the involvement of North American capital and corporations was often courted by Mexican businesspeople who hoped to increase their competitiveness via exclusive exhibition rights, or the infusion of capital needed to expand their theatrical holdings. Jacob Granat again provides an instructive example. In the 1920s, he sought to be "the only cinema owner in the city," which led him to court foreign investment to aggressively expand his theatrical holdings (holdings which would eventually become the property of those same American investors).[100]

With so much Hollywood influence, the early dream of a self-sustaining Mexican film industry seemed increasingly unlikely. However, as Laura Isabel Serna has shown, postrevolution Mexican film exhibition was framed in explicitly nationalist terms, which allowed Mexican businessmen, statesmen, and audiences to frame their consumption of foreign films as a

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[98] Laura Isabel Serna*, Making Cinelandia*, 35.

[99] The Cine Olimpia was built in 1919 by Germán Camus, who entered the film business as a distributor of European films and also tried his hand at film production. That same year, Camus sold the Olimpia to the Granat brothers. Granat in turn formed a corporation with two American investors, who took control of the property when Granat fled Mexico under mysterious circumstances. Ibid, 47, and Aurelio de los Reyes, *Cine y Sociedad II*, 307.

[100] Aurelio de los Reyes, *Cine y Sociedad II*, 48.

patriotic act.[101] Technologically and architecturally modern theaters were celebrated as emblematic of the city's progress, and film exhibition was incorporated into the celebration of national holidays. This clarifies how, even as Mexican film production ground almost to a halt in the late 1920s, a distinctively Mexican film culture – one with the power to prescribe norms of gendered behavior and appearance – persisted. Ultimately, the postrevolution era of Mexican cinema was a historical moment in which multiple determinant forces coincided: Mexican filmmakers shifted their focus from documentaries to narrative fictions; the U.S. film industry became a global force as its films were increasingly replacing European films in Mexicans' media diets; and Hollywood distributors began to establish their hold on the Mexican market, which those distributors saw as a gateway to potentially handsome profits throughout Latin America.[102]

The shape of the Mexican silent film industry and its attendant film culture defy simple categorization. Foreign films were criticized for their denigrating representations of Mexicans and their ill effects on Mexican women, but foreign pictures were also sought-after by audiences and exhibitors who often understood their consumption of motion pictures within a nationalist paradigm. Mexican films foregrounded the fact that they were nationally produced, but these same films borrowed liberally from foreign genres and performance styles that were popular with local audiences, including Italian diva films and North American action serials. The incongruities that characterized the Mexican silent cinema cannot be explained away. Instead,

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[101] See Laura Isabel Serna, *Making Cinelandia.*

[102] Laura Isabel Serna, *Making Cinelandia,* 45-46. For an analysis of the way the US film industry courted Latin American audiences through its preferential treatment of Mexico in the WWII era, see Tamara L. Falicov, "Hollywood's Rogue Neighbor: The Argentine Film Industry during the Good Neighbor Policy, 1939–1945."*The Americas* 63, no. 2 (2006): 245-260.

the internal contradictions of the cinema (and Mexican responses to it) must be mined to understand how cinema played into the push and pull of Mexico's postrevolutionary cultural project, and how this interfaced with debates about the character of Mexican femininity in the postrevolution era.

Method

The ongoing public conversation regarding the 'proper' place and function of cinema in postrevolution Mexico included a variety of voices, including intellectuals, artists, clergy, state agents, political activists, and private citizens. The way these voices re-articulated the international cinematic phenomenon for the Mexican national context served to define the meaning of cinema, and simultaneously helped to define the identities of the historical agents addressed by cinematic discourses and the modern culture they inhabited. This is to say that discourse assumed a central role in guiding both the direction of motion pictures in Mexico and the modernization of gender norms for the postrevolutionary era – but to date, this discourse has been inadequately researched. Existing histories of Mexican cinema instead tend to pursue textual or auteurist analysis, even to the exclusion of other aspects of film culture that were equally fundamental to the creation of the cinematic experience (including spectatorship and industrial structures). A study extending the prevailing textual/auteurist lines of inquiry into the silent era would be not be without merit, but in the particular case of Mexican *silent* cinema, there just are not enough films surviving to carry out an adequate study of film style before 1931 (an unfortunate situation which in part helps to explain why Mexican silent film has been an under-explored area of research). However, my own decision to focus primarily (though not exclusively) on the discursive elaboration of postrevolution film culture is a matter of choice as much as necessity. Even if a cache of Mexican silent films were to be discovered tomorrow, an

inquiry into the ways film culture and femininity were elaborated through discussion and debate would still be essential, for it is discourse that bridges the divide between the space of the screen and the social world. The loss of films from the Mexican silent age is hardly cause for celebration, but the silver lining is that, in the absence of discreet aesthetic objects to analyze, we are forced to anchor our work in traces of the past that reveal how movies were made, consumed, understood, and discussed – in short, how they became meaningful.

Following Michel Foucault, I understand discourse as not a mere reflection or product of the social world, but instead, as an essentially *productive* phenomenon. Discourse produces relationships of power and knowledge that organize both individual identities (herein feminine identities are the central concern) and the social world (for this study, Mexico at the outset of modernity). To frame the issue in terms of the discipline of film and media studies, discourse can be understood as what film historians Robert Allen and Douglas Gomery call a "generative mechanism" – a causal structure or mechanism that can help to describe *why* observable historical phenomena occur as they do. Foucault's notion of a 'discourse' encompasses writing, speech, and signs which act as "practices that systemically form the objects of which they speak."[103] The definition of discourse I employ here is expanded to allow for the consideration of urban geography, architecture, and visual culture as they inflected and materially manifested ideas about cinema and femininity articulated in discourse.[104] My consideration of these extra-discursive elements also recognizes Allen and Gomery's provision that generative mechanisms

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[103] Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language,* trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Pantheon, 1972), 49.

[104] My approach to the study of Mexican silent film culture is indebted to Aaron Andrew Gerow's illuminating *Visions of Japanese Modernity,* which opened my eyes to the power of discourse not as evidence of some lost object which would constitute the 'true' object of analysis, but rather, as a proper object of inquiry in its own right.

do not operate in isolation; often, multiple generative mechanisms operate simultaneously and unevenly, which should lead historians to "understand these mechanisms in their complexity," as they relate to the facts of the past.[105] However, I hope to honor Foucault's innovations through my own attempt to understand how the broad field of cinematic discourse contained multiple competing and contradictory perspectives that offered a range of identities and opportunities for resistance, and even as they exercised the power to discipline and organize social experience.[106]

To use the oft-cited parable of the blind men and the elephant as a metaphor for my own work, my method centers discourse not in an attempt to describe the 'elephant' (which is now absent, and impossible to satisfyingly reconstruct from fragmented perceptions) but instead to consider statements about the 'elephant' as worthy of study in their own right, precisely for the way such claims to truth and knowledge reveal operations of power and resistance over the course of historical stasis and change. Though the story of cinematic discourse in postrevolution Mexico City awaits full elaboration, preceding studies of Mexican sound cinema and international silent cinema provide guidance on how to structure a study like the one I propose, and how to gather relevant evidence to support claims about film cultures of the past.

Twenty years ago, Mexican historian Julia Tuñón Pablos argued that the only research program sufficient to address the question "How have Mexican women seen themselves in cinema?" must consider equally women's impact on film from the pre-production phase of filmmaking, to the analysis of the representations on screen, and through to reception of these

[105] Robert Allen and Douglas Gomery, *Film History: Theory and Practice*, 16.

[106] Chris Weedon, Feminist Practice and Poststructuralist Theory, 35.

images by audiences and critics.[107] Despite the innovative approach to film historiography deployed in Tuñón's monograph *Mujeres de luz y sombra en el cine mexicano: la construcción de una imagen, 1939-1952*, no comparable inquiry into the silent era of Mexican cinema has yet appeared – and so my project aims to address this gap in the literature. Tuñón's method is also useful in a study of silent film culture, because it is eminently compatible with the propositions for silent cinema research generated at the FIAF Brighton Conference in 1978.[108] So influential was that event that film historians can now refer simply to "Brighton," when discussing the summit that brought together archivists and historians whose collaboration sparked newfound interest in silent cinema as a distinct mode of filmic practice. One of Brighton's most significant contributions to the study of silent cinema was its expanded notion of what counts as relevant historical evidence and inquiry for film scholars. Like Tuñón, Brighton scholars considered archival documents about the production and reception of cinema, as well as cinema texts themselves. As a result, scholars associated with the Brighton school illuminated paths not taken when cinema became a profit- and narrative- driven medium. Brighton also described how modernity - with cinema as its emblem - altered human experience of the world. However, while cinema from its earliest iterations was a global phenomenon, Brighton school research privileged

[107] Julia Tuñón Pablos, *Mujeres de luz y sombra en el cine mexicano: la construcción de una imagen, 1939-1952.* (Mexico D.F.: El Colegio de México y el Instituto Mexicano de Cinematografía IMCINE, 1998).

[108] The intellectual fruit borne of this moment in film history is anthologized in Thomas Elsaesser and Adam Barker, eds. *Early Cinema: Space, Frame, Narrative.* (London, British Film Institute, 1990).

American and European cinemas, thereby failing to consider the way the uneven experience of modernity in the global south and elsewhere pertained to the spread of cinema.[109]

As an extension of and modification to seminal research on European and North American silent cinemas, recent research on Latin American silent cinemas capitalizes upon newly-digitized resources and favorable trends in the discipline of film history to pose questions previously unasked, and to use evidence previously unexamined or unavailable to capture a portrait of the early cinema landscape in Latin America. This contemporary scholarship destabilizes Eurocentric meditations on the conditions of modernity, and it clarifies how Latin Americans from Mexico to Argentina experienced the cinematic phenomenon in the early twentieth century. The work of Miriam Hansen and Jennifer Bean (on silent-era female spectatorship in various geographic situations), Janet Staiger (on the historical study of reception), Joanne Hershfield (on the representation of womanhood in Mexican sound cinema), Rielle Navitski (on the intersection between state formation, cinema, and violent phenomena of modernity), Laura Isabel Serna (on Hollywood films and postrevolutionary Mexican nationalism), and Charles Ramírez Berg and Paul Schroeder Rodríguez (on the aesthetic parameters of early Mexican cinema as related to domestic concerns and international influences) provide partial templates for my study.[110] Together, the aforementioned works affirm

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[109] As Andrea Cuarterolo notes, Brighton's impact on the study of Latin American cinema was most strongly felt via the improved position of Latin American archives within FIAF itself (UNAM's Manuel Gonzalez Casanova attended as a representative of the Mexican Filmoteca, which was a participating member in conference activities). The theoretical and methodological implications of the conference for the study of Latin American silent cinemas were slower to manifest. Andrea Cuarterolo, "A 40 años de Brighton, 1978. Latinoamérica en el 34th Congreso de la FIAF 'Cinema 1900-1906,'"*Vivomatografías. Revista de estudios sobre precine y cine silente en Latinoamérica* 4 (2018): 312-356.

[110] Miriam Hansen, *Babel and Babylon: Spectatorship in American Silent Film.* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991); Jennifer Bean, Ed. *A Feminist Reader in Early Cinema*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002); Janet Staiger, *Perverse Spectators: The*

the nation- and gender-specific approach to Mexican silent film history I propose is both viable and promising.

And yet, even well-read and well-intentioned scholars of Mexican cinema have minimized and mischaracterized early cinema in the region. Andrea Noble's *Mexican National Cinema,* for example, concludes that "very few narrative films that made a lasting impact were produced prior to the 1930s," and proceeds to a discussion of the sound era without interrogation of what "lasting impact" might mean, or how such influence could be assessed.[111] Noble's work makes no pretext toward comprehensiveness, but the exclusion is nonetheless jarring, especially since the themes that inform Noble's selections include "the quest for modernity, the legacy of the Mexican revolution; the audience, movie theaters, and spectatorship" as well as "representations of indigenous Mexico"– themes that, as this dissertation will show, were formative concerns within the Mexican silent cinema. [112] This is to say that the antecedents of the better-studied and beloved Mexican Golden Age can be found in the Mexican silent era. The real issue is a paucity of scholarship on the silent era, not the silent era's limited relevance to later

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Practices of Film Reception. (New York: New York University Press, 2000); Joanne Hershfield, *Imagining la Chica Moderna*; Rielle Navitski, "Early Film Critics and Fanatical Fans"; Laura Isabel Serna*, Making Cinelandia*; Charles Ramirez Berg "El Autómovil Gris and the Advent of Mexican Classicism." In *Visible Nations: Latin American Cinema and Video*, edited by Chon A. Noriega, 3-32. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000; Paul Schroeder Rodriguez, "Latin American Silent Cinema: Triangulation and the Politics of Criollo Aesthetics." *Latin American Research Review*: 33-58.

[111] Andrea Noble. Mexican National Cinema, 30.

[112] Ibid*,* 3. Noble's work is part of the Routledge "National Cinemas" series. The book delivers on its promise to introduce readers to key debates in the study of Mexican cinema – it is the elective exclusion of silent cinema from these discourses that is problematic. Noble's only other two themes are "melodrama, masculinity, and the patriarchal state," and "the role of the US-Mexico border in the southern cultural imaginary." These themes were apparent in the silent cinema, but are less central to the concerns of this dissertation.

filmic practice. Another significant limitation of the existing literature pertains to gender in particular. In his analysis of early Latin American efforts to strike a balance between local experience and imported aesthetics, Schroeder Rodríguez states that "all of the films of the [silent] period…are androcentric and oftentimes misogynistic… outside of acting, only two women ventured into film production and direction."[113] This is doubly problematic: first, it is inaccurate, and second, it implicitly asserts that cinema was merely an extension of extant patriarchal power structures. The androcentric conception of early Mexican cinema thus fails to engage the messier (and more interesting!) reality of silent cinema culture in the postrevolution era. It is erasure masquerading as critique. Throughout the early years of Mexican national cinema, women appeared on screen, worked in film production, and pioneered the elaboration of film culture – and the centrality of femininity in discourses *within* and *about* cinema culture affirm the importance of both historical women and the symbolic category of 'woman' for the development of the Mexican national cinema. It is undeniable that, in some ways, Mexican silent cinema operated in alignment with established Catholic-patriarchal power structures. But in other areas, cinema exerted a palpably destabilizing influence.

How, then, did cinematic discourses conceive of women as movie spectators, movie producers, and movie characters? How did these discourses interface with Mexican gender ideologies, and how did they affect the development of the Mexican film industry? The three chapters of this dissertation aim to help answer these questions. These chapters cut across distinct but interrelated sites of cinema culture to 1) avoid the oversimplification and continued erasure of feminine interventions in Mexican silent film culture, and 2) to trace the distinct social

[113] Paul Schroeder Rodríguez, "Latin American Silent Cinema: Triangulation and the Politics of Criollo Aesthetics." *Latin American Research Review* 43, no. 3 (2008): 33-58, 39.

implications of the relationship between cinema and gender at various sites of engagement. Consider that the earliest Mexican-produced feature narratives included *La luz* (Vollrath 1917, in which Emma Padilla plays a femme fatale-type character whose betrayal destroys a lovelorn young man) *Alma de sacrificio* (Rosas 1917, in which Derba plays a selfless woman who raises her sister's illegitimate child as her own to ensure her sister's happiness, and whose sacrifice is met with societal contempt), *Fanny o el robo de veinte millones* (Sánchez Valtierra 1921, in which Maria Cozzi plays a daring adventurer in the style of Pearl White), and *En la hacienda* (Vollrath 1921, in which Elena Sánchez Valenzuela plays a vulnerable Indian woman who finds love and safety in the arms of an upstanding Indian man). Though all these films are lost, surviving documentation indicates that their female characters often contradicted prevailing norms of feminine behavior: the women projected on screen were described to be by turns heroic, villainous, and/or sympathetic, depending on the film.[114] The discourses initiated by these films affirm the presence and diversity of women on screen – but more importantly, their documented appeal to female spectators affirms the significance of feminine economic agency in the transformation of Mexican screen culture specifically and society more generally.

The institutions that supported film spectatorship, including movie theaters and film reviews, hailed women as Mexicans and as consumers with a degree of economic and social agency. In so doing, spectatorship opened up public spaces to women – though this liberalization was accompanied by an increased state interest in the regulation of cinemas and public anxiety about cinema's potentially deleterious effects on women (and by extension, Mexican society).

[114] Estimates suggest approximately 100 feature films were made in Mexico, with more than 90 of them lost – see Kimberly Tomadjoglou, "Introduction: The Culture of Mexican Silent Cinema." *Film History* 29(1), 2017; Paulo Antonio Paranaguá, *Mexican Cinema*. (London: British Film Institute and IMCINE, 1995), 70.

Film production opportunities ranging from directing to theater ticket sales offered women the opportunity to participate in the labor force and to directly shape film culture, but above-the-line labor opportunities were preferentially allocated to women of the Mexican upper class. Thus, film production tended to reproduce class boundaries that predated the revolution. Finally, film texts represented a narrow range of feminine types – in many ways, representation was the most socially and politically conservative of the three aspects of film culture that engaged femininity in the postrevolution era. However, the necessity of courting female audiences and competing with international cinemas also meant that Mexican representations of femininity in the form of divas, indigenas, and pelonas challenged certain norms of gendered behavior and appearance (even as they upheld others).

In addition to augmenting knowledge of the Mexican silent era, the three chapters of this dissertation constitute a comparative analysis of three sites of cinematic meaning-making, which illustrates how the often-atomized aspects of the wide-reaching cinematic phenomenon work in concert. Within the discipline of film studies, it has been typical for scholars to view cinema through a particular lens: art, technology, industry, or culture (to choose only the most common examples).[115] Monographs, journal articles, and even academic careers are built upon focused explorations of specific areas within the larger field.[116] These intellectual labors make it possible to view clearly relationships that would be obscured by a more general perspective. At the same time, the interrelationship of different aspects of film production and consumption is where the

[115] Robert C Allen and Douglas Gomery. *Film History: Theory and Practice.* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1985).

[116] For an explication of the institutional and intellectual foundations of the discipline of Film and Media Studies, including paths not taken by the discipline, see Lee Grieveson and Haidee Wasson, *Inventing Film Studies*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008).

power of cinema is least visible and arguably most effective – because cinema is an economic commodity, a form of communication, an artistic medium, and a technological phenomenon, its effects reverberate across social and institutional domains. So, rather than analyzing the representation of women on screen in Mexican cinema; the experience of female moviegoers; or the labor of female stars, directors, and screenwriters in isolation; my approach includes discursive studies of three areas within the larger field of cinema culture – areas that ultimately bleed together in illuminating ways. Accordingly, the definition of cinema culture I employ is broad, encompassing the notions of film as text, film production as a cultural-economic process, and cinemagoing as a social practice. This allows me to consider the varied and sometimes contradictory operations of cinema as both a destabilizing and fortifying force in the elaboration of modern Mexican femininity.

To trace the different ways cinematic discourse inflected notions of femininity in postrevolution Mexico, my approach supports research on film production and consumption with visual analysis of surviving films and fragments, advertisements, and ephemeral images of emergent Mexican modernity. This being the case, my project is both synthetic (as I have gleaned bits of information and threads of causality both foregrounded and footnoted in the work of other scholars) and archival in the broadest sense (in that I have called upon my own field research in the archives of the Cineteca Nacional, the Filmoteca Nacional, and the Hemeroteca Nacional in Mexico City, digital archives including the Lantern Media History database, and film fragments digitized and posted to the internet by state agencies and private corporations alike).[117] I will always lament the pleasures lost in the nitrate fire that decimated the Cineteca

[117] As Rielle Navitski notes, "digital remediation and access (re)produce methodological challenges that are especially thorny in the case of Latin America, where the scarcity of financial resources and the often vexed relationship between cultural institutions and the state have often

Nacional in Mexico City on March 24, 1982, which claimed some 3,300 Mexican features and shorts.[118] However, the wealth of traces left by the past means that the stories of women and Mexican silent film need not go untold.

To the best of my ability, I have endeavored to provide a multi-dimensional historical context in which to situate my analysis of cinematic discourse in postrevolution Mexico City. To this end, I have considered statistics, photographs, postcards, maps, newspapers, novellas, film magazines, advertisements, legislative documents, government reports, and fragments of the films themselves encountered in my own research and brought to scholarly attention by the work of others. With these sources, it becomes possible to interrogate the relationship between cinema and society in ways that are both engaged with the specificity of the motion picture and cognizant of how cinema refracts across dimensions of human experience.

My central preoccupation in the work that follows is the intersection of femininity, nationalism, and modernity staged by Mexican cinema culture, and the periodization aims similarly to account for relevant shifts in each of these domains. In addition to recognizing the arrival of modernity in Mexico in the second decade of the twentieth century, my chosen span of 1917-1931 also reflects the development of silent narrative cinema in Mexico City, and the emergence of new modes of femininity to match the modern age.[119] In Mexico, Serna writes, the

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rendered archival preservation fragmentary and politically fraught." Open access digital archives are favored by Latin American cultural institutions in the name of cultural patrimony, but digital records are also vulnerable to digital obsolescence. "Reconsidering the Archive: Digitization and Latin American Film Historiography," *Cinema Journal* 54, no. 1 (2014): 121-128.

[118] Anthony Slide, *Nitrate Won't Wait: A History of Film Preservation in the United States*, (Jefferson: McFarland, 2000), 15.

[119] Arturo Sotomayor, *México, Donde Nací: Biografía de una Ciudad* (México City: Librería de. M Porrúa, 1968), 295. The notion that Mexico experienced a protracted 19th century that only ended with the coming of revolution is not uncommon, Sotomayor's account is

end of the Mexican revolution was a "watershed" in Mexican film culture, which corresponded to a shift to narrative production, the increasing popularity of Hollywood cinema, and the growing influence of North American capital.[120] The year 1917 marked the end of open warfare, and, symbolically, the authoring of a new government which offered new opportunities for women, as well as the production of the first Mexican narrative feature films. Mexicanists may find my decision to end inquiry in 1931 peculiar. At that time, the *Maximato* had not yet ended, and Cardenas' influential presidency had not yet begun.[121] The effects of the Great Depression were manifest, but not determinant, and by that time, the institutionalization of the revolution was established (most prominently in the 1929 establishment of the Partido Revolucionario Institucional, or PRI), but the government had not yet implemented official supports for the film industry.[122] And yet, 1931 is not an arbitrary line in the sand –the first Mexican-produced sound film, *Santa* (dir. Antonio Moreno), was made that year. The year 1931 is thus where multiple histories of Mexican national cinema proper pick up, in part following the distinction between

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distinctive in that it is both imaginative and grounded in a lifetime of living in and thinking about Mexico City.

[120] Laura Isabel Serna*, Making Cinelandia,* 45-46.

[121] The *Maximato* was a period in which former President Plutarco Elias Calles continued to exert power over Mexican politics following the assassination of Alvaro Obregon. Mexican law prohibited Calles from holding the office of president for two successive terms, so other men were nominally declared "President" of Mexico to finish out the *sexenio*, or six-year presidential term, opened by Obregon's assassination, while Calles exercised authority as the 'jefe maximo.' See Alan Knight, *Counter-revolution and Reconstruction.* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

[122] The party dictatorship of the PRI dominated Mexican political institutions from its establishment in 1929 until the year 2000. This governing coalition courted stability and a more conservative transformation of Mexican politics than its revolutionary rhetoric would suggest.

silent and sound cinema often deployed within the discipline of film and media studies.[123] For example, Emilio García Riera's ambitious series *Historia documental del cine mexicano* begins with the sound era, and Anglophone studies of Mexican film history do similarly (prominent examples include survey texts of Mexican and Latin American cinema by Andrea Noble and John King, respectively).[124] So, the periodization of this study seeks to account for changes that occurred within the practices of Mexican film culture, the social and political context of postrevolution Mexico, and subfields under the umbrella of film history (most notably, historiography and Mexican national cinema).

Conclusion

The story of Mexican silent cinema is in part a story of failures and unfulfilled ambitions. Mexico produced few silent films; most of those are lost. The films that survive seem rustic in comparison to Hollywood features of the same era, and these films have not entered the international canon of silent cinematic art. The production companies founded in Mexico's silent era did not survive to the arrival of sound, and many of the professionals who sought to put Mexican cinema on the map in those first decades have faded into historical obscurity. But despite – or rather, *because* of this –there are important stories to be told about the troubled development of Mexican silent cinema and its role in the elaboration of modern Mexican gender norms. Even such small items as *El Universal*'s interview with Emma Padilla (and *El Nacional*'s

[123] The divide between silent and sound cinema was not as cataclysmic as imagined: Hollywood's interdependent mode of production and the visual grammar were solidified by the late 1910s, and these parameters were not significantly changed by sound technology, nor the breakdown of the Hollywood studio system. See David Bordwell, Janet Staiger, and Kristin Thompson. *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style & Mode of Production to 1960.* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985)

[124] Emilio García Riera, *Historia documental del cine mexicano.* (Mexico City: Consejo Nacional Para la Cultura y las Artes, 1992) and John King, *Magical Reels : A History of Cinema in Latin America*. (London: Verso, 2000)

rebuttal) illustrate how issues of gender (as well as race and class) were at the forefront of the emerging national consciousness in postrevolutionary Mexico. The question of gender remains significant to Mexican filmmakers and scholars of Mexican cinema today, but the foundational period in which the relationship between film and gender was first posited in Mexico leaves the linkage between these conceptual constructs hidden behind the shroud of assumption. My work clarifies the ways in which Mexican women – a group previously overlooked by film historiography but vital to the development of film history – both shaped and were shaped by discourses of femininity and national identity in postrevolutionary Mexico through their engagement with motion pictures.

Chapter 1: Espectadoras

I foreground spectatorship in this study of cinema and Mexican femininity because spectatorship was the mode of cinematic engagement most accessible to the largest number of women in postrevolution Mexico City. Photographs held in the collections of the Hemeroteca Nacional capture mixed-gender cinema audiences comprised of roughly equal numbers of men and women seated side-by-side during the 1920s.These images register the presence of individuals whose names do not appear in historical accounts of Mexican cinema but whose individual contributions to the collective of "the audience" channeled the current of modern Mexican popular culture.[1] Cinemas were located throughout the city center and the surrounding neighborhoods, and a trip to the cinema could cost as little as ten centavos (for reference, a copy of *El Excélsior* cost six centavos).[2] *Cine-Mundial* reported that in 1917 there were only two theaters in the city that had not been outfitted to exhibit films, and by 1925, Mexico City was home to forty-five movie theaters and ten *carpas* (moveable tent shows), for a total seating capacity of 100,000 in a city of approximately 800,000.[3] Moreover, movie advertisements

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[1] These photos depict both an unnamed "popular" venue and the more prestigious Cine Olimpia. Aurelio de los Reyes, *Cine y Sociedad II* 140; 323.

[2] First-run theaters priced tickets from fifty centavos to upwards of two pesos for a premiere event, but entrance to a carpa was considerably cheaper. In fact, trips to the movies were sometimes free (the Mexican government used film as an attraction to draw citizens to attend educational programs) so ten centavos would be the minimum price for a commercial, entertainment oriented cinematic experience. Laura Isabel Serna*, Making Cinelandia.*

[3]Miguel Saucedo, "Crónica de México," *Cine-Mundial,* November 1917 (Vol. II, No. 11), 577. Saucedo reported, "At present only two theaters have not entered the film business, which has little by little won over businessmen." See also Archivo Historico del Distrito Federal, Fondo Diversiones Públicas, Tomo III, número 105, año 1922, quoted in Paulina Suarez-Hesketh, "The Frivolous Scene: Cosmopolitan Amusements in Mexico City's 1920s." *Global South* 9, no. 2 (2015): 108.

strategically designed and positioned to attract the eyes of urban passers-by wove the cinema into the everyday spaces of the city.[4] The prevalence of cinema, and the prevalence of women within its institutions and its images, suggested the medium's capacity to challenge the traditional distinction between the masculine public sphere and the feminine domestic one – a fact not lost in a nation wherein 'woman' constituted a symbol of identity and shared values. This being the case, thinkers from varied fields (including but not limited to entrepreneurs, legislators, and intellectuals) appraised cinema's broad power and attempted to analyze its place in society.

In May 1916, for example, weekly magazine *Revista de Revistas* published an article written by Mexico City eye doctor Rafael Mendoza entitled "Cinema is damaging to the eyes."[5] Mendoza wrote:

> "[T]he cinema, which has enriched many artists and not a few businessmen, is also daily increasing the frequency of ocular illness. Thus, one must know the dangerous aspects of this diversion, for once they are known they can be avoided as much as possible. The principal cause of these illnesses is abuse. It is not uncommon for people who spend long hours in the cinema over a course of successive days to see figures or lights that do not exist. These are symptoms of inflammation and/or irritation of the retina, which can eventually diminish one's ability to see. *So, the first advice is do not frequent the cinema too much.*"[6] (emphasis mine)

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[4] Advertising schemes were varied and inventive. Foirt example, the Rudolph Valentino vehicle *Moran of the Lady Letty* (Melford, 1922) was advertised with placards affixed to taxicabs. See Aurelio de los Reyes, *Cine y Sociedad II,* 182. Filmgoing in general was stimulated through raffles and star recognition contests, among other promotions.

[5] Dr. Mendoza was not the only medical professional to argue the deleterious health effects of cinema. In 1918, one Dr. Cahacon gave a lecture on the potential ocular damages inflicted by motion pictures at the Medical Academy in Mexico City. See Mora, *Mexican Cinema*, 14. That eye doctors were positioned as experts on the cinema speaks to the centrality of the visual experience in modernity. As Ann Friedberg writes in *Window Shopping,* optical research and visual culture boomed simultaneously in the nineteenth century, though which phenomenon produced the other is a matter of historiographic debate (16).

[6] Rafael Mendoza, "El cine daña a los ojos," in Helena Almoina, *Notas Para La Historia Del Cine En México, Tomo 1 (1896-1918),* (Mexico: Filmoteca de la UNAM, 1980), 77-80

Despite the alarmist title and the implicit skepticism toward cinema expressed in the above introduction, Mendoza's article focused primarily on "healthy" ways to watch movies -- perhaps a concession to the fact that cinema was already so entrenched in urban life that no warning would scare audiences away entirely. The article also included hand-drawn illustrations of proper spectatorial bodily alignment, recommendations for the optimal viewing distance as not to fatigue the eyes or neck, and suggestions for the ergonomic design of screening spaces. However, Mendoza's prescriptions were not strictly ocular; he also discussed fashion and nutrition as they pertained to healthful spectatorship. He asserted that "the way one dresses is of certain importance, as clothing that prohibits free circulation and respiration are dangerous in any setting… especially so in the movie theater," and that the excitement of cinema could disrupt the body's "natural digestive cycle," which would cause indigestion and insomnia for viewers who failed to wait 45-60 minutes after eating to go to the movies. In this way, Mendoza characterized cinema as a multi-sensory phenomenon. Moreover, his multifaceted approach to healthy cinema consumption anticipated the range of debates catalyzed by the popularity of motion pictures in the modernizing postrevolutionary nation-state.

But it is the latter half of Mendoza's article that best highlights how gender subtly and pervasively shaped Mexican modernity: Mendoza warned that cinema aggravated heart conditions, problems with the nerves, and melancholy. Mendoza did not explicitly state that *women* were the natural victims of these ill effects, but he did not have to – diagnoses of "nervous problems" and "melancholy" were strongly coded as feminine in early twentieth century Mexico, and miracle cures for these afflictions of the fairer sex were advertised daily in

any publication with a fraction of female readership.[7] Mendoza reasoned that deleterious health effects were the product of both physical process and psychological fancy: the mechanical presentation of flickering light strains the eyes and the nerves, while the emotional content of film stories can upset impressionable viewers. In this way, Mendoza's article underscored how gender unevenly shapes social experience. Certain viewers could employ medical advice to enjoy cinema in a healthful manner, but others (women, children, uneducated minorities) could plausibly and properly be excluded based on their *de facto* susceptibility to harm. Such exclusion was not framed as social discrimination, but rather, as a benevolent extension of patriarchy in defense of the vulnerable.

Mendoza's column closed with advice to smooth the jarring transition from screening room to city street – a presumably neuter suggestion that also had gendered implications. Mendoza recommended moviegoers gradually ease themselves back into the "real" world by waiting in the lobby, alternately opening and closing one eye and then the other, and finally, by exiting the theater building carefully "as not to jolt one's body with the currents and sounds of the world outside."[8] Healthful cinematic enjoyment, then, mandated that spectators linger in the social space of the lobby, where individuals could move about with relative freedom – even across gender lines. Here, Mendoza's writing also reveals how cinema was imagined as somehow separate from the materiality of the world and yet tangibly integrated with viewers'

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[7] Lya Yaneth Fuentes Vásquez, "Representaciones De Los Cuerpos Femenino Y Masculino, Salud Y Enfermidad. Una Revision De Los Anuncios Publicos Del Excélsior (1920-1990)." *La Ventana* 16 (2002): 187-220, 219. http://www.redalyc.org/html/884/88432175009/ Through content analysis of advertisements for health products in *Excélsior* from 1920 to 1990, Fuentes Vásquez shows how conditions relating to perceived fragility were strongly feminized, including delicate nerves, melancholy, and susceptibility to delusion.

[8] Rafael Mendoza, "El cine daña," in Helena Almoina, *Notas Tomo 1,* 80.

experience of that world. His viewpoint presumes a relationship between extra-theatrical behaviors and the pleasures of moviegoing, and by extension, foreshadows the tension between individual agency (in advice for how viewers can take their health into their own hands) and social imperatives (in the assertion that theater owners are responsible for maintaining good ventilation, and it is the government's job to regulate smoking in theaters). In the years following Mendoza's wide-ranging advisories, the elaboration of revolutionary cultural dogma and the spread of cosmopolitan modernity would bring questions of gender, public/private life, and individual/social dynamics to the fore again and again. Such questions were never politically- or gender- neutral. State efforts to modernize Mexico and to develop a cohesive sense of national identity operated cognizant of the fact that modernization entailed unique challenges in the management of gendered social hierarchies. To that end, the state enacted measures to contain the scope of these changes – but even so, state strategy was insufficient to predict or constrain all the ways in which new spaces like cinemas and new experiences like consumer capitalism would work in tandem to expand women's participation in the daily life of the nation-state.

With the above-detailed considerations in mind, this first chapter traces debates about femininity that convened at the site of motion picture consumption, as well as how cinema spectatorship was described as the facilitator of new modes of social experience for women in Mexico City.[9] Inherent within these larger concerns are more mundane questions: Where were theaters located? What did a trip to the movie cost? How did the space inside the theater construct the audience? Because these questions are focused on the process of consumption

[9] In remote locales, itinerant showmen were known to travel with their gear on burros to exhibit films in towns not reachable by road, creating makeshift theaters in corrals when no other suitable space was available. See Elissa J Rashkin "Una Opalescente Claridad De Celuloide: El Estridentismo Y El Cine," *Ulua* 12 (2008): 54 https://cdigital.uv.mx/handle/123456789/9573

rather than the specificity of the thing consumed, they apply to *all* cinematic products screened in Mexico City whether imported or locally-produced. That women were drawn to European and American movies as well as Mexican films does not nullify the national or gender identities that women brought to the theater, nor can the origin of the film projected on screen override the specificity of the space (geographic and temporal) in which the film was consumed.

Theorizing Historical Spectators

The relatively small number of silent films made in Mexico dictated that representations of femininity on screen and opportunities for women to make films were necessarily limited in number, if not in influence. By contrast, the opportunity to engage cinema as a member of the audience was broadly inclusive across gender, class, and racial lines. While not every moviegoer could afford a seat in the *luneta* of the Salón Rojo for a premiere, virtually every capitalino would have had exposure to cinema: the city's expansive and efficient streetcar system serviced 280,000 patrons per day, and its lines provided direct access to a range of cinemas at different price points throughout the city center [figure 6].[10] The low barrier to entry into the productive class of spectatorship might seem to minimize the power of spectators, but I argue otherwise: spectatorship effected social transformation by the scale and scope of the (female) audience.

My thinking here is influenced by film historian Miriam Hansen, whose account of female spectatorship in Hollywood silent cinema captures the opening of the United States' public sphere to women alongside the simultaneous liberalization and commodification of

[10] Streetcar use statistic from Georg Leidenberger, "Huelgas tranviarias y el orden urbano en la Ciudad de México, 1911 a 1925", in *Historias. Revista de la Dirección de Estudios Históricos (INAH)*, 56 (2003): 43; See also *Mexico Tramways Company: Lines and Properties in Mexico City.* New York: Rand McNally and Company, 1910 (Library of Congress) and map of Mexico City movie theaters circa 1923 in Laura Isabel Serna*, Making Cinelandia,* 60.

feminine sexuality.[11] Much of Hansen's account relies on the novelty of Rudolph Valentino as a male sex symbol marketed to a female audience: for Hansen, Valentino films undermine the presumed masculine bent of visual pleasure while placing the male protagonist in the conventionally feminine position of erotic object. Hansen thus provides an opening for research centered on female spectatorial agency, but her model also poses limitations for my own project. Though feminine sexuality cannot be eliminated from discussions of modernity in general and cinema in particular, (normative, hetero) sexuality cannot fully account for the enthusiastic reception of varied cinematic products by audiences comprised largely of women.[12] Other scholars have highlighted the special type of relationship that "women's pictures" established with gendered audiences. [13] Building on semiotic and psychoanalytic paradigms, this scholarship has interrogated film language to illuminate the possibilities of filmic representation unbound from the masculine perspective. However, I do not address the gendered structure of filmic language in silent-era Mexico, in part because an argument focused on modes of address (how movies are constructed to communicate meaningful content to viewers) presumes the prevalence of the Hollywood filmmaking model as coterminous with the prevalence of a masculinized

[11] See Miriam Hansen, "Pleasure, Ambivalence, Identification: Valentino and Female Spectatorship." *Cinema Journal* 25 no 4 (1986): 6-31 and *Babel and Babylon: Spectatorship in American Silent Film*. (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1991)

[12] Queer readings of films and queer theorization of cinema-spectator relationships have opened up the cinematic cannon to new interpretation while creating new space for contemporary creators to express their subjectivities. See David William Foster, *Queer Issues in Contemporary Latin American Cinema*. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2009). Similar work on Latin American silent cinema would be a welcome addition to the literature.

[13] See, for example, Mary Ann Doane. *The Desire to Desire: Women's Films of the 1940s* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987).

worldview, without recourse to the localized vagaries of reception.[14] Rather, my concern is with the historical development of film audiences. If cinema was taken to stand for both transnational modernity and national self-definition, how were Mexico's cinematic institutions discursively gendered, and what social and economic opportunities were afforded to female spectators as a result? [15]

Unfortunately, the audience remains an under-interrogated aspect of Latin American silent cinema history, and Mexico is no exception. No theoretical paradigm exists for conceptualizing historical audiences in Latin America, and perhaps such a project would be untenable: grand theory has proven itself unable to account for the diversity of communities and cinematic experiences possible across spaces and time.[16] Nonetheless, a theoretically-informed study of historical audiences and the receptive positions available to them is necessary to avoid casting anachronistic desires onto past human agents, and for asking the questions that clarify the possibilities and limitations circumscribed by historical forces. For this I turn to Janet Staiger, who asserts that contextual factors are more useful than textual ones for understanding how past audiences made sense of their cinematic experiences.[17] Her notion of "perverse spectators" is open to – and indeed designed for – the kinds of unruly human agents not accounted for by the

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[14] For an articulation of the patriarchal structuring of looking relations in cinema, see the seminal essay by Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure in Narrative Cinema," in *Feminisms: An anthology of literary theory and criticism,* ed. Robyn Warhol and Diane Herndl (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1997): 438-48.

[15] 'Transnational' refers to set of economic, sociopolitical, cultural, and interpersonal forces that link states, institutions, and people across geographic and political boundaries.

[16] For a grounded, longitudinal discussion of cinema spectatorship in Mexico, see Ana Rosas Mantecón, "Un Siglo De Ir Al Cine En Mexico: Los Cambiantes Modos De Estar Juntos," in *Nuevo Texto Crítico* 28 no 51 (2015).

[17] Janet Staiger, *Perverse Spectators,* 30.

marketing offices of Hollywood studios or the default masculine paradigm of spectator theory. Moreover, while classical spectator theory describes the women on screen as objects of sexual desire for the [default male] spectator, this paradigm fails to account for salient extra-textual conditions captured in Staiger's approach – even when those conditions could support the contention that cinema has tended to objectify women. Consider that, when the Fox Studios feature *Una hija de los dioses (A Daughter of the Gods,* dir. Herbert Brenon) received its Mexico City premiere in 1918, the Salón Rojo ran a promotion with a prize of 100 pesos – a reward available to any and all female patrons whose physical measurements matched exactly the "perfection" embodied by the movie's star, Australian swimming sensation Annette Kellerman (whose nude scenes in the film were infamous, but not specifically mentioned in the advertising copy). To this end, in lieu of imagery from the film, the ad featured a printed measuring tape with markers indicating the size of "Miss Kellerman's" body parts, including her wrists, neck, head, thighs, waist, chest, and hips. The ad thus encouraged female spectators to literally measure themselves against the metric of the modern movie star, while also suggesting to male patrons that shapely women would be on display on screen and seated in the theater.[18]

In fact, the entirety of the Mexican viewing audience is best understood as "perverse," in that these spectators brought to the cinema a set of cultural identities and decoding tools unique to their geographic, temporal, and social positions. Perverse spectators do not do what is expected – that is, they do not necessarily look for the narrative coherence or verisimilitude that critics and theorists analyze so earnestly. Sometimes, as was the case in Mexico City's working-class Cines Garibaldi, Buen Tono, and Monte Carlo, audience members engaged with each other, musical accompanists, and the screen so that "the activities of the audience competed with the narrative

[18] Advertisement printed in *El Pueblo,* February 2, 1918, pg 6.

on the screen."[19] And, as Staiger explains, even those spectators who do focus on the film itself autonomously hierarchize cinematic elements according to their own desires.[20] Consider, for example, the Mexican silent film *El tren fantasma* (García Moreno, 1926). The film boasts train robberies, bullfights, and chases as well as picturesque scenes of the Mexican countryside, a romantic subplot, and stylish pelonas. A sales pitch might say this movie has "something for everyone!" and it would be wise to take that cliché literally to recognize that what that "something" is will vary by individual and by instance of viewing. Where silent cinema is concerned, there is another contingency to bear in mind: analyses that center filmic mode of address speak only to the content of a complete film print in pristine condition. As Richard Abel explains, photographic moving images "cannot be experienced without progressively damaging them," which means that the longer a film remained on the exhibition circuit, the more likely it is be to accrue distracting damage (such as tearing, shrinkage, or excised frames) that can shape the viewing experience in unpredictable ways.[21] While film analysis remains a valuable tool for

[19] Laura Isabel Serna*, Making Cinelandia,* 79. Middle-class inspectors working for the Department of Public Diversions reported that cinema spectators kicked seats, whistled, laughed loudly, clapped, and shouted. While the inspectors' class position led them to emphasize the perceived deficiencies of such behavior, accounts from the individuals in question are unavailable.

[20] Janet Staiger, *Perverse Spectators*, 39.

[21] Richard Abel, *Encyclopedia of Early Cinema.* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), 531. Enrique Vigle, "How the Motion Picture Theater is Operated in Mexico," *Exhibitor's Trade Review*, (New York, Exhibitor's trade review, Inc.) April 25 1925, 52. The trade publication advised readers that film import duties were extremely high, which led distributors to order as few prints as possible and to exhibit those as widely as possible. In the Mexican context, David Wood has considered how the reconstruction of films from unordered footage is problematized by the potentially conflicting priorities of contemporary film preservationists. See David M. J. Wood, "Recuperar lo efímero: Restauración del cine mudo en México." In *El patrimonio de los siglos XX y XXI*, Louise Noelle, ed. (Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2011.), 125-57.

the cinema scholar, its limitations can be at least partially addressed through consideration of film exhibition and reception.

As an account of historical film spectatorship (a product of exhibition and reception), much of what follows is necessarily speculative. In the absence of direct, specific, and/or quantitative evidence of the (female) audience, I have endeavored to establish a robust context to support the plausibility and probability of the history I narrate – and indeed, evidentiary limitations dictate that the full history of women in Mexican silent cinema remains, at least in part, beyond the realm of provability. My work thus employs deductive reasoning and informed extrapolation based on available traces of the past. To cite but one example, documents that affirm the demographics of streetcar use during the postrevolution era are, to my knowledge, nonexistent. However, I *do* have access to newspapers and travelogues that describe the utilization of public transport in modernizing Mexico City. In the travelogue *Six Months in Mexico,* American journalist Nellie Bly reported that men and women rode Mexico City streetcars together, and that male passengers smoked as much as they liked within the confines of the car, leading women to stand out on the platform for fresh air.[22] Later, during a streetcar workers' strike, the newspaper *El Imparcial* recounted how women in elegant hats were compelled to ride mule-drawn carts to get around the city while the streetcars stagnated – a sight so out of the ordinary that it merited notice.[23] These accounts, in turn, suggests that at least some women in postrevolution Mexico City enjoyed a level of mobility and visibility within the urban space. From this, it is not implausible to suggest that a visit to the cinema was among the many

[22] Nellie Bly, *Six months in Mexico*. (New York: American Publishers Corporation, 1888), 180-181.

[23] *El Imparcial*, 4 July and 6 July 1911, quoted in Leidenberger, "Huelgas Tranvias," 47.

possible errands completed by streetcar-riding women. Significantly, as this example illustrates, mine is an imaginative task -- and I hold that imagination is an essential component of any historian's toolkit. To imagine the past is to conceive of possibility: the possibility of presents not realized, and the possibility that engaged human agents can shape the trajectory of history, just as engaged spectators actively shape the meanings of the images they see on screen.

This caveat borne in mind, Staiger emphasizes that modes of address and modes of exhibition (the latter referring to the vagaries of film framing, programming, and projection) are useful but inadequate considerations to understand modes of reception – that is, how audiences ascribe meaning to their cinematic experiences. She also emphasizes that every period of history in every place hosts several modes of cinematic address, several modes of exhibition, and several modes of reception – often simultaneously, thereby offering individual spectators a range of cinematic experiences and dispositions toward the screen.[24] It is thus conceivable – and in fact highly probable – that a Mexican woman could regard a newsreel about Mexican domestic affairs with the critical eye of one affected directly by the events depicted on screen, and that the same woman could shift into a more engrossed mode of reception when viewing the romantic misadventures of beloved screen diva Pina Menichelli. While Staiger's focus on U.S. cinema necessitates that her conclusions not be mapped directly onto the particularity of the Mexican experience, her sensitivity to the multiple viewing positions available to spectators based on time/place, intersectional identities, and access to extra-cinematic reference points is ideally suited to the study of diverse female spectators in Mexico City following the revolution. The category of "women in postrevolution Mexico City," includes rural migrants and lifelong city-dwellers; prostitutes and street vendors and typists and heiresses; and women of European,

[24] Janet Staiger, *Perverse Spectators*, 43, 22.

indigenous, and mestizo ancestry, among other vectors of identity. To account for the full diversity of all possible spectatorial experiences would be impossible, but because women in Mexico have historically "defined themselves first by gender," and have been excluded from full social and political participation on the same grounds, it is essential to account for the ways that gender was frequently presumed to subsume these differences and how gender operated through various domains. [25]

However, whereas Staiger deploys the "perverse spectator" to suggest how past audiences understood specific film texts, I find the concept of spectatorial "perversion" more useful for evaluating how women in Mexico City could engage *cinema culture*. By 1925, cinema was the most 'popular' entertainment in Mexico City in terms of consumer spending, surpassing bullfights, live theater, soccer, and other leisure activities capitalinos could enjoy.[26] Within the pervasive postrevolution discourse of mexicanidad*,* hundreds of thousands of individual audience members largely unknown to each other could go to the movies and conceive of themselves as part of a uniquely Mexican public. And while at least 80 percent of films screened in Mexico during the 1920s were the product of US film studios – a situation that would seem to contradict enthusiasm for moviegoing as a national pastime – Laura Isabel Serna's *Making Cinelandia: American Films and Mexican Film Culture Before the Golden Age* proves otherwise.[27] Mexican nationalism "filled the space around the screen," and public discourse

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[25] Kathryn A Sloan, *Women's Roles in Latin America and the Caribbean*, (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2011), xi.

[26]The Mexican department of commerce tracked public spending on "diversions" and in 1925 certified that cinema surpassed bullfights as Mexico's most popular amusement n a market valued at more than 7 million pesos per year. "Movies lead Mexico City Amusements in 1925," *Motion Picture News,* 15 May 1926, p 2342.

[27] This statistic is the product of analysis of a comprehensive list of films screened in Mexico City during the 1920s. See María Luisa Amador and Jorge Ayala Blanco, *Cartelera*

portrayed motion picture exhibitors as contributors to Mexican economic growth and social development, since their theaters (with names like "Cine Progreso Mundial" and "Parisiana") offered parades of ever-renewing images that modeled cosmopolitan modernity for audiences in need of modernization. [28] Mexican moviegoers were further primed to understand their trips to the movie theater within the framework of postrevolutionary nationalism via such efforts as reduced ticket prices on national holidays, which framed the activity of going to see foreign movies as a way to commemorate one's relationship to the Mexican nation.[29] This interrogation reveals that the "perversity" of Mexican women at the movies yielded mixed political effects, but also brought about an undeniably significant transformation of Mexican gender norms – specifically, the irreversible and undeniable recognition of female social presence and value outside the home, and acknowledgement of unruly desires unaccounted for by religious dogma and state law.

State Intervention: Time Management and Behavioral Surveillance

While the practice of moviegoing offered audiences the sense that they were active participants in Mexican modernity, spectatorship also served the state's goal to transform Mexico from a dependent, fragmented society with a rural-based economy into an industrial-capitalist state populated by national citizens – a goal often executed through gendered initiatives

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cinematográfica, 1920-1929. (Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autonoma de México, Centro Universitario de Estudios Cinematográficos, Coordinación de Difusión Cultural, 1999), 465-469.

[28] Laura Isabel Serna, *Making Cinelandia*, 8.

[29] Laura Isabel Serna, "Exhibition in Mexico During the Early 1920s," *Convergence Media History.* Janet Staiger and Sabine Hake, eds. (London and New York: Routledge, 2009), 7; and Michael J. Gonzales, "Imagining Mexico in 1921: Visions of the Revolutionary State and Society in the Centennial Celebration in Mexico City." *Mexican Studies/Estudios Mexicanos* 25, no. 2 (2009): 247-70, 253. https://doi.org/10.1525/msem.2009.25.2.247

that targeted women as proxies for their class and race.[30] The state's interest in cinema as a locus of gender-conscious modernization was manifest in its appointment of inspectors to oversee cinemas and audiences. Cinemas had been subject to inspection as potential hazards to public health and safety since at least 1906, but in 1921, The *Departamento de Diversiones Públicas* (Department of Public Diversions) was tasked with the expanded charge to regulate exhibition practices and monitor spectator behavior.[31] The 20-man contingent of inspectors visited all of the city's theaters on a daily basis, reported relevant findings to the government, and issued fines to theaters found to be in violation of their duty to the public.[32] Because this department worked hand in hand with both the Department of Public Health and the Mexico City police, the state's oversight of cinema was integrated within a system of surveillance and control.[33] While the inspectors' official reports document their disappointment with the caliber of cinematic fare shown in the city, their power to affect this aspect of the industry was also minimal: inspectors could make recommendations to exhibitors, but inspectors could not schedule or withdraw

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[30] Joanne Hershfield, *Imagining la Chica Moderna*, 41, and Laura Isabel Serna,"Exhibition in Mexico During the Early 1920s: Nationalist Discourse and Transnational Capital," 70.

[31] Fire was a concern for cinema inspectors and audiences alike. Nitrate film is a highly flammable material, and dramatic accounts of movie theater fires that occurred in Mexico and elsewhere were documented in the popular press throughout the silent era. Indeed, the threat of bodily harm in the presence of literally combustible films likely added to the sense that the motion picture medium was dangerous in more ways than one.

[32] C. Palacios to Head of Public Diversions, August 29, 1922. Quoted in Serna, *Making Cinelandia,* 82. The inspectors' labor also helped the municipal government keep track of taxes that needed to be collected off of box office receipts.

[33] Ageeth Sluis. *Deco Body, Deco City,* 49. The Department of Public Diversions oversaw cinemas, theaters, puppet shows, tent shows, sports, mechanical rides, and other "diversions," which were by their popular and commercial nature conceived as distinct from cultural activities.

films.[34] Instead, distributor offerings, exhibitor strategy, and audience preferences overlapped to determine what appeared on the screen, and the city's inspectors exerted their greatest influence through regulation of screening spaces and audiences themselves.[35]

Mexico City film inspectors shaped exhibition by imposing fines on theaters that screened films late, allowed excessively long intermissions, screened badly damaged prints, or swapped one film for another.[36] These regulations affirmed the "order and progress," mantra of positivism that carried over from the Porfirian era into the revolutionary state, but exhibition regulations also functioned to bring the rhythms of personal life into harmony with the timetable of public affairs. Specifically, the inspectors' schedule-enforcing labor served to bolster the "hegemony of clock time," which entails the conception of time as an objective, quantifiable, and commodifiable resource. The dominance of clock time over all realms of experience was a necessary precursor to the capitalist structuring of social relations in modernity, and regulation of leisure activities that engaged women (whose daily lives were otherwise structured by the more organic notions of task time) was one way to integrate a large swath of the public into modern Mexico.[37] While the commodification of time and the very notion of leisure as an alternative to labor have been vigorously critiqued (e.g. the Frankfurt school), the gendered implications of this development merit consideration. Increased feminine labor in administrative and bureaucratic jobs during and after the revolution integrated working women into clock time, and governing

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[34] Laura Isabel Serna*, Making Cinelandia*, 75.

[35] Laura Isabel Serna, "Exhibition in Mexico During the Early 1920s." 121.

[36] Ibid, 165.

[37] Jonathan Martineau. *Time, capitalism and alienation: a socio-historical inquiry into the making of modern time.* (Leiden, Brill, 2015),107.

institutions brought leisure activities enjoyed by women into accordance with modern temporal management – but despite these changes, women were nonetheless subject to unique demands on their time and energy that fostered conflict between their new roles as modern subjects and their traditional caregiving responsibilities. As Barbara Adam notes,

> "The cliché of 'women's work is never done,' exemplifies the incompatibility with a work time that comes in finite units, a uniform and abstract time that can be measured, quantitatively evaluated, controlled and exchanged for money, accumulated for "time out' and delimited against leisure time."[38]

Birthing and childrearing, for example, could not be scheduled with the regimentation cinema inspectors expected from theater owners; moreover, the fact that women were increasingly expected to manage multiple timetables including work, leisure, familial support, and household maintenance fostered significant role conflict.

Mexican women's newfound suspension between the flow of task-oriented time and the rigidity of clock time suggests, in part, why Italian diva films in particular gained a cachet with female audiences. As Angela Dalle Vacche explains, Italian divas' sublime performances possessed "the mute eloquence of a suffragette's speech ….[and thus] expressed the struggle of women caught between old-fashioned standards and new options for the future."[39] Beyond the beautiful star performers who embodied the particular challenges of being a modern woman in a society structured by traditional expectations, diva narratives were also, unsurprisingly, preoccupied with the passage of time. In comparison to their contemporary Hollywood competition, Italian diva films were

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[38] Barbara Adam, *Timewatch: The Social Analysis of Time,* (Cambridge, UK and Cambridge, MA: Polity, 1995), 87.

[39] Angela Dalle Vacche. *Diva: Defiance and Passion in Early Italian Cinema.* (Austin: University of Texas, 2008), 5.

> "…much more accidental, erratic, uneven, badly plotted, and unpredictable in their developments. This more nonsystematic, emotional, and subjective handling of temporality differs greatly from the Tayloristic, measurable protocols of time used in both the American factory and the Hollywood studios."[40]

That the films thematized personal desire in conflict with social conventions added to their resonance with the Mexican woman who encountered models of alternative lifestyles in the cinema at the same time that the revolutionary state stressed that a woman's first obligation was to raise ideal citizens for the future within the traditional family structure of the past.[41] The female-driven Italian "diva" films of the late 1910s emblematized by the work of actresses Pina Menicelli, Lyda Borelli, and Francesca Bertini were especially relevant in this regard, as the divas synecdochally evoked one crisis of modern Mexican femininity.

Critics and moralizers who disapproved of the fantastic mise-en-scene and effusive sexuality featured in diva films failed to recognize the deeper ontological appeal of movies that evoked the temporal problem of modern Mexican femininity, but at the same time, these critics evoked other anxieties surrounding the nature of womanhood and its relationship to cinema.[42] One such critic, Rafael Pérez Taylor, described passion for the cinema as an "illness" afflicting middle class women, and he suggested that the way Mexican women emulated Italian diva Pina Menichelli's gestures and fashions was a slippery slope toward more dangerous emulations of the stories on screen, which would lead to young girls "smooching some nobody in the shadows

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[40] Ibid 9.

[41] Rielle Navitski, "Early Film Critics and Fanatical Fans," 68. The diva film's role in Mexican modernity is further discussed in Chapter 3, while the diva as a prototype for Mexican film stardom is discussed in Chapter 2.

[42] Rielle Navitski has identified the phenomenal popularity of Italian screen stars as instrumental to establishing the role of the film critic. Male journalist-critics of the intellectual class positioning themselves as authority figures and arbiters of aesthetic and moral values, in opposition to hysterical female fans. "Early Film Critics and Fanatical Fans," 59.

of the movie theater," and progressively becoming more unmanageable until they would "fall squarely into the quivering tentacles of vice."[43] Pérez Taylor feared that the sensational diva films exploited innate feminine sensitivity, thereby threatening the gender ideology of *marianismo* upon which social stability was premised. Perez Taylor could hardly take solace in the eventual decline of the diva film (a consequence of the international political economy of motion pictures more than any reconciliation of the tensions imposed upon Mexican women by the transformation of their society and their selves), for when Hollywood pictures became the dominant cinematic idiom of transnational modernity, screen images of a putatively wayward female sexuality continued apace.[44] In any event, enforced adherence to rigid screening schedules imposed a degree of control over cinematic modes of exhibition, but inspectors, critics, and reformers failed to achieve control over the unruly modes of reception practiced by spectators in the space before the screen.

The state agents responsible for disciplining leisure time in Mexico City via cinema inspection also concerned themselves with overseeing the behavior of movie theater patrons. Inspectors anxiously reported that moviegoing couples often did "not go to the cinema to watch the films," and instead participated in "immoral acts" during projection, thereby affirming Staiger's supposition that cinema spectatorship constituted more than the relationship between the elements within the film text, or the relationship between text and audience. [45] While the

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[43] Hipólito Seijas, "El Menichelismo" Anexo 14, 128-131, reproduced in Manuel Casanova, *Las Vistas: Una Época Del Cine En México.* (Mexico City: Instituto Nacional de Estudios Históricos de la Revolución Mexicana, 1992)

[44] In Italy, production shifted to other narrative types for economic and political reasons, while the simultaneous ascendance of Hollywood during WWI gave audiences new choices at the box office.

[45] Katherine Bliss, *Compromised Positions*, 88.

cinema inspector's internal reports were just that – internal government correspondence – the public was also aware of the cinema's potential as a romantic rendezvous. Mexico City author Juan Bustillo Oro's 1925 short story *El Ladrón de Bagdad* dramatized precisely the novelty of feminine (sexual) independence at the cinema by way of a tale of film spectatorship. In the story, which was originally published in *El Universal Ilustrado* in 1925, the protagonist is a man who goes to see *The Thief of Bagdad* (Walsh, 1924) alone.[46] In the darkened space of the theater, an unknown woman sits next to the protagonist. She is captivated by the action on screen, while the protagonist is captivated by her. Both envious of and emboldened by Fairbank's assertive, athletic persona, the protagonist "bests" his on-screen rival in the imagined contest for the woman's attention: as the film ends, the protagonist of the story manages to steal a kiss from his charming neighbor. Despite the drummed-up drama of this rather banal scene, the result of the protagonist's 'adventure' is not lasting connection but a fleeting thrill; the unnamed girl leaves the theater to meet her "official" boyfriend outside. The sexual activities described in inspector's reports and Bustillo Oro's prose were especially troubling because they were not contained by the geographic and economic conditions that had traditionally stratified audiences: even the Salón Rojo was identified as "host to some of the most repugnant sexual activity in the metropolis."[47] The experiences of women as a social group were more significantly transformed

[46] Juan Bustillo Oro, Jael Tercero Andrade, and María de Lourdes Franco Bagnouls. *La penumbra inquieta y otros relatos*. (Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2009). Because the Mexican publishing industry was relatively underdeveloped in the 1920s, many foundational postrevolution novels were published in installments within daily newspapers (or weekly magazines affiliated with daily newspapers). This practice ensured that nationalist literary works enjoyed wide dissemination.

[47] Ibid. Bliss stresses that Mexican gender ideologies cast male promiscuity as a necessary and even beneficial practice for the socialization of young men who by nature required sexual freedom, while female promiscuity was regulated and denounced on moral grounds.

by the sexualization of screening spaces than were the experiences of men: as Katherine Bliss emphasizes, a degree of promiscuity was permissible (and even encouraged) for young men in the years before and after the revolution, but similar opportunities did not exist for women in the absence of acceptable pretexts for women to occupy public spaces and interact with the opposite sex outside of the family. The cinema provided these conditions, as well as a sense of anonymity and a cover of darkness, which opened new possibilities of sexual behavior (or at least exposure to such behavior) for women of multiple classes.

Though film inspectors could call upon Mexico City police in the face of patently criminal behavior, attempts to stymie the cinema-facilitated liberalization of feminine sexuality more often took the guise of urban hygiene and modernization campaigns that targeted movie theaters as centers of heterosocial interaction. Inspectors thus reported and fined theaters whose architecture facilitated undesirable/improper social mixing (including at least one in which bathrooms were shared by men and women), as well as multiple venues in which dim lighting and unorthodox seating arrangements allowed couples to engage in physical intimacy.[48] City officials encouraged structural improvements – framed as "modernizations" – as a solution for vice, encouraging the development of movie theaters that standardized the spectatorial experience as disembodied contemplation of the screen. The state's efforts to dictate the appropriate terms of cinematic reception aimed to ensure that moviegoing could be a wholesome entertainment for modern citizens.[49] But while some endorsed the notion that environmental improvements could incubate modern subjects, others saw fundamental flaws in both the motion picture medium and the essential constitution of the fairer sex that made the combination of these

[48] Laura Isabel Serna*, Making Cinelandia*, 78.

[49] Ibid 77-78.

two particularly threatening. These perspectives, articulated by Mexican feminists and lay groups within the Catholic Church, affirm the centrality of cinema in the discursive construction of modern Mexican femininity.

Feminist and Faith-Based Critiques of the Cinema

Critical appraisals of cinema's influence on female moviegoers were not unique to male critics intent on preserving the existent social order, nor to film inspectors whose middle-class sensibilities led them to prescribe a 'proper' mode of engrossed cinematic spectatorship akin to that practiced in the live theatre. Self-proclaimed feminists and religious reformers also placed themselves at cross-purposes with the cinema, though for different reasons. The former position is best exemplified by Leonor Llach, an advocate for suffrage and women in the workplace who used writing to advance the feminist cause in the 1920s.[50] In work published across multiple Mexico City outlets including *El Nacional* and *El Universal Ilustrado*, Llach argued that feminine identity should encompass intellectual and professional pursuits, and that the state's emphasis on maternity was merely a ruse to exclude women from full participation in national life.[51] Llach turned her critical sights on cinema in her fable "A Girl Like Any Other," which was published in the magazine *Elegancias* in 1926. The story describes a dark-haired girl named

[50] Porter, *From Angel to Office Worker,* 98. Llach earned a master's degree in History from the UNAM and worked as an administrative officer in the Departments of Child Welfare and Health. Her activism was oriented toward the middle-class women who comprised both her own social milieu and her presumed readership. See also Aurora M. Ocampo, *Diccionario de escritores mexicanos*. (México Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México Centro de Estudios Literarios, 1967), 486. Llach's advocacy for working women and distast for marriage as a socially subjugating institution were common points of the Mexican feminist platform in the postrevolution era. For more on this topic, see "Feminismo y revolución" Martha Eva Rocha Islas, 27-60 and "Mujeres, feminism y sufragio en los anos viente," Ana Lau Jaiven 61-96, both in *Un fantasma recorre el siglo: luchas feministas en Mexico 1910-2010.*

[51] Leonor Llach, "La feminidady la cultura," *Elegancias*, March 3, 1926, 6.

Alicia who is entranced by fairytales about romantic love – fairytales first narrated to Alicia in childhood by her mother, and later imbued with enhanced seductive power by the motion picture medium. Blinded by the fantasy of romance, Alicia clumsily adopts the fashions of her screen idols and marries the first man who proposes – only to find herself miserable in a life with neither autonomy nor the purpose-giving love she fetishized.[52] Llach thus cautioned against the allure of the silver screen by explicitly aligning the new medium of motion pictures with regressive gender ideologies. Elsewhere, Llach decried cinema-inspired fashions, including short hair and high-arched eyebrows in the style of Gloria Swanson, a look she dubbed "grotesque gringo." For Llach, who was an important voice in the Mexican feminist movement, cinema was at best a distraction from the more pressing issues facing Mexican women: as she made clear, "the real issue, what is important to us, is the vote!"[53] As a writer, Llach's privileged mode of activism positioned her to critique both the characterization of femininity romanticized in cinema and the Americanized consumerist disposition movie images nurtured in fans –perspectives couched in the belief that whatever cinema's ills, they would be borne primarily by women.

The official position of the Catholic Church was anti-feminist and staunchly conservative, so real women like Llach (who chose to work outside the home and agitated for political suffrage) embodied the threat of postrevolution modernization – but the Church and lay faith groups associated with it were more likely to employ colorful anecdotes about movie-struck *chicas modernas* when describing corrosive changes in postrevolution Mexico. Invoking the "proper" gender order of a Christian society, Father Jose Cantu Corro wrote that "women's physical and moral structure reveals their destiny, their obligations and their duties. Woman was

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[52] Leonor Llach, "Una niña como hay muchas," *Elegancias*, July 1 1925, 16.

[53] Porter, *From Angel to Office Worker*, 165. Llach quoted in Ibid, 100.

made for love and for the life of feeling. She should reign in the home and form there docile, honorable, and hard-working children."[54] The cinema, though potentially useful for moral purposes, was principally associated with moral corruption. A Catholic father's group started a petition against the exhibition of *Cuerpo y alma* which they felt put too much skin on display, and the Damas Católicas – a group of upper-class Catholic women focused on aiding the poor and working class – lobbied José Vasconcelos to protect women and children from immoral images by appointing a film ratings commission.[55] In their official written request, the evidence the Damas provided for the necessity of such an organization came directly from an advertisement for the Collen Moore film *Juventud Ardiente* (*Flaming Youth*, John Francis Dillon, 1924) that ran in *El Universal* and *Excélsior.* The ad features a short haired woman in a low-cut dress surrounded by a motif of champagne bubbles, each containing an image of the film's attractions including flirting, cocktails, and cigarettes, as well as a silhouetted rendering of the film's infamous skinny-dipping scene.[56] The Damas were concerned that the scandalous activities shown in this film (and others like it) would lure young women into immoral behavior

[54] J. Cantú Corro, 'El Feminismo', Acción y fe (September 1922): 651, quoted in Patience Schell. "Social Catholicism," 1588.

[55] I have been unable to ascertain which film was distributed in Mexico City under the title "Cuerpo y alma," which means "Body and Soul," but it was surely not the 1925 Oscar Michaux film of that name. Patience Schell, "An honorable avocation for ladies: The Work of the Mexico City Union de Damas Catolicas Mexicanas, 1912-1926," *Journal of Women's History,*10 no 4 (1999), 81-87. doi:http://dx.doi.org.www2.lib.ku.edu/10.1353/jowh.2010.0522

[56] Ad published in *Excélsior,* June 1, 1924, page 8. The film was advertised for its premiere at 12 Mexico City Theaters: Odeon, Progreso Mundial, Alcazar, Trianon, Lux, Alarcon, Parisiana, Royal, Majestic, Fausto, Progreso and Cervantes.

– a pronouncement they made before the film had even been released, but grounded in an abiding mistrust of North American sexual mores.[57]

Though Vasconcelos voiced his support for a review body along the lines of that requested by the Damas Católicas, the Damas' request did not come to fruition. This was indicative of the broader state of Mexican film censorship during the 1920s, when moralizing censorship – provoked by complaints from either private citizens or local officials, but not by state mandate – was "spotty and ineffectual."[58] The state censorship body responsible for reviewing films prior to exhibition established in 1920 was disbanded in the bureaucratic churn following Carranza's assassination, and censorship under Obregón and successive administrations focused on curtailing negative representations of Mexico manufactured in Hollywood rather than controlling images of sexuality (as was the case in the United States, where a preoccupation with sexual propriety was central to the establishment of the Hays

[57] Laura Isabel Serna, *Making Cinelandia,* 128. While the Damas did not persuade Mexico City theaters to pull purportedly objectional films, regional chapters in Merida and Oaxaca achieved isolated successes preventing the screenings of certain films, notably *A Night In New Arabia* (1917) which featured cross-class romance and elopement. The Damas' ire for popular culture extended to the state's nationalist projects as well, and the group campaigned against the "nude, female, brown flesh Diego Rivera and José Clemente Orozco painted in their first murals in the National Preparatory School." Mary Kay Vaughan, "Introduction: Pancho Villa, the Daughters of Mary, and the Modern Woman: Gender in the Long Mexican revolution." 26.

[58] Laura Isabel Serna, "'As a Mexican I Feel it's My Duty," 231. The threat of censorship raised by the appointment of the (short-lived) censorship board, and subsequent calls for more rigorous regulation of motion picture content by citizens, were sufficient to inspire counter-arguments *against* proposed cinematic censorship. See "La Censura de Las Peliculas Cinematograficas" and "La Mejor Propaganda Para Mexico es la del Cinematografo" by Carlos Noriega Hope, Anexo 27A and B in Manuel González Casanova, *Las Vistas.*

Code).[59] Mexican film scholar Roberto Jesús Ramírez Flores differentiates the censorship models of Mexico and the US in the 1920s as mechanisms of political legitimacy and moral control, respectively.[60] This meant that the sexual mores of North American cinema (progressive or puritanical as they may have been, depending upon the evaluator) were imported to Mexico, and contestation of those mores happened via public discourse rather than government intervention. As Patience Schell writes, these public "debates about the nature of the cinema, about books and about fashion rarely, if at all, considered their impact on young men: women remained the guardians of beliefs and actions and the reproducers of culture. As potential or actual mothers, women's morality would have a lasting impact on the moral health of future generations."[61]

Exhibition Space: Creating a Place for the Mexican Audience

As the cases of sexuality on screen and sexual activity in the theater illustrate, anxiety about the intersection of cinema and femininity was predicated upon not only *what* was seen but *where.* Judging the state's efforts to police theaters ineffective and movie exhibitors' greed counter to the impartial judgement of films, Father Joaquin Cardoso in 1924 advised Catholics to acquire their own projectors so they could avoid the dangerous atmosphere of the movie theater

[59] See Annette Kuhn, *Cinema, Censorship, and Sexuality, 1909-1925*. (New York: Routledge, 1988.)

[60] Roberto Jesús Ramírez Flores, "Luces, cámara ¡censura! Los orígenes e inicios de la censura cinematográfica en México (1896-1941)."*El ojo que piensa: Revista de cine iberoamericano* 9 (2014), 10. Accessed April 5, 2019. http://elojoquepiensa.cucsh.udg.mx/index.php/elojoquepiensa/article/view/17910.

[61] Patience Schell, "Social Catholocism,"1588.

altogether (the recommended projector cost 75 pesos).[62] Such a 'solution' would have been viable only for the wealthiest families, so Cardoso's proposal in part sought to re-establish the classed segregation of city audiences that was then beginning to recede, thanks in part to the expansion of cinema culture.

The Cine Olimpia is a case study in the way cinematic exhibition eroded classed spatial dynamics. In 1921, the theater's aristocratic ambitions were apparent in advertisements that positioned the Olimpia, located six blocks west of the Zócalo, as the cinema of choice for "the most select families." The theater had room for nearly 4,000 spectators, with seating for 2,000 in the orchestra, 250 in the various boxes, 800 on the balcony, and 850 in the gallery. As designed, this seating distribution delimited different spaces, social categories, and ticket prices along the lines of a classical theater, rather than the undifferentiated seating of theaters built later in the 1920s.[63] The theater also boasted opulent gilded décor, a lobby of white granite, an organ, room for a 40-piece orchestra, and an upstairs tea room. It was even featured in English-language trade journals as a sign of Mexican modernization (from which distributor profits would surely flow).[64] However, just two years later, the Olimpia's owners changed their tune. Advertisements announced the Olimpia's intention to "become the theater for all" so that everyone could "feel

[62]J. Cardoso, 'La solución de un grave problema', Mensajero del Sagrado Corazón de Jesús de México (May 1924): 313 –21, quoted in Sc Patience Schell. "Social Catholicism," 1597. For comparison, Schell notes that Catholic schoolteachers were paid 60 pesos a month.

[63] For a detailed history of the Cine Olimpia see Aurelio de los Reyes, *Cine y Sociedad II* 306-341.

[64] "Mexican Theaters Make Great Strides in Type of Construction: An Interesting Description of the New Olimpia House," *Motion Picture News,* (New York, Motion Picture News, Inc.) *25.* March April 1922. 1522.

like family in this theater, whether they come dressed in denim or silk and satin."[65] Accordingly, ticket prices dropped across the board, and the price differential between sections was reduced: original ticket prices of $2.50 for the orchestra and $1.20 for the balcony were lowered to $1.50 and $0.50, respectively.[66] The price of admission still varied in accordance with seat location, but, as Aurelio De los Reyes reports, the price of admission for even the most expensive seats was within reach of peasants and workers, who were thus able to mix with other social sectors. Similarly, the middle class could be seen to opt out of their allocated position by selecting cheaper balcony seats for family outings.[67] Thus, the particularities of Mexican society meant that cinemas modeled after the great movie palaces of New York City (to which the Olimpia explicitly compared itself) were not viable in the Mexican context. Though the middle class doubled in size in the decade following the revolution, the class structure of Mexico was still overwhelmingly popular, with nearly 80 percent of Mexicans classified as "working class," approximately 20 percent in the middle class, and one percent in the elite class.[68] Following the footsteps of the Olimpia, other first-run institutions such as the Salón Rojo and the Cine Palacio also democratized their pricing schemes.[69]

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[65] Ana Rosas Mantecón, "Públicos De Cine En México," in *Alteridades* 22, no. 44 (2012): 38. http://www.scielo.org.mx/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S0188-70172012000200004

[66] Laura Isabel Serna, *Making Cinelandia,* 51. For comparison, one could rent a taxi for $2.50 per hour ($3.00 on Sunday). Teresa Matabuena Peláez, *La Ciudad De México a Través De La Compañía Industrial Fotográfica.* (Mexico City: Universidad Iberoamericana, 2004), 19.

[67] Aurelio de los Reyes, *Cine y Sociedad II*, 327.

[68] James W. Wilkie and Paul D. Wilkins. "Quantifying the Class Structure Of Mexico," 579.

[69] Aurelio de los Reyes, *Cine y Sociedad II*, 327-328.

If the ticket pricing decisions of the Cine Olimpia, the Salón Rojo, and the Cine Palacio indicate how the exhibitors' business models democratized out of economic necessity, the programming decisions of formerly elite entertainment venues further show how cinema was embraced by business owners to attract new publics as a means of survivalist modernization in the economic and political climate of the 1920s.[70] The lavish playhouse founded by the stage diva Esperanza Iris in 1919—built with the finest Italian marble and non-combustible Brazilian wood—originally specialized in Viennese operetta, but by 1924 the theater was outfitted to screen films, and by 1934 it screened films to the exclusion of other entertainments.[71] Cinema's integration into the nation's poshest venues was a sort of Trojan horse: for business owners, cinema represented modernization and ensured continued operation, but it also meant appealing to a new, broader audience who could then rub elbows with the established clientele. Simultaneous with legacy theaters' pivot toward new class and gender demographics, new venues also cropped up to meet the entertainment demands of audiences too large, diverse, and geographically diffuse to rely entirely on top-tier venues close to the city center. The *cines de barrio* (neighborhood cinemas) offered a mid-tier, second-run theatrical venue between the grandest movie theaters of the city center and the carpas of the city's periphery. One of the things that seemed to distress critics of the cines de barrio most was the fact that the clientele of these venues was extremely varied: cines de barrio were frequented by young adults, large groups of

[70] Paulina Suárez-Hesketh, "The Frivolous Scene" 103-30, 109. While purpose-built cinemas began to emerge, venues experimented with different exhibition strategies to ensure a healthy box office.

[71] Esperanza Iris is discussed as a "Woman in Exhibition," in the second chapter of this dissertation.

children, and whole middle-class families visiting the cinema together.[72] However, as Ana Rosas Mantecón points out, acceptance of this development was essential precondition for the peaceable coexistence of various social sectors, both in the movie theater and in the city at large.[73] The favorable, or at least non-threatening, coexistence among strangers allowed people to trade, live, and work closely together in the heterosocial elaboration of modern Mexico City.

As a result of these changes, cinema became a social experience that exceeded entertainment. In this regard Mexico City cinemas were "similar to churches, which is why they were referred to as 'temples of silent art,' 'cinematic cathedrals,' and 'temples of silence.'"[74] The cinema's partial usurpation of the place of the church in national life was not merely a metaphor; as architects Francisco Alfaro and Alejandro Ochoa have documented. Early motion picture audiences formed more rapidly than specialized spaces to accommodate them, and former Mexican convents were converted to motion picture theaters. The Cine Regis, opened in 1914, occupied the former Convent of San Diega, and the Convent of Jesús María was in 1922 converted into the Cine Mundial.[75] The very availability of convents for secularization speaks to the way Mexican gender roles were changing, for in the nineteenth century and before, convent life was the only respectable living arrangement available to unmarried women of polite society.[76] Cinemas also integrated themselves into the political and private lives of capitalinos in

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[72] Ramon Lopez Vallarde quoted in Helena Almoina, *Notas Tomo 1*, 96.

[73] Ana Rosas Mantecón, "Públicos De Cine," 37.

[74] Aurelio de los Reyes, *Cine y Sociedad II*, 43-45.

[75] Alfaro Salazar, Francisco Haraldo, and Alejandro Ochoa Vega. *La República De Los Cines* (Mexico City, MX: Clío, 1998), 17, 19.

[76] Julia Tuñón Pablos, *Women In Mexico,* 32. For unmarried women, according to Christian thinking, "the chaste solitude of nuns was an ideal life."

other, perhaps unexpected, ways: movie theaters became venues for political meetings, polling places, name-day celebrations, end-of-school festivities, and other social activities.[77] Multi-purpose use helped to make cinemas the site of personal and collective memory-making, and as these sites became familiar and comfortable, the conceptual and physical barriers between public and private experience were further blurred.

Buying Into Modernity

Worries about cinema expressed by movie reviewers, feminists, government functionaries, and Catholic groups underscore how film spectatorship created desires that overflowed the boundaries of the screen and a disposition toward the world that could not be contained by the walls of the movie theater. The new sensory experiences and social roles opened by the phenomenon Mary Kay Vaughan calls "public spectatorship" were the product of how women moved about via streetcars, automobiles, and on foot; visited dance halls, parks, department stores and movie theaters; and bought goods like postcards and hats.[78] While Vaughn acknowledges that both men and women participated in pubic spectatorship, the practice was uniquely significant for women who had (unlike their male counterparts) been barred from similar activity less than a generation before: "women moved noticeably into public space as performers, spectators, and consumers, complementing their growing presence as workers, students, and political actors."[79] Vaughan's observations also highlight the dynamic and intimate relationship between mobility, leisure, and consumption which was readily apparent in postrevolution Mexico City.

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[77] Aurelio de los Reyes, *Cine y Sociedad II*, 43-45.

[78] Mary Kay Vaughan, "Introduction," S*ex In Revolution,* 23.

[79] Ibid.

One product of public spectatorship was the consonance between cinema screen and shop window, a relationship that was formalized by theaters and retailers who exploited the symbiotic integration of feminized leisure activities under the logic of consumption. The pleasure of looking at movies and looking at goods for purchase were thus folded into each other. The Cine Olimpia, for example, hosted a raffle in 1928 in which contestants could enter movie tickets for a chance to win three pairs of new shoes. The contest was advertised in a show window at the theater entrance, with a half-dozen pairs of women's high-heeled shoes and boots on display. The façade of the movie theater was in fact virtually indistinguishable from a storefront as it hailed female passers-by with material objects of desire.[80] In another marketing campaign, the newspaper advertisement for the Corinne Griffith and Clara Bow film *Las Mujeres Modernas (Black Oxen,* dir Frank Lloyd, 1924) emphasized that "80,000 dollars were spent on the manufacture of furs and dresses for the stars," and that "no woman should miss" the film, the plot of which hinged upon luxury, "flapperismo," and the seductive quality of youth.[81] The ad suggests the marketable appeal of the pelona aesthetic in the Mexican context, but it also encouraged filmgoers to think like consumers by foregrounding the quantifiable purchase cost of the stars' wardrobes. Meanwhile, department stores including *La Ciudad de Londres* and *El Palacio de Hierro* advertised dresses and shoes named and styled after Italian screen diva Francesca Bertini, giving women the chance to buy into cinematic modernity in a starkly literal

[80] "Profitable Exploitation," *Exhibitor's Trade Review.* (New York, Exhibitor's Trade Review, Inc.)14.1 Jun-Aug 1923, 42.

[81] Advertisement for *Las Mujeres Modernas* reproduced in Aurelio de los Reyes, *Cine y Sociedad II*, 289. Though the date and publication in which the advertisement appeared are not included in Reyes' notes, the film had its US premiere in 1924.

fashion.[82] Mexican women who (window) shopped would surely have been cognizant of the price of garments, so films like *Las Mujeres Modernas* and movie replica merchandise indulged fantasies of purchase power while advancing the commodification of modern femininity. Though contemporary feminist scholarship problematizes consumption as a means of integrating women into oppressive socioeconomic structures, Anne Friedberg highlights how the practice of shopping entailed a level of empowerment for urban women in modernity:

> "'To shop': as a verb, it implies choice, empowerments in the relation between looking and having, the act of buying as a willful choice. To shop is to muse in the contemplative mode, an activity that combines diversion, self-gratification, expertise, and physical activity."[83]

Even if working-class women could not afford most foreign fashion and luxuries advertised in magazines or displayed at Palacio de Hierro, they enjoyed "the freedom to window-shop."[84] Cinema instrumentally extended the reach of this consumer culture, for the economics of movie distribution were such that women throughout the city also shopped from the same *virtual* department store as their counterparts in London, Paris, New York, and other cosmopolitan cities Mexico City aspired to be like. Movies – mostly imported – began circulation at well-appointed

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[82] Rielle Navitski, "Early Film Critics and Fanatical Fans," 67; An ad for "Fal: El Almacen de Moda, Departamento de Calzado," featured several styles of tacones Bertini (Bertini high heels) ranging in price from 22 pesos to 27.5 pesos. *El Jueves de Excélsior,* 28 May 1925, 16. By 1925, Bertini films were no longer being screened in the capital, but the shoes remained fashionable.

[83] Anne Friedberg, *Window Shopping* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2006), 57. "The cultural logic of capitalism is a fundamentally *un*-feminist thing," write Nicki Lisa Cole and Alison Dahl Crossley, who articulate the feminist critique of how global capitalism perpetuates economic stratification at odds with feminism's goal to eradicate such inequality. Cole, Nicki Lisa, and Alison Dahl Crossley. "On Feminism in the Age of Consumption." *Consumers Commodities and Consumption: A Newsletter of the Consumer Studies Research Network* 11, no. 1 (2009): 1-5. Accessed 11 November 2018. https://csrn.camden.rutgers.edu/newsletters/11-1/cole_crossley.htm

[84] Joanne Hershfield, *Imagining la Chica Moderna*, 41.

first run houses, and then the cans of film were sent down the line to successively smaller and more peripheral venues to be screened for new audiences. This method maximized the profits that film distributors could extract from a single print, but it also meant that Mexican women of different social positions came to share and emulate a common set of style icons. As Hipólito Seijas observed in 1917, "the cinema is the best fashion magazine ever invented."[85]

The movie star as shared fashion icon presented a radical change because, in pre-revolution Mexico, the sartorial effects of women served as visual icons of social class. Women's presence, only permissible in a restricted range of spaces, allowed people to orient themselves within spatial/social hierarchies. In the Porfiriato, the city's wealthiest denizens attended live theatrical performances for social validation as much as for entertainment. These families bought boxes at expensive theaters and placed their well-dressed, marriageable daughters in the front seats of those boxes.[86] While the action on stage was theater's putative raison d'être, the reality was that well-to-do daughters were also very much on display at the theater as status symbols and potential brides. This meant that class-segregated live theater of the Porfiriato reproduced social hierarchies while reaffirming the family's place within them, and elite women chose their corseted Parisian-styles with observers in mind, conscious of the evaluative gaze that would fall upon them when they ventured into public.[87] Conversely, the

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[85] Hipólito Seijas, "La Academia de Cinematógrafo," *El Universal,* Feb 26 1917, in Helena Almoina, *Notas Tomo I*, 100.

[86] Kristin L. McCleary, *Culture and commerce: An urban history of theater in Buenos Aires, 1880–1920.* University of California, Los Angeles, 2002, 269**.** 236-238. While McCleary's dissertation focuses on Buenos Aires, Ageeth Sluis's research emphasizes the commonalities of elite culture across Latin American societies during the 19th century which make these findings applicable to Mexico as well.

[87]. Ibid. 269.

'plain' attire of women of the popular class, who were visible not at leisure but as a function of their labor, established a contrast that allowed capitalinos to orient themselves within the social geography of the city. In the postrevolution era, then, modernity's emphasis on visuality (especially as a form of consumerism), and the Mexican state's reliance on visual arts as a means of educating a large, variably literate public, represented a shift in the function of visuality itself. The primacy of the visual register allowed for the development of new subjectivities through visual means traditionally reserved for the reproduction (rather than transformation) of social power relations.

The culture of images that operated in Mexico before the arrival of cinema had been predicated upon the widespread influence Catholicism – a faith John Mraz calls a "theology of images," for its enthusiastic production of icons and its emphasis on apparitions (like the appearance of the Virgin to the peasant Juan Diego on his *tilma*) as verifiable proof of church teachings.[88] Moreover, despite scholarly emphasis on the role of newspapers and legal thought in the establishment of both modern nation-states more broadly and ideals of *mexicanidad* more specifically, Mraz argues that visuality was in fact the primary conduit of state formation and social experience in Mexico after 1920: modern visual culture articulated through photographic and motion picture cameras in fact defined *mexicanidad* [89] Extending Mraz's conclusions into the question of gender, it is apparent that the mass production and consumption of images

[88] John Mraz, *Looking for Mexico*, 7

[89] See Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism.* (New York: Verso Books, 2006). Anderson elaborates on the fundamental role of newspapers in perceived belonging to a sovereign nation state. See also Benjamin Thomas, *La Revolución: Mexico's Great revolution as Memory, Myth and History.* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2000) Benjamin holds that the master narrative of Mexico has been made by poets, journalists, teachers, politicians, and writers.

offered women an unprecedented opportunity to imagine themselves as part of the nation-state. Female capitalinos who went to the cinema and looked through the paper saw themselves in other women – real historical agents whose presence in the world was affirmed by the reality effect of photography, as opposed to idealized images of femininity seen in church frescoes and official portraiture.[90]

The changed conditions of female visibility in modernity specifically "invited the practice of the self which was centered on one's visual status and effects" in contradistinction to a sense of self predicated on one's position within larger social structures.[91] One's visual status is more readily mutable than one's embedded position in social networks, and so modern visuality was more accessible, more pervasive, and oddly, more anonymous than its pre-revolutionary counterpart. Images of flappers who were "packaged and marketed by Hollywood for the rest of the world," epitomize how postrevolution cinema culture precipitated the erasure of visible, gendered markers of social stratification. In Mexico, the women who adopted this ideal were called *pelonas*, and they were easily recognized by their streamlined, short, loose dresses (which were easy to produce and facilitated freedom of movement), and by their stylish bob haircuts (a no-fuss hairstyle any women could do at home on her own). Ageeth Sluis argues that the pelona aesthetic "formed a bridge" connecting various social sectors because it was both an appealingly modern style and an imminently accessible one.[92] This said, the 1920s also saw various attempts to contain the cinema-driven pelona phenomenon, largely in response to the style's broad and

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[90] Walter Benjamin,.*The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*. Trans J.A. Underwood, (London: Penguin, 2008)

[91] Liz Conor, *The Spectacular Modern Woman: Feminine Visibility in the 1920s.* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 2004), 23.

[92] The preceding two quotes are from Ageeth Sluis. *Deco Body, Deco City* 84.

liberatory appeal. The Damas Católicas "feared the plague of bobbed hair, immoral dancing, loose dresses, and cosmetics which interested young women," and passed resolutions binding their members to a 'respectable' dress code. These resolutions aimed to protect members from succumbing to the appeals of 'immoral dress,' but even more importantly, the resolutions sought to ensure that the self-styled 'leaders of society' who comprised the Damas would serve as positive counter-role models for working-class women who might otherwise be tempted to emulate movie stars.[93] Still others stressed that poor women should not adopt *pelonismo*, because a woman of the popular class could not expect to attract a husband if she did not conform to traditional Mexican standards of beauty, and moreover, that *pelonismo* was unflattering to shorter, darker-complected, less-lean members of the Mexican race, regardless of class.[94] Policing of the new, transnational pelona aesthetic was an attempt to contain modifications to Mexican femininity based on traditional notions of race and class. In the end, the short hair and unrestricting garments favored by prototypical flappers were adopted across class lines anyway. The ideal was manifest in Mexican film production from the early 1920s, and the look had

[93] Patience Schell, "An Honorable Avocation," 88-89. The Damas "preferred to believe that their membership was open to all women who shared their concerns," but working-class women were generally conceived as beneficiaries of the Damas' role modelling and charity rather than participants in its activities.

[94] Anne Rubenstein, "The War on Las Pelonas: Modern Women and their Enemies, Mexico City, 1923" In *Sex in Revolution: Gender, Politics, and Power in Modern Mexico,* edited by Jocelyn Olcott, Mary Kay Vaughan, and Gabriela Cano. Mexico (2007): 57-80. Mexico's racial ideology is complex. The legal basis of colonial race categories was abolished after independence in 1821, largely as a reflection of the centuries of miscegenation that made clear racial demarcation untenable to police. See Alan Knight, "Racism, revolution, and Indigenismo: Mexico, 1910-1940," in *The Idea of Race in Latin America, 1870–1940* ed Richard Graham (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990), 71-113.

gained widespread popularity in the provinces by 1928.[95] As Joanne Hershfield concludes in *Imagining la Chica Moderna*, the eventual 'Mexicanization' of the flapper expanded the accessibility of modern femininity for Mexican women in the 1920s and 30s, whether those women were workers, peasants, homemakers, or members of high society.

As the case of pelonismo shows, fashion began to lose its utility as a marker of class when it became a marker of modernity. Women across the class spectrum adopted common fashion icons, and mass-produced goods made the accoutrements of those fashion icons more accessible than ever before. At the same time, advertisers keenly capitalized on the fertile gendered marketplace: ads targeted (young) women who sought to express their independence and individuality through their consumptive habits, and liberalized feminine sexuality was also used to entice male consumers. In the advertisements printed in general circulation periodicals, images of women were enlisted with increasing frequency over the 1917-1931 period to sell products that ranged from cigarettes to cars to medications to clothing.[96] Pelonas were often deployed as salesgirls because their appearance conferred a sense of "newness" on any product with which they were affiliated; the *pelona* "associated the modern woman with rebellion, controversy, and self-determination, thus liberating as well as commodifying feminine independence."[97] But as early as 1921, the pelona was joined in advertisements and as an

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[95] Laura Isabel Serna*, Making Cinelandia,* 134. Images from a family gathering in Durango, for example, show young and middle-aged women with bobbed hair.

[96] Interestingly, the images of the women therein changed over time even when the products themselves did not (for example, Lydia Pinkham's vegetable compound retained its formulation and female-driven marketing strategy over more than a decade, but the images of women used in the ads changed in accordance with fashion trends).

[97] Ageeth Sluis. *Deco Body, Deco City* 74. Ironically, while flappers were psychologically profiled as a champion of individuality, in practice, this was expressed through consumer conformity.

emblem of modern femininity by the *indigena,* who appeared as a generalized representation of the female Indian. The revolutionary state's emphasis on indigenismo as a font of national specificity encouraged the cross-class adoption of the *trajes* of rural peasants, especially to commemorate national holidays. On the one hand, this appropriative dress-up game introduced an uneven power dynamic between Mexican women based on ethnicity and class, but at the same time, the playfulness with which fashions were adopted in the postrevolution era introduced a new, carnivalesque fluidity to women's choice of dress as an articulation of identity.[98] The adoption of new modern styles (whether the styles of pelonas or indigenas) underscore that social ideas are not simply "imposed on the individual from outside"; rather, individual social subjects actively take part in the self-fashioning of a visible social identity through the selective incorporation of available "modes of self-production."[99] Even if working-class women consumed their movies in carpas and did not share the same physical space with middle- and upper-class women in the city center, these groups shared the imagined space of the movies.

Conclusion

Accounts of Mexican cinema spectatorship illustrate how the interface between capitalist desire and demographic reality changed in the way Mexican women experienced both the space of the postrevoluion city and their relationship to the Mexican nation. Theater owners courted female audiences (and their pesos) because women in the theater provided a necessary condition for social respectability and financial success. On the other hand, pushback from inspectors,

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[98] For more on the subversive quality of the carnivalesque, see Ella Shohat and Robert Stam, *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media*. Sightlines (London and New York: Routledge, 1994)

[99] Elizabeth A Grosz, *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism.* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 143-144.

critics, and reformers in response to sexual activity in theaters and sexualized images on screen (images that included "Bertini's neckline and Menichelli's immoral contortions," among others) belied an acute awareness of the dramatic reorganization of gender relations that was occurring below the official discourse of gendered postrevolutionary nationalism. [100]

The fact that modernity was imagined as a gendered practice of ambivalent impact is important; equally significant is how the alternately conceived possibilities and limitations of cinema specifically mirrored that larger ambivalence. Cinema going (and related forms of consumption) offered women a reason to be in public while bringing them under the hegemony of clock time and the totalizing logic of capital; fashion let women create and express novel identities even as those identities became ironically conformist in character, and visual culture helped to make women part of public life even as it reduced the variety and nuance of their experiences into a series of readily-comprehensible symbols including dreamy divas, noble indigenas, and fun-loving pelonas.[101] As the next two chapters will affirm, the web of relationships uniquely facilitated by cinema – between spectators and spectacles, between producers and consumers, and between text and reality – were characterized primarily by a profound ambivalence about the gendered implications of Mexico's modernization and nationalization efforts.

[100] Carlos Noriega Hope in Manuel González Casanova, *Las Vistas,* 171.

[101] The experiences and desires of individual Mexican women were often subsumed by the symbolic utility of "woman" to those who sought to guide Mexico's path, Malinche being the paradigmatic example. The three 'types' of femininity – diva, indigena, and pelona -- that appeared in Mexican-produced silent cinema are discussed in Chapter 3.

Chapter 2: Productoras

This chapter considers how film production activities in Mexico City aligned with the roles available to women within Mexican society. Rather than appending the existing canon with films produced by women or squeezing female producers in the established narrative of film history, this chapter challenges such hierarchies of cultural value by situating a variety of types of gendered labor within the historical development of Mexican cinema. Records show that women worked in silent cinema as directors, stars, and writers, but they also worked in other roles created by the expansion of the motion picture medium. These included movie reviewer, ticket-counter girl, and theater pianist, among others. Such opportunities unfolded within Mexican discourses of modernization and postrevolutionary nationalism, which were intrinsically gendered "master narratives and symbolic systems that not only cemented society, but plotted women differentially into the social text."[1] This being the case, my intention in the work that follows is not to create a "great woman" history of Mexican silent cinema, but to foreground the agency of historical actors whose opportunities and achievements were mediated by cultural ideas about femininity and contained by the hegemonic processes of the state. When gender receives its due consideration as a causal mechanism in the story of the past, Mexican femininity reveals itself as a shaping force not only in Mexican cinema, but in the character of Mexican modernity.[2]

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[1] Jean Franco, *Plotting Women*, xii.

[2] The latter claim is perhaps best illustrated by the way 'Mexican woman' has served as a symbol for the nation itself, from *La Malinche* to Dolores Del Rio's titular protagonist in *Maria Candelaria* and beyond; representations of Mexican women that appeared in the Mexican silent cinema are the subject of the third chapter of this dissertation.

Following motion picture industries' own definition of film producers as high-level managers and artists, scholarly taxonomies of media production typically examine the labors of above- and below-the-line professionals directly responsible for the generation of screen images.[3] I argue instead that movie reviewers, ticket sellers, pianists and other individuals involved in the manufacture and delivery of motion picture experiences should also be included in the cohort of motion picture "producers." This requires a shift from focus on the production of *film text* to a broader inquiry into the production of *film culture*. Consider, for example, the women who provided musical accompaniment for films. These women were less visible than many of their contemporaries in the film industry (indeed, the product of their labor was an aural rather than visual phenomenon), and yet, anyone who has experienced a silent film recognizes that both film director and musical accompanist make choices that guide the audience's attention and structure the audience's interpretations of the text. The durable product of the director's work more often remains to be scrutinized after the ephemeral sounds of the accompanist's labor have dissipated, so directorial work is easier to analyze but not necessarily more important.

Moreover, conventional definitions of media "producers" implicitly re-inscribe patriarchal power by emphasizing as primary the labor (and therefore historical agency) of directors and executives.[4] These roles have historically been (and remain at the time of writing)

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[3] Vicki Mayer, *Below the Line: Producers and Production Studies in the New Television Economy* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 2. The industry terms "above the line" and "below the line" connote both creative agency and economic position. Film budget top sheets capture the production's major expense categories (with line items in each category on subsequent pages), and creative talent appears "above the line" at the top of the page, while everyone else – technicians, craftspeople, etc – are defined as "below the line" expenditures.

[4] Mexican film Historian Miquel Angel notes that some postrevolution film critics blamed Mexican audiences for the underdevelopment of the national cinema because spectators were ignorant of filmmakers to such an extent that "Mexican filmmaker" was not a category one could aspire to. Consider that, while D.W. Griffith was as well-known as his protégé Lillian Gish in the US, he was hardly known at all in Mexico -- the film's advertisements in the Mexican press

principally occupied by men. While directors and impresarios have certainly been significant, the collaborative nature of filmmaking and cinematic exhibition necessarily empowered a range of historical agents beyond those who would today be called 'above the line' creative professionals, and every beyond those whose names appear elsewhere on production company payrolls. I recognize that the creative and technical work of filmmaking was certainly distinct from the wage labor of employed women. My assertion that ticket sales girls and silent film directors ought to share the umbrella of "film [culture] producers" does not mean that historical agents occupying these distinct roles would recognize themselves as members of a common class apart from their gender and national identity (productive, creative, social, or otherwise). While the Fordist division of labor that would characterize mature film industries fostered a level of social alienation that allowed creative professionals to conceive of themselves as distinct from manual and wage laborers, the artisanal structure of the Mexican silent film "industry" cannot be understood under similar terms. Instead, the class hierarchy of Mexican society and spatio-temporal splits between filming, distributing, and exhibiting motion pictures all but assured that the work of individuals in each phase would be atomized rather than conceived as part of a common endeavor. Nonetheless, these groups evinced women's increased social participation in the development of modern Mexico City and their collective efforts helped to define how Mexican audiences experienced the movies. [5]

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announced Gish first, with the director's name often omitted. Still in 1920, stars were celebrated while directors remained anonymous: in the Mexican publicity for *Blind Husbands*, Von Stroheim's name did not appear, but the name of the principal actress was displayed in a font as large as the title of the film. This suggests how advertising practices were localized according to the tastes of their audiences. *Por Las Pantallas De La Ciudad De México: Periodistas Del Cine Mudo,* (Guadalajara: Universidad de Guadalajara, 1995),116.

[5] See Vicki Mayer, *Below the Line*.

Theorizing Media Production

Film texts and their contexts of reception (the topics of the chapters that follow and precede this one, respectively) illuminate much about the engines of stasis and change in the historical development of cinema. However, even together, these frameworks leave a blind spot at the site of film production. Present developments in cinema studies – especially the idea of "convergence culture" in which relationships between media texts, media producers, and media consumers are radically restructured – should provoke retrospective inquiry into media production as it relates to other components of media systems.[6] I do not mean to imply a necessary homology between the identities of film producers, the content of the films, and mainstream audience dispositions, but rather, to interrogate how the interconnectedness of these concerns within a distinct sociohistoric and economic context means that we cannot understand films without understanding the conditions that produced them. In regards to the present case, consider the film *La luz.* The film was a remake of a well-known Italian film, but it was celebrated as a triumph of Mexican cinema precisely because it was *produced* in Mexico by Mexican talent. Moreover, the cast and crew included Emma Padilla and Ezequiel Carrasco, both of whom hailed from Mexico City's upper class.[7] Opportunities to work in film were

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[6] Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture : Where Old and New Media Collide.* (New York: New York University Press, 2006). Jenkins constructs convergence culture as a 21st century phenomenon wherein grassroots and corporate efforts intersect, and the distinctions between media producers and media consumers are blurred – but this work provides a basis for rethinking historical differentiations between productive classes and analyzing the way they interact.

[7] Elisa Lozano, "Ezequiel Carrasco, Del Cine Silente Al Sonoro," *Cuartoscuro*, 2010. http://cuartoscuro.com.mx/2010/09/ezequiel-carrasco-del-cine-silente-al-sonoro/ A picture reproduced here shows the cast and crew, handsomely dressed in evening gowns and tuxedoes, posed in three rows behind a motion picture camera. The spacious, high-ceilinged set in which they appear appears as a well-appointed domestic space, connoting both the class of the film's protagonists and the personal, domestic character of its narrative.

preferentially allocated to those already connected with the entrepreneurs wealthy enough to pursue film production, and yet, while filmmakers in Mexico were from the middle and upper classes, the bulk of the audience could be classified as proletarian.[8] In the composite, the interaction between Mexican socioeconomic hierarchies and cinema was contradictory: filmmaking reproduced the social capital of Mexico City's upper class, even as the exhibition of films tended to reconfigure class distinctions (as illustrated in Chapter 1). Thus production studies complement studies of spectatorship and film texts, altering not only how we understand media texts, but also how we understand media to operate within larger social structures.

Production studies, however, have not always been as central to the discipline of film and media studies as one might expect – so one aim of this chapter is, in part, to integrate the study of cultural labor with the study of cultural products and their effects. Past interrogations of the broader implications of film production have often come from outside the film studies discipline, as was the case with Hortense Powdermaker's groundbreaking and as-yet unrivalled 1950 anthropological study *Hollywood, The Dream Factory,* which argued that the power structures of Hollywood and the day-to-day social relations of filmmaking determined the content of motion pictures.[9] From within the discipline, scholars mindful of film's industrial character have fruitfully integrated the study of filmmaking business structures with the study of film artistry;

[8] This was also the case in other Latin American countries. See, for a distinctive example, Christine Ehrick, "Beneficent Cinema: State Formation, Elite Reproduction, and Silent Film in Uruguay, 1910s-1920s." *The Americas* 63, no. 2 (2006): 205-24. Ehrick's work on Uruguayan "beneficent cinema" – movies produced as fundraising projects for women's philanthropic organizations – shows how cinema was used to re-inscribe the social position of upper-class citizens. Montevideo's upper class had the capital (material and social) to produce films and guarantee an audience for those films; Joanne Hershfield, *Imagining the Chica Moderna*, 42.

[9] Hortense Powdermaker, *Hollywood, the Dream Factory: An Anthropologist Looks at the Movie-Makers*. Boston: Little, Brown, 1950.

most notable are David Bordwell, Janet Staiger and Kristin Thompson's *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style and Mode of Production to 1960*, which reveals how the mechanics of production and American economic ideology codified classical cinema aesthetics, and Thomas Schatz's *The Genius of the System*, which argues that Hollywood's durability and popular/artistic success were the product not of great artists but of a well-designed and efficient movie making process.[10]

Note that the above studies 1) treat gender only tangentially, rather than as a historical force in its own right, and 2) are premised on the longevity and stability of a massive, well-capitalized, and integrated cultural *industry*. How, then, have gendered discourses structured media production? And what of the precarious, diffuse, and ephemeral production that occurred in would-be industries (as was the case for pre-Golden Age Mexican cinema)? Films seen by a relative few, businesses that never got off the ground, and career aspirations never fulfilled can be at least as instructive as unqualified successes. The circumstances under which certain events *do not* become part of the master narrative that leads inevitably to the present can (and must) be understood – though to do so often requires work at the margins of established scholarship, or careful searching for inconsistencies and absences in the historical record.[11] This is a task that pairs naturally with the work of feminist production studies, which as an approach is concerned with uncovering the historically relevant and yet unrecognized labors of women producers whose

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[10] David Bordwell, Janet Staiger, and Kristin Thompson. *The Classical Hollywood Cinema*, and Thomas Schatz, *The Genius of the System: Hollywood Filmmaking in the Studio Era.* (New York: Pantheon, 1988).

[11] For an account of how the events of the past and the narration of those events diverge in the service of entrenched power formations, see Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History.* (Beacon Press, 1995).

various labors constituted one generative mechanism driving historical change.[12] In particular, I am concerned with the way women's film production work has been defined, valued, and articulated within the context of postrevolution Mexico.[13]

The situation of female labor in the nascent, pre-industrial Mexican film production system mirrors the earlier conditions endured by women writers in Mexico from the conquest to the contemporary era, which Jean Franco explicates in her book *Producing Women.* Franco writes that, while the interventions women made in the development of modern Mexican literature may have been "lonely," the impact of that labor "cannot be considered trivial or isolated." Franco argues that women's apparently isolated challenges and disruptions to the status quo at various points in Mexican history constitute (perhaps ironically) a legacy -- a continuous historical thread -- of struggle and disruption through which "new social selves are constructed."[14] Within the constraints of their historical contexts, women seized productive labor as a means to create identities outside those conferred by religion and the state. Where film production is concerned, the postrevolution moment was a time when transnational capitalism and emergent modern nationalism collided to provide unique opportunities for women to struggle against and disrupt traditional patterns of behavior while constructing their own social selves.

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[12] When speaking of production, it should be noted that there are unconscious processes beyond the artists' control that inform their productive activity. Moreover, cultural production often occurs within the confines of media institutions and other social systems. Nonetheless, the intentionality of creative production on the part of historical agents remains relevant.

[13] Miranda Banks, "Feminism Below-the-Line: Defining Feminist Production Studies," in Vicki Mayer, Miranda J Banks, and John T Caldwell. *Production Studies: Cultural Studies of Media Industries.* (Routledge, 2009), 90.

[14] Preceding quotes from Jean Franco, *Plotting Women*, xxiii.

Women and Work

Traditional social configurations coded Mexican women's work – and by extension, existence – as domestic, private, and anonymous.[15] From the time before first contact and continuing after Mexican independence, opportunities for women to earn a living and to make a name for themselves were extremely limited. However, the early decades of the twentieth century transformed Mexican sentiments about women and work. Porfirian anxieties about the dangerous potential of men and women interacting in shared workspaces subsided by the 1920s, and changes in workplace demographics followed. Women as a percentage of Mexico City public employees more than tripled over three decades, from seven percent in 1900 to thirteen percent in 1920, up to 22 percent in 1930.[16] The aforementioned shifts in public discourse about gender in the workplace and simultaneous increased labor participation by women are attributable to both the success of the women's movement in advocating for women's right to work and the need to replace more than a million and a half (predominantly male) workers lost to the deadly violence of the revolution.[17] Female workers helped to satisfy the demand for administrative and service labor especially in the modernizing Mexican economy; in the gender-segregated want ads in the daily newspapers, one can find ads seeking women to work as

[15] Per Tuñón and Franco, nuns and sisters account for the historic deviation from this norm, but even women committed to the church were subject to its particular patriarchal regulations.

[16] Susie S. Porter, *Working Women in Mexico City: Public Discourses and Material Conditions, 1879-1931.* (University of Arizona Press, 2003), 23.

[17] Ibid, 52.

secretaries, shop attendants, and nannies, while illustrated advertisements for Sanborn's restaurant show aproned female employees waiting on mixed-gender dining parties.[18]

Though still a minority, women in the postrevolution Mexican workforce altered the gendered landscape of the city by normalizing the presence of women in shops, offices, entertainment venues, and on the street – a change that benefitted even women who by choice or necessity assumed the vocation of wife and mother to the exclusion of other professions. As employed women, housewives, domestics and others became more active participants in the day-to-day life of the city, they also adopted an active gaze – the "public spectatorship" described by Mary Kay Vaughan, which was marked by a consumerist disposition towards images, commodities, and identities. This disposition "legitimized women's presence in public and made them active participants in the construction of their own desires."[19] At the same time, as Joanne Hershfield writes, "vision and representation, the production and consumption of images, cannot be teased apart; they are intimately connected as part of a complex social system of signification that involves the production, circulation, and consumption of images."[20] This is to say that women entering the postrevolution public sphere participated in a circular process of seeing and being seen that affirmed their belonging in the modern nation-state while linking their presence to the capitalist logic of the new century, and film production was part of a similarly integrated cultural sphere that included as well film consumption and films themselves.

With the above concerns in mind, the production and consumption of popular culture reveals itself to be as political an endeavor as agitation for suffrage. I do not mean to imply that

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[18] *Excélsior*, 6 Nov 1918, p 4.

[19] Ageeth Sluis. *Deco Body, Deco City* 75.

[20] Joanne Hershfield, *Imagining the Chica Moderna*, 15.

cinema production in postrevolution Mexico City was centrally concerned with the transformation of political institutions, but rather, that human agents engaged in the production of popular culture cannot avoid simultaneous participation in the generation of gendered discourses with broad social and political implications. Prevailing ideas about the proper nature of gender in society feed into the development of social institutions and political decision making, thereby altering the opportunities available to individuals.

Women In Front of the Camera

While women participated in the production of Mexican silent film culture in multiple ways, those who worked as actresses contributed most visibly to the developing national cinema.[21] This may seem excessively obvious – acting is a form of visual communication, after all – but screen stars do not merely communicate: they play a central role in the "production, circulation, and negotiation of meanings, identities, desires, and ideologies" wherever they appear.[22] Moreover, film stars are not only their performances. They are the product of both industrial imperatives and their own personal narratives, which leads Richard Dyer to conclude that "stars are examples of the way people live their relation to production in capitalist society."[23] This is to say that film stars, despite their celebrated distinctiveness, are remarkably like other human agents – including the women discussed throughout this dissertation – in that they must negotiate the structural constraints of their historical positions as they seek to control their own

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[21] In 1919 Hipólito Seijas affirmed that "the public who currently go to the movies can be divided into two classes: those who go for the stars, and those who like the stories." Quoted in Miquel, *Por Las Pantallas*, 122.

[22] Christine Gledhill, "Introduction," in Christine Gledhill, ed,. *Stardom: Industry of Desire* (London: Routledge, 1991), i.

[23] Richard Dyer, "Introduction," from *Heavenly Bodies: Film Stars and Society,* 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2004), 5.

lives and stories. As the following accounts of Mexican silent film stardom will show, the constellation of discourses that constituted the "star texts" of Mexican silent divas (including publicity photos, interviews, product endorsements, gossip and on-screen appearances) constructed these women as *both* committed patriots fighting for the *patria* through their art, and as women subordinated to the restrictions of a patriarchal society whose peripheral film industry cold not satisfy their ambitions. Female Mexican silent film stars responded to these conditions in various ways – some, like Padilla, eventually left acting all together, while others, like Derba, used acting to move into new (and potentially more autonomous) roles in media production that would have been all but impossible to access without the springboard that performance provided.

Significantly, efforts to create a distinctly Mexican national cinema began not with a push to tell national stories, but instead with the introduction of Mexican stars. What made the narrative feature films of the late 1910's "Mexican" was not their subject matter or their aesthetic grammar (recall that Derba's first films were direct remakes of Italian films), but rather, the appearance of performers who were Mexican nationals in their private lives, even if the characters they played would have been more at home in Rome, Italy than in the Roma neighborhood of Mexico City. Indeed, Padilla and Derba professed a commitment to the improvement of their country even as they played roles originated in Italian cinema – Padilla's star vehicle, *La Luz,* was based on the diva film *Il Fuoco s*tarring Pina Menicelli. Significantly, even before Padilla's first film had premiered, newspapers hailed her as Mexico's first star. She had never acted on the stage, so the public came to know her as they came to feel familiar with other screen stars – through the growing body of journalism dedicated to movie stars and movie culture. Padilla was a textbook case of how the process of creating fame was reversed when Mexico entered modernity: "before, people who were famous for having accomplished

something in reality were then accorded recognition in the media but, as this [visual] culture developed, individuals became celebrities just for appearing there."[24]

But Padilla and Derba also benefitted from the efforts of women who came before them; in fact, the stage had been set decades before by the divas of the late nineteenth century theater. Though the specific characteristics of the diva have changed over time, several key features remain constant: divas are actresses of high social standing, renowned for both their beauty and their charismatic performances, who portray female characters that by fate or by choice come into conflict with the gendered norms of society. During the nineteenth century, divas hailing from both Mexico and abroad were uniquely exempt from the assumption that a woman's noblest aspirations should be matrimony and maternity. [25] Mexican diva Angela Peralta, who made her stage debut in 1862, provides an instructive example. Peralta capitalized on the high-class prestige conferred by the performing arts to craft a career at once visible and simultaneously premised upon the singularity of her talents as a performer, and the press referred to her simply as "the Star."[26] Acting was thus an anomalous form of female labor in the Mexican context: performance was work individualized, publicized, and celebrated rather than taken for granted as a woman's (re)productive duty. As such, acting was a proven path toward the greater

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[24] John Mraz, *Looking for Mexico*, 3.

[25] It bears noting that women could also achieve financial independence through sex work – but this work was outside the social economy of respectable Mexican society, and those women who labored in sex trades were generally exploited. See Katherine Bliss, *Compromised Positions.*

[26] For more on Peralta's unique position among her countrywomen, see Bobette Gugliotta, *Women of Mexico : The Consecrated and the Commoners, 1519-1900*. (Encino: Floricanto Press, 1989), 164-165. Gugliotta emphasizes how racially diverse women working from within and without Mexican social institutions played an instrumental role in the nation's trajectory.

individuality and independence of modern femininity, and Mexican actresses of the twentieth century would take advantage of the exemptions afforded to actresses to push the boundaries of feminine influence in the culture industry.

The nineteenth-century institution of the diva also proved adaptable to the international, twentieth-century art of motion pictures. From the crumbling of the Porfiriato, through the fighting of the revolution, and as a parade of new leaders tried their hand at statecraft, the silent divas enthralled audiences. Diva films even played on Mexican screens alongside newsreels that documented the battles then unfolding across the country, so the reign of the divas thus spanned the dramatic split between pre- and postrevolution Mexico City.[27] The divas' work bridged another divide as well: that between European filmmakers and Mexican moviegoers. Audiences were primed to welcome Italian screen divas Lyda Borelli, Francesca Bertini, and Pina Menicelli (and later, the Mexican divas Padilla and Derba), largely because they already recognized and embraced in the abstract the figure of the diva: hyper-feminine, glamorous, emotive, and larger-than-life. Beloved Italian stars put a modern, silver-nitrate shine on the already-popular diva figure by appearing in *the* archmodern medium, thereby becoming prototypical "it girls" before such a term existed. Divas set the fashions of the day, and their notoriety was inseparable from their personae.[28] It should also be noted that the plots of the Italian diva films (and later, the Mexican diva films modeled on those templates) resonated with moviegoers because they captured a sense of indeterminacy that suffused Mexico as one historical chapter closed and a

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[27] Darlene J. Sadlier, *Latin American Melodrama: Passion, Pathos, and Entertainment.* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2009), 4.

[28] The department store *La Ciudad de Londres* sold dresses and shoes named after Bertini, and, as Rielle Navitski has noted, male critics were quick to deploy the diva's fashion icon status as evidence of their frivolity.

new one was being drafted. In this way, screen divas laid the foundation for the enduring institution of Mexican screen stardom (to speak nothing of the way silent film stars offered moviegoers actionable models of modern femininity).[29] This stardom encompassed both on-screen and off-screen appearances, straddling public and private realms in a way that echoed the transgression of those same boundaries by women who navigated the urban space as film spectators and modern consumers.

So important were female stars that, in advertisements for films, the names of glamorous performers received top billing – even before the title of the film or the name of the theater. The economic power of the divas was such that their appearance was sufficient to sell tickets, which foregrounds the status of the star as a public commodity ("stars are made for profit," as Dyer has plainly observed).[30] Reviewers contributed to the phenomenon of star-as-commodity by lavishing their attention on female performers as the primary attraction within motion pictures; in newspaper criticism, plots were often de-emphasized in favor of acting and mise-en-scene. The public did favor a few male comics, but even Chaplin mustered only a fraction of the devotion lavished upon the divas. One journalist observed the cinematic landscape of the day and concluded that the divas "inaugurated the reign of the movie stars" in Mexico.[31] It bears repeating, however, that the screen divas were those film stars whose performance style and

[29] Mexican cinema, in its Golden Age, would develop the most glamorous star system in the Spanish-speaking world. Marketable stars helped Mexican movies dominate both domestic and international Spanish-speaking markets -- a level of success akin to that of Hollywood. See Joanne Hershfield and David Maciel, eds. *Mexico's Cinema: A Century of Film and Filmmakers* (Wilmington, Del: SR Books, 1999), xii.

[30] Richard Dyer, *Heavenly Bodies,* 4.

[31] Ángel Miquel, *Por Las Pantallas De La Ciudad De México: Periodistas Del Cine Mudo*. (Guadalajara: Universidad de Guadalajara, 1995): 45.

social position were most akin to the brand of female stardom already recognized and accepted in the Mexican context *prior* to the arrival of cinema. With this in mind, it is no surprise that the female film stars who most closely fit the extant 'diva' paradigm were Mexico's first screen sensations.

Mexican critics of the popular Italian screen divas and the divas' Mexican acolytes often framed their critiques in nationalist terms.[32] For example, one reviewer appraised Derba's work in *La Soñadora* and concluded that the actress' "national beauty" would be better displayed in "a typical Mexican costume performing a lively and daring *jarabe."*[33] Such discourse posited an ideal notion of the Mexican star as distinct from her international counterparts, while the act of positioning Derba as a movie star helped to bring Mexican national cinema into alignment with the international economy of motion pictures (which commodified individuality on a mass scale via the figure of the star). The imperative to embody a 'Mexican look' did eventually make its way into Derba's star text, even if she did not play a national archetype on screen: in a souvenir photograph produced by the famed Compañía Industrial Fotográfica in 1925 (one of many Derba photographs that studio would produce), Derba appears in an elaborately beaded sombrero with a serape draped over her shoulder.[34] Such an image assured audiences that Derba was r*eally* a Mexican star, regardless of the roles she played – and such a sense of who the star genuinely is

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[32] The preceding chapter of this dissertation addresses critical responses to diva films; for an in-depth analysis of how male Mexican critics evaluated the phenomenal popularity of diva films, see Rielle Navitski "Early Film Critics and Fanatical Fans."

[33] The jarabe was a dance that assumed folkloric status in postrevolution Mexico. Quoted in ibid 73.

[34] Photo reproduced in Angel Miquel, "Mimí Derba." In Jane Gaines, Radha Vatsal, and Monica Dall'Asta, eds.*Women Film Pioneers Project.* Center for Digital Research and Scholarship. (New York, Columbia University Libraries, 2013) <https://wfpp.cdrs.columbia.edu/pioneer/ccp-mimi-derba/>

as a private individual, often in tension with their public performance, is an important component of the star phenomenon as described by Richard Dyer in his seminal work on the subject. [35] Dyer's theory of stardom grows from his study of Hollywood stars, but his insights regarding the multimedia elaboration of star texts and their utility in society is readily adaptable to the Mexican context, wherein similar strategies of marketing and consumption were used for both home-grown and foreign stars. Souvenir photographs like Derba's, and interviews like the one between Hipolito Seijas and Emma Padilla, were as fundamental to the creation of Mexican stars as were the actresses' on-screen performances.

And yet, while the extra-filmic components of film stardom (that is, the way movie stars were manufactured, marketed, and reviewed) were broadly similar in Hollywood and Mexico during the late 1910s and early 1920s, the on-screen components of the first Mexican film actresses' 'star texts' were initially more aligned with European – particularly Italian – iterations of screen stardom. This is evident in the deployment of the term "diva" to describe Mexican silent actresses. By connoting divinity – something sublime –the title underscores an important distinction between Mexican divas and their star counterparts north of the Rio Grande. Angela Dalle Vacche has emphasized that the on-screen characterization of the diva (be she Italian or Mexican) was erratic and complicated, in stark contrast to the plucky, goal-oriented Hollywood stars exemplified by Mary Pickford and Pearl White. Dalle Vacche attributes this difference to the fact that American mainstream cinema was tied to values of narrative coherence and depth of character, which the diva film overrides for the sake of dazzling visual display an operatic heightening of emotions.[36] Moreover, the affecting performances of divas, while "excessive" in

[35] See Richard Dyer, *Heavenly Bodies.*

[36] "The combination in one single type of these two extreme postures – rigidly elegant and callously flexible – demonstrates that the diva's cultural function was to embody a conflicted

their expressiveness, affirmed Mexicans' longstanding notion of women as emotional (rather than rational) beings.[37] For their part, Mexican audiences vocalized a preference for the Italian performance style both on the basis of emotional resonance, and also because of racial and linguistic commonalities between Italy and Mexico: when *El Universal Illustrado* in 1920 held a contest to determine the most popular film star among Mexican audiences, a pair of female readers wrote on their ballot "We do not understand how a woman who feels, a woman with a soul, a Latina woman, in short, can vote for an artist who is not Francesca Bertini."[38] By explaining their aesthetic preference in terms of racial and linguistic belonging, these women redeemed foreign cinema for the overarching discourse of nationalism that dominated public discourse at the time.[39]

Italian divas offered Mexican stars and Mexican audiences alike a recognizable and readily appropriable model for how to fit women into the medium of motion pictures, and Mexican actresses consciously adopted the style of performance and the sartorial affectations of their Italian idols. But to say that Mexican screen divas were only pale imitations of their more widely-recognized Italian contemporaries would be to ignore the way cinema figured into

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answer to major changes within sexual and social relations. The diva is afraid of, but also eager for, new behaviors and fresh situations. By contrast, Hollywood stardom as a whole is built on the belief that, on one hand, greedy vamps are always evil, while, on the other, any new way of being, in a personal or an economic sense, is, by definition, always good." Angela Dalle Vacche, *Diva,* 6, 22

[37] Jean Franco, *Plotting Women*.

[38] Paz Fregoso and Elena Platas, quoted in "Nuestro buzón cinematográfico," *El Universal Ilustrado*, April 29, 1920, 22.

[39] Fandom indigenized foreign stars: the "Reina del Cine" contest concluded with a gala function to honor winners Francesca Bertini and Mabel Normand (neither of whom was in attendance). Angel Miquel, *Por Las Pantallas,* 113.

Mexican modernity, and the way Mexican actresses used their stardom as a point of entry into other activities in the cultural industres. Mexican filmmakers embraced the diva model not only as a way to be 'modern' but also as a way to help elevate the status of their country, thereby suggesting how motion pictures could facilitate the intranational spread of modernization and nationalism so desired in the postrevolutionary era. Moreover, Mexican actresses often diversified their careers after appearing on screen: Mimí Derba was a stage diva of the late Porfirian era who segued her theatrical success into work as a film actress, director, and producer, while Derba's peer Esperanza Iris, "La Diva de la Opereta," used the fame and fortune she gained as a star of the stage to enter cinematic exhibition as the proprietor of Teatro Esperanza Iris, which upon its opening on May 25 of 1918 "was a sign that society could find harmony in culture overcoming violence and socio-political instability."[40]

However, the divas' reign was not indefinite: WWI-generated declines in European film production, Hollywood's ascendance, and changing tastes among Mexican audiences saw the figure of the *pelona* – a Mexican flapper – usurp the diva's place as the prevailing emblem of modern Mexican femininity. The concurrent, dramatic reduction in Mexican film production also assured that the would-be Mexican screen stars of the Jazz Age had to look elsewhere for opportunity.[41] This is not to say that interest in generating Mexican stars for the Mexican screen diminished in tandem with attenuated production – the desire to "find ideal female figures to embody a particular form of film stardom that corresponded fully with nationalist ideas"

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[40] "Teatro de la Ciudad Esperanza Iris," cultura.df.gob.mx

[41] Mexican narrative fiction production was inconsistent throughout the silent era. From 1922 to 1923, production dropped by 50 percent – from ten films to five. By 1928 and 1929, urban film production was down to 2 films per year, and filmmaking in the provinces fared no better. No narrative features were produced in Mexico in 1930. Garcia Riera, *Historia del Cine Mexicano*, 50.

continued, but star-making was pursued outside of the national cinema, though these efforts, pursued chiefly through the national press, were unsuccessful. [42] Positive reviews for would-be Mexican action star Maria Cozzi, whose screen debut in *Fanny o el robo de veinte milliones* (*Fanny or the theft of twenty million*, Sánchez Valtierra,1921) was praised in Spanish-language film magazine *Cine Mundial*, could not achieve their goal to elevate a Mexican girl to legitimate star status in the absence of a film industry that could cultivate that talent. Subsequent efforts to make Mexican stars, then, were oriented toward export to an industry with the necessary means to manufacture modern movie stardom.

In 1923, the Circuito Olimpia theater chain, Mexico City liberal newspaper *El Democrata*, and the Mexico office of Famous Players-Lasky distribution announced the "Estrella del sur" contest to find "a beautiful girl from the Federal District to go to Los Angeles, all expenses paid, to appear in Paramount films" alongside studio stars Gloria Swanson, Pola Negri, Betty Compson, Antonio Moreno, and Agnes Ayres.[43] The contest was, importantly, open only to female entrants – presumably, women were both the best cinema consumers and the best suited to represent their country as stars in the USA. The contest announcement specified that the winner would receive a screen test with an opportunity for feature roles if she was successful. It also assured contestants that knowledge of English was not necessary, which opened up the competition, but to only a limited degree – while more than 50 percent of the urban populace were literate, it is no stretch to imagine that the figure was lower for women. So, this newspaper-administered contest (like all iterations of film culture that unfolded through print media) was in

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42 Alfaro De la Vega, *Mexique las grandes actrices du cinema mexicain*. Cinémas d'Amérique latine N° 7/1999, 59-60.

[43] "Jovenes: aqui esta lo que estaban esperando." *El Democrata,* 25 March 1923, p 5.

fact classed in ways that may be invisible to the contemporary reader but which were exceedingly relevant to women living in early twentieth century Mexico City.[44]

De los Reyes reports that the contest connected with "the new Mexican woman, eager for novelty and adventure," but the contest also served the American-owned Circuito Olimpia (whose flagship venue was the Cine Olimpia), *El Democrata*, and Famous Players-Lasky, which were eager to grow their audiences and their profits. [45] To cast a vote in the contest, one needed both a voting coupon from *El Democrata* and a ticket stub from an Olimpia theater. Olimpia theaters encouraged women who entered the contest to send their friends and family to see movies at the Olimpia so that they could accrue more votes. Portraits of the contestants were displayed in the lobby of the Olimpia, and the vote tally was published periodically in *El Democrata*, which framed "a typical Hollywood publicity scheme as an exercise in democracy," as Laura Isabel Serna astutely observes.[46] The eventual contest winner, a Guerrero native named Honoria Suarez, defeated more than 41 contest 'finalists' including recognized stage and screen actresses Elena Sánchez Valenzuela, Adela Seyqueyro, and Nelly Fernandez.[47] Suarez said that she entered the contest "not because I consider myself beautiful, but because I have the necessary temperament, disposition, and ambition," thereby downplaying appearance and emphasizing

[44] Official government statistics reported Mexico City literacy rates of 45 percent in 1900 to 75 percent in 1930, though national literacy rates were considerably lower. Statistics cited in Pablo Picato, *City of Suspects, Crime in Mexico City, 1900-1931* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001).

[45] Aurelio de los Reyes, *Cine y Sociedad II*, 328.

[46] Laura Isabel Serna*, Making Cinelandia*, 148.

[47] Aurelio de los Reyes, *Cine y Sociedad II*, 329.

character as the essential virtues of a deserving Mexican celebrity. [48] Following Suarez's victory, the Cine Olimpia held benefits in her honor both to raise funds for her voyage and to build public support for "the Mexican chosen by those of her race to elevate not only Mexico, but all of Latin America, because through her veins runs the blood of the conquistadors, and she, a conquistador as well, will put her name like a jewel in the coat of arms of those people who still believe in Jesus Christ and speak Spanish."[49] The decision to emphasize Suarez' Spanish heritage bears noting, as Suarez was chosen to be a *Hollywood* star as well as an ambassador for her country. Mexican nationalism emphasized the Aztec character of mexicanidad, but Hollywood tended to whiten Latinx stars by emphasizing their Spanish, rather than Indian, heritage.[50] Honoria Suarez never did become a Hollywood film star (she died in Los Angeles at the age of 24), but the contest that crowned here was nonetheless remarkable in its construction: consumption of Hollywood cinema was framed as a means to make a Mexican star, one who was both a woman of faith and a representation of a distinct, inborn Mexican sensibility. [51] Moreover, the contest dramatized the modern promise of social and spatial mobility in its premise, which promised to elevate a Mexican girl to the heights of international stardom without regard to her pedigree (or even talents, one might cynically observe). To sum, not only did the contest tether together

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[48] "Honoraria Suarez, a vencedora del concurso cinematografico" *El Democrata*, June 22 1923, p 3.

[49] Aurelio de los Reyes, *Cine y Sociedad II*, 334

[50] See Mary Beltrán,.*Latina/o Stars in US Eyes: The Making and Meanings of Film and TV Stardom*. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2009).

[51] She appeared, briefly, in *Trail of the Lonesome* (Maigne, 1923) as well as a lost short, *Honoria Suarez en Hollywood*. Despite attempts to launch a career in both Mexico and Los Angeles, Suarez died "alone and penniless" at age 24. Laura Isabel Serna*, Making Cinelandia*, 150.

Hollywood cinema and Mexican identity, but it made cinema consumption into a 'productive' modern activity – and all of these effects pivoted on the ideal of modern Mexican femininity.

Where Suarez failed in achieving international stardom though Hollywood cinema, actresses Lupe Vélez and Dolores del Rio succeeded– the latter two were unquestionably Mexico's most famous cinematic "exports" of the silent era. As ambassadors of mexicanidad, their Hollywood careers were closely followed by the Mexican press. A week before del Rio's *What Price Glory?* (Walsh, 1926) premiered in Mexico City, *El Universal* ran the headline "Dolores del Rio's Triumph in *What Price Glory?* Is Mexico's Triumph in the Arts," while the accompanying text assured readers that New York film critics had given the film rave reviews.[52] Such discourse positioned Mexican-born stars alongside popular Hollywood personalities like Clara Bow and Greta Garbo, thereby affirming both the uniqueness of Mexican character and the compatibility of that character with international modernity. Vélez and del Rio also joined the cohort of Hollywood stars who served as templates Mexican women embellished as they constructed modern identities for themselves. The stardom associated with those movie actresses blurred the line between public performance and private experience not only at the level of the individual star, but for her audience as well. The conventions of movie stardom gave women a chance not only to be the topic of discussion, but to discuss their personal lives in a way that aimed to mimic the cinema's intimate (and yet paradoxically mass-produced) mode of address.[53]

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[52] *El Universal*, October 1927. The spatial circumscription of this dissertation precludes more detailed analysis of the way these actresses navigated the dual expectations of *mexicanidad* and Hollywood stardom. See Hall, *Dolores del Rio: Beauty in Light and Shadow* and Sturtevant, "Spitfire: Lupe Velez and the ambivalent pleasures of ethnic masquerade," in *The Velvet Light Trap*.

[53] Joanne Hershfield, *Imagining La Chica Moderna,* 65. Hershfield notes that this trend took hold specifically as Mexican culture began to re-calibrate its focus from European models

In interviews, stars discussed their families, their beauty routines, and their hobbies to appear at once individually distinctive and broadly relatable. Such banalities might seem divorced from the grand aims of the postrevolution nationalist project, but while "discussions of mexicanidad or a projection of Mexican authenticity have generally been concerns with political nationalism or with the work of muralists and its manifestation in the popular arts…." images of women and aimed at women, including (but not limited to) movie star images, transformed the modern Mexican woman, too.[54]

Moreover, the distinctive notion of stardom exemplified by silent divas was not erased, but rather overlaid, when Mexican filmmakers and audiences pivoted toward Hollywood: consider, for example, the celebrated Golden Age screen divas Dolores del Rio (who would return to Mexico in the 1940s) and Maria Felix. Both were Mexican studio stars known for their affective – but always, even if improbably, glamorous – performances. To sum, the fact that Italian divas provided the prototype for film stardom in the Mexican context means that stardom in Mexico works in ways differently than commonly assumed on the basis of Hollywood's eventual domination in Mexico and its proximity to the same: while personal interviews and marketing campaigns are trappings of contemporary stardom commonly recognized across the US/Mexico border, Mexican stardom to this day remains more deeply rooted in the performance of pathos than pluck; and it is the ability to evoke emotion rather than to convey plausible psychological motivation that makes a performer stand out.

Women Behind the Camera

(such as Sarah Bernhardt during the Porfiriato, and then Pina Menichelli during the early postrevolution era) toward North American ones.

[54]Joanne Hershfield, *Imagining la Chica Moderna*, 99.

While actresses performed new ideals of femininity for Mexican audiences, female directors extended that labor on the other side of the camera. Though these women completed only a handful of films, their efforts must be evaluated within the gendered social, national, and industrial formations that inflected their careers. Too often scholars have overlooked the role women played in Mexican silent film production based on the size of the female director cohort and the correspondent loss of the films those five women produced.[55] Moreover, as the silent films directed by women in Mexico do not necessarily satisfy the scholarly benchmark of "women's cinema" they have not been retroactively assimilated into the history of that corpus.[56] Unfortunately, such judgments impose unfitting standards of productivity and influence on an enterprise that was contingent for all involved, regardless of gender. Mexican silent film production was unsystematic, artisanal, and discontinuous as a general rule, and those men who directed motion pictures also found their success delimited by the instability of the Mexican film production landscape and the strength of competition from abroad: despite the collective efforts of countless filmmakers, a Mexican film industry proper did not coalesce until the state began funding and facilitating film production in 1935.[57]

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[55] Schroeder Rodriguez, for example, grossly underestimates the number of women who worked in film production.

[56] Elissa Rashkin, *Women Filmmakers in Mexico: The Country of Which We Dream.* (Austin, University of Texas Press, 2001), 31. The generic construct of women's cinema encompasses those films that are organized around female fantasy, or around the crisis of subjectivity that surrounds the figure of the woman. See Mary Ann Doane, *Desire to Desire.*

[57] Andrea Noble, *Mexican National Cinema*, 14. The state subsidized the CLASA (Cinematografico Latino Americano, SA) Studio in 1935, which was followed by the production of Mexico's first international hit film *Alla en El Rancho Grande* in 1936 and the production of a record-setting 50-plus films in 1938.

With this context in mind, the challenges faced by Mexican female filmmakers take on significance beyond the standard invocation of women's struggles as evidence of a pervasive, domestic patriarchy: Mexico's female film pioneers were full participants in the attempted development of a national industry proper, rather than accessories to a historical struggle spearheaded by better-remembered men like Enrique Rosas.[58] What is actually remarkable, then, is not how poorly women fared in Mexican silent cinema, but how many women succeeded in completing feature films within the broad contours of uncertainty that defined Mexican silent film production.[59] If even one hundred silent feature films were made in Mexico, eight percent of those were directed by women – and this percentage compares not unfavorably to contemporary Mexican production demographics, especially when one considers the expansion of women's rights in the century since.[60] However, it is not my intention here to 'redeem' the careers of Adriana and Dolores Ehlers, Mimí Derba, and Cándida Beltrán Rendón under the contemporary rubric of auteurism, a program Jane Gaines rightly questions as a tautological enterprise – rather, I seek to assure that the disappearance of films produced by these women do not also produce the erasure of the women themselves.[61] Indeed, the cases of these women emphasize how very

[58] Rosas directed the 1919 Mexican silent serial *El Automovil Gris,* a true-crime story that has become Mexico's best-known silent film.

[59] One might also note those would-be female filmmakers Eva Limiñana and Alice Rahon, whose aspirations were frustrated and whose projects never reached screens. See Elissa Rashkin, *Women Filmmakers in Mexico*, 32.

[60] In 2016, 23% of Mexican features were directed by women, as compared to just seven percent that same year in the USA. See Center for the Study of Women in Television and Film Website maintained by Dr. Martha Lauzen of San Diego State University, and Instituto Mexicano de Cinematografia. *Anuario Estadístico De Cine Mexicano, 2016.* (Mexico City: Secreataría de Cultura, 2017).

[61] Jane Gaines, "Of Cabbages and Authors," in *A Feminist Reader in Early Cinema.* eds Jennifer M Bean and Diane Negra. (Durham: Duke University Press: 2002), 88-118.

limited notions of authorship are. Films do not spring fully formed from the minds of their producers, but are instead the product of material and industrial processes that come to the fore especially when careers limited by those same processes are the subject of interrogation.

The precocious success of Mexican female filmmakers in the silent era mirrors the situation of silent film production in the US and Europe, where female film workers often occupied more prominent roles in the silent era than they did following the introduction of sound.[62] The relative over-representation of women in the first decades of motion picture production seems to contradict the general historical trend toward expansion of women's rights, public visibility, and political participation in Westernized nations over the course of the twentieth century. The trend can be explained in part by the uncertain status of motion pictures before the crystallization of the classical narrative cinema and its attendant production structures: when film was a medium of uncertain repute and its potential as a profit generator was unproven, women – who had less to lose and more to gain from venturing into untested waters – encountered less competition from their male counterparts. As cinema became further and further capitalized, patriarchal control set in and fewer opportunities were available for women to participate in the most celebrated productive roles on motion picture sets (though they continued to work as editors, wardrobe mistresses, script girls, etc).

The factors outlined above suggest why film production at the international level was, for its era, unexpectedly amenable to female labor – but the Mexican context must be factored in as well. First, the Ehlers sisters (a team of documentarians who made their own series of newsreels

[62] Jane Gaines' *Pink Slipped: What Happened to Women in The Silent Film Industries?* provides insight into this phenomenon. Like this chapter, Gaines' book uses individual careers to explore how women were pushed out of film production and subsequently erased from film history.

and also worked in the government's film bureaucracy) benefitted from the fact that Pathé did not establish studios in Mexico as the company had in other nations across the globe, which left the field of documentary production rather more open than one might expect.[63] More important for narrative production, the Mexican convention of political patronage (in which individuals collect material rewards in return for political support) in part facilitated the ascendance of female filmmakers. Following the outbreak of revolution, the revolving door of Mexican politics saw regimes rise and fall in quick succession. Many of these regimes recognized cinema as an opportunity to sway public opinion, and some women engaged the confluence of political and artistic opportunity to enter the fray of motion picture production. Granted, a "spoils system" that prioritizes social relationships over expertise opens opportunities for corruption; however, the bad-faith argument that these women did not "deserve" their positions should not prevent us from appraising the work they achieved therein. [64] In the absence of a patronage system, the career trajectories of the most prolific female directors, Mimí Derba and the Ehlers Sisters, would likely look very different – and while the net effects of these women's association with political leaders is ambivalent, the implications of their work for future generations are no less relevant.

The Ehlers Sisters

Adriana and Dolores Ehlers' biographies are evidence of the kind of nuanced Mexican womanhood highlighted throughout this dissertation. The Ehlers sisters entered documentary

[63] John King, *Magical Reels,* 15. King's survey of Latin American cinema is remarkable for its comprehensiveness and conciseness – King capably draws connections and distinctions between film production in various Latin American countries over the course of the 20th century.

[64] Jonathan Kandell writes that "the favoritism and corruption that had plagued Porfirian mexico continued to flourish during and after the revolution," as different leaders gave government jobs and resources to supporters. *La Capital,* 449

film production under the patronage of Mexican President Venustiano Carranza, and they continued their work in nonfiction cinema after their state positions were revoked upon a change in national leadership precipitated by Carranza's assassination in 1920.[65] The Ehlers were exceptional in their ascent to positions of power that straddled both an industry and a government hostile to women – though as Elissa Rashkin notes, the question of gender has not often been central in documentation of the Ehlers' contribution to Mexican film culture.[66] While narrative cinema remains the focus of this dissertation, the Ehlers nonetheless warrant inclusion: their short-lived government posts gave them power over exhibition and production of narrative cinema, and as the first recipients to receive state financial support for filmmaking activities from the Secretaría de Gobernación, their careers marked the beginning of a pattern of official state sponsorship that would ultimately facilitate the development of a stable national industry for the production of narrative features in the sound era, and their example clarifies how –despite the egalitarian rhetoric of the revolution – the legacy of class hierarchies predating the Profiriato continued to shape the distribution of opportunity in ways that challenged patriarchal control of public discourse. [67]

Adriana and Dolores studied photography in their home state of Veracruz, where they photographed Venustiano Carranza at a state ceremony in 1915.[68] Carranza, then serving as First

[65] Patricia Torres San Martín, "Mujeres detrás de cámara: Una historia de conquistas y victorias en el cine latinoamericano." *Nueva Sociedad* 218: (2008): 107-122.

[66] Elissa Rashkin, *Women Filmmakers in Mexico*, 39.

[67] Márgara Millán, "En Otro Espejo: Cine Y Video Mexicano Hecho Por Mujeres," *in Miradas Feministas Sobre Las Mexicanas Del Siglo XX*. ed Martha Lamas (Mexico: FCE/Conaculta, 2007); and Ulises Castañeda, "Las Mujeres Detrás De Las Cámaras En El Cine Nacional." *La Cronica* (Mexico City), March 8, 2018.

[68] Adriana reported that her Veracruz studio served an especially large female clientele,

Chief of the Constutionalist Army, was so impressed by the sisters that he secured funding for them to study cinematography in the United States. There, the sisters worked at Champlain Studios in Boston and toured Universal Studios in New York City. In 1919 the Ehlers returned to Mexico, where they established the first government film unit for the production of short documentaries.[69] That same year, *Excélsior* reported that the sisters "wanted nothing more than to contribute to the aggrandizement of Mexico," through their efforts, which would "make North Americans see how wrongly they have judged Mexico."[70] In 1920, Adriana was named head of the newly-established Federal Film Censorship Department and Dolores was named head of the new Film Department – two significant public-service appointments for women in the developing bureaucracy of the revolutionary nation-state.[71] The concurrent development of state bureaucracies and consolidation of state power in Mexico following the revolution underscores the significance of these posts, which put the nascent state cinematic apparatus under the control of two women.[72]

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who were more comfortable being photographed by female photographers Márgara Millán, "En Otro Espejo," 387.

[69] Perla Ciuk, *Diccionario De Directores Del Cine Mexicano.* (Mexico City, Mexico: Cineteca Nacional, 2000), 224.

[70] *Excélsior,* "Sritas Adriana y Dolores Ehler (sic) que se perfeccionaron en Estados Unidos en el arte cinematografico, y que por medio de peliculas haran conocer a Mexico en el pais del norte." 04/05/1919, p 8, quoted in Perla Ciuk, *Diccionario De Directores Del Cine Mexicano,* 225

[71] Elissa Rashkin, *Women Filmmakers in Mexico*, 36 and Roberto Jesús Ramírez Flores, "Luces, cámara ¡censura!"

[72] For a concise survey of the special significance of political bureaucracies in Mexico and the development of these institutions through the mid-20th century, see C.E. Grimes and Charles E. P. Simmons. "Bureaucracy and Political Control in Mexico: Towards an Assessment." *Public Administration Review* 29, no. 1 (1969): 72-79. https://doi.org/10.2307/973988.

The revolution had dominated newspapers on both sides of the Rio Grande, and North American documentary and fiction films on the topic often promulgated images of Mexico as a lawless place populated by violent bandits – one such advertisement enticed viewers to view "Barbarous Mexico" from the safety of their local movie theater.[73] To counteract the unfavorable image of Mexico projected from Hollywood, Adriana produced a series of documentary films with images representative of the best and most unique aspects of Mexico and its people, including films made at Teotihuacan and the National Museum of Anthropology.[74] Perla Ciuk asserts that the Ehlers sisters were in fact the driving force behind the legislation that established longstanding government film censorship power.[75] The efforts of cinema inspectors employed by the municipal government of Mexico City described in the previous chapter jigsawed nicely with the aims of the Ehlers-led federal film bureaucracies. While inspectors sought to create a respectable and modern cinema scene on the level of exhibition, the Ehlers-led film departments inserted themselves in distribution and production: the department was empowered to review and approve cinematic material before it could be exhibited, and it also authorized the production of

[73] Margarita de Orellana writes, "Innate violence is the Mexican characteristic most often emphasized by North Americans; for them the Mexican is a villain capable of all kinds of criminal excess. From the beginning the North American cinema has portrayed the Mexican as irresponsible, treacherous, vengeful, and prey to an uncontrolled sexuality." *La Mirada Circular : El Cine Norteamericano De La Revolución* (México: Editorial J. Mortiz, 1991) 3.

[74] Aurelio de los Reyes, *Cine y Sociedad II*, 61.

[75] Reglamento de Censura Cinematografica del 1 de Octubre de 1919 and Reglamento Interior, de 2 Octubre de 1919, which established pre-censorship of films for export and of films for domestic exhibition. Perla Ciuk, *Diccionario De Directores Del Cine Mexicano*, 224.

films in the capital after reviewing pre-production planning documents to ensure that on-screen representations of Mexico cast the nation in a positive light.[76]

While a paucity of documentation prohibits analysis of the internal decision-making mechanics of the federal film departments, it is clear that the Ehlers sisters' gender made them targets for the critics of their agencies. A 1920 newspaper article admonished the cinematic bureaucracies "placed in the hands of young women who neither understand films, nor are capable of understanding the topics [of the films] that could offend our country, good manners (buenas costumbres) or morality."[77] The sisters were also accused of exercising arbitrary judgment, and men alleged that the Ehlers sisters lacked the requisite artistic training and sensitivity to rule fairly on issues pertaining to domestic film production and exhibition – a line of argument that mirrors the rhetoric male film critics used to assert their authority to pass judgment on films (and audiences!) they deemed unsophisticated. [78] Despite the objections of their detractors, and despite the shortness of their official tenure (which lasted less than a year), the Ehlers sisters played a "small but significant role in determining the direction of the

[76] Elissa Rashkin, *Women Filmmakers in Mexico*, 34. As Laura Isabel Serna reports, film exhibitors and film producers opposed this oversight and often refused to comply with the regulations requiring them to screen films and share plans with the government. The end of Carranza's administration put these complaints to rest, and the Obregón administration focused its energies on working *with* Hollywood to prevent unfavorable depictions of Mexico before they were filmed. See Serna, 'As a Mexican I Feel It's My Duty:' Citizenship, Censorship, and the Campaign Against Derogatory Films in Mexico, 1922–1930." *The Americas* 63.02 (2006): 225-44.

[77] Daniel C Narváez Torregrosa, *Los Inicios Del Cine,* 283.

[78] Gabriel Ramírez Aznar, *Crónica Del Cine Mudo Mexicano.* (México City, Mexico: Cineteca Nacional 1989), 111. The Ehlers sisters also participated in the foundation of the first Mexican film industry union, the Union de Empleados Confederados del Cineamtografo which was affiliated with the CROM (Confederacion Revolucionaria Obrera Mexican) which would have important implications for the later shape of the film industry.

postrevolutionary nation" through their overlapping labors of film regulation, censorship, and production as the first stewards of the first federal film agencies in Mexico.[79]

The Ehlers also exemplify the limitations of state patronage in the Mexican context: when opportunities are linked to the favors of a leader or party, opportunities can be revoked as expeditiously as they are offered. The leadership churn in the postrevolution era was especially intense; after decades of Porfirian rule, Mexico had five different presidents over a span of only 13 years (1917-1930). This instability surely contributed to the slow development of the national film industry, as state sponsorship and protection is essential to the success of small and fledgling industries in the face of Hollywood domination.[80] While the Ehlers' photographic skill earned them Carranza's support, they were relieved of their posts when Obregón became president in 1920: the sister's personal allegiance to one of Obregón's rivals cost them their jobs.[81] The Ehlers thus embodied the entanglement of the personal and the political, a dynamic which has been a conceptual cornerstone of contemporary feminism. The Ehlers' career trajectories are also an indication of how women of the postrevolution era necessarily navigated the patriarchal and politicized configuration of their society as they worked to build the national film culture.

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[79] Elissa Rashkin, *Women Filmmakers in Mexico*, 38.

[80] This remains the case for contemporary film industries in Latin America. As Octavio Getino writes, "the lack of robust state or governmental policies that incentivise and protect national production puts these nations at a disadvantage." C*ine Iberoamericano: Los Desafíos Del Nuevo Siglo.* (Buenos Aires: Instituto Nacional de Cine y Artes Audiovisuales, 2007), 60.

[81] After departing their government posts, the sisters went into business for themselves producing newsreels. Many of their films were produced on commission; the sisters staved off bankruptcy by filming a major soccer match for Modelo brewery and by operating a projector sales and repair shop. Unfortunately, the sister's newsreels were lost in the fire that devastated the archives of the Cineteca Nacional in 1982. Rashkin, *Women Filmmakers in Mexico*, 38.

Mimí Derba

Mimí Derba was a vaudeville star turned film director, writer, producer, and actress whose efforts to establish a Mexican film industry at a pivotal moment "contributed to the creation of a nationalist discourse, which would later be consolidated during the Golden Age of Mexican cinema."[82] Derba was a middle-class teenager when she played her first leading stage role in Mexico City in 1912, and by 1915 she was a bona fide star of the stage. At that time, the Italian divas had come into vogue among Mexican audiences, and Derba soon expressed a desire to try her luck at film acting based upon her admiration for Lyda Borelli's wide-ranging emotional performance in *La Mujer Desnuda* (*The Naked Truth,* Gallone, 1914).[83] However, at that time, Mexican film production was exclusively documentary in nature – so Derba created the opportunity to pursue her cinematic aspirations by founding Azteca Films. In this regard Derba was much like her contemporaries in Hollywood, especially Mary Pickford, who founded their own production companies to achieve greater creative and economic control over their careers.[84]

Derba did not single-handedly lay the foundation for Mexican feature film production; like her contemporaries the Ehlers sisters, Derba's skill in her first field attracted the attention of a powerful political figure who helped her enter the fray of film production. Specifically, Derba

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[82] Given name María Herminia Pérez de León Avendaño, she changed her name when she made her stage debut at the Lyric Theater. The last name Derba was chosen to evoke the names of Italian actresses Derba admired. Armando Grant and Gerardo Mariel, *Siempre Presentes:Grandes Figuras Del Cine Mexicano.* Mexico, DF, Cineteca Nacional, date unk, 6. Irene García, "Mimí Derba and Azteca Films: the Rise of Nationalism and the First Woman Film-Maker," in *Women, Ethnicity, and Nacionalisms in Latin America,* 100.

[83] Daniel C. Narváez Torregrosa, *Los Inicios Del Cine,* 86.

[84] Shelley Stamp, "Women and the Silent Screen." *The Wiley-Blackwell History of American Film* (2011), 9.

was the lover of General Pablo Gonzalez, an Army chief under Venustiano Carranza.[85] Gonzalez would in 1919 be responsible for orchestrating the assassination of Emiliano Zapata – but in 1917, the "right arm of Carranza" provided the financial backing for Derba to found Mexico's first production company, Azteca Films, with photographer Enrique Rosas.[86] The name of Derba and Rosas' company invoked Mexico's indigenous past even as the company itself set its sights on shaping the nation's cinematic future: it was founded with the intention to "develop matters of national interest" as a "first step in a very important area of our [Mexican] culture."[87] Importantly, Derba's ambitions for the company extended beyond national borders. In an interview Derba gave the US-based Spanish language film magazine *Cine Mundial*, Derba posited that distribution of her films north of the Rio grande could "spread the truth of a Mexico that is cultured, socialized and progressive; . . . [to] erase the prejudice, so deeply rooted here [in the US], of a Mexico that is uncivil, always rebellious, and ever more backwards."[88]

Between April and October of 1917, Azteca produced five narrative features: *Alma de sacrificio, En defensa propia*, *En la sombra, La soñadora*, and *La tigresa.* Derba produced all

[85] Gonzalez was also implicated as the purported mastermind of the crimes committed by the "Grey Car Gang" and Derba was accused of possessing jewelry that had been stolen by the gang. Angel Miquel, *Mimi Derba*, 91-92.

[86] Azteca's facilities at the intersection of Balderas and Juarez Streets included several laboratories for developing film, and exhibition room, dressing rooms, and a large lot used for sets. Márgara Millán, "En Otro Espejo: Cine Y Video Mexicano Hecho Por Mujeres En Miradas Feministas Sobre Las Mexicanas Del Siglo Xx.". ed. Martha Lamas, 387-92. (México, FCE/Conaculta, 2007)

[87] Irene García,. "Mimi Derba and Azteca Films: The Rise of Nationalism and the First Woman Film-Maker in Mexico," in *Women, Ethnicity and Nationalisms in Latin* America ed. Natividad Gutiérrez Chong, (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2007), 101.

[88] Quoted in Liedo Fumilla, "La escena muda en México," *Cine-Mundial*, January 1918, 17.

five, wrote two, and acted in all but *La tigresa,* which she co-directed. The roles Derba created and played spanned a spectrum of Mexican femininity, from suffering, selfless mother to sensual temptress (a versatility that enabled her to continue her film acting career until her death in 1953). Unfortunately, no complete copies of these films are known to survive, though fragments of films believed to be *La tigresa* and *En propia defensa,* each less than thirty seconds long, survive. These fragments are characterized by static camerawork, long-shot framing, and upper-class mise-en-scene crowded with well-dressed actors engaged in leisure activities: dancing, spectating at an outdoor event (the activity being watched is not apparent), and congregated on a sunny patio staircase.[89] Derba carried her stage diva persona (and if the surviving clips are representative, a directorial style based in the principles of stagecraft) through to her film work; she channeled the Italian diva films that inspired her and were so popular with her fellow Mexicans. And even as Azteca adapted Italian films for Mexican actors and settings, the nationalist impulse of the company's founders garnered praise from the press, which lauded Azteca for providing "a practical and effective means for Mexico to gain prestige abroad, promoting our customs and our splendor, our current civilization, unique and stable, our cultural treasures, etc."[90] Despite this, Azteca ceased production the same year it was founded. The company had an ambitious production schedule lined up at the time it ceased operations, but it could not sell films to American distributors, and without access to audiences, the company

[89] The fragments in question have been used in programming for the Mexicna TV network *Cine Nostalgia* and have been posted to Youtube. The series of fragments, each form a different film, total two and half minutes in runtime.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y9wTIfzIppg

[90] *Excélsior* quoted in Irene García "Mimi Derba and Azteca Films," 104

could not remain solvent.[91] The fate of Derba's company foreshadowed that of many other Mexican film production ventures in the years to come: while 14 Mexican-produced narrative feature films received their premieres in Mexico City in 1917, only five premiered in 1918. Angel Miquel attributes the steep decrease in narrative production to the confluence of several factors, including atypically cold weather; the Spanish flu epidemic that closed schools, theaters, and churches for many days, and renewed political conflict.[92] As national film production ventures folded, Derba pursued other projects and eventually acted in the national sound cinema, while in the face of significant barriers to entry and without the benefit of state protection, feature film production in Mexico waned until it ceased entirely in 1930.[93]

Derba was in many ways unusual for her time, and even prophetic in her pursuits: with a stated mission to raise Mexico's profile and polish its international reputation through production of world-class cinema, Derba established a vision that still today guides Mexican film production.[94] At the same time, her story affirms the significance of class in postrevolution Mexico. Derba's class status undoubtedly granted her access to opportunities unavailable to other women, and without the benefit of the arts education conferred by her middle class upbringing, it is unlikely that she would have had access to powerful political figures like

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[91] Ibid 111. Rosas retained what remained of the company and Derba pursued other labors. In 1919, the restructured Azteca released what is likely Mexico's best-known silent film, the serial *El automovil gris* – but even the success of that film was insufficient to anchor the Mexican industry.

[92] In 1920, Huerta led a new fight against Carranza. Angel Miquel, *Por las Pantallas,* 73.

[93] Joanne Hershfield & David Maciel, eds. *Mexico's Cinema,* 14.

[94] De la Garza, Armida. *Mexico on Film: National Identity & International Relations*. (Bury Saint Edmunds: Arena Books, 2006). Garza begins from the premise that films represent national identity and from there interrogates how national and international productions and markets help to define mexicanidad for Mexicans and foreign audiences.

Gonzalez who helped to facilitate her filmmaking activities. Even so, Derba's particular use of her social position allowed her to serve as a model for the women who would shape the next era of Mexican cinema: she was fluent in both nationalist rhetoric and cosmopolitan culture, and she used the capital conferred by her exceptional "feminine" characteristics to enter social roles denied to others of her gender.

Cándida Beltrán Rendón

Cándida Beltrán Rendón was only sixteen years old in 1914 when she wrote a treatment for *El secreto de la abuela.* At that time, the revolution was raging on unabated, and it was not until Beltran was thirty years old that she was able to direct the film based on her story. Beltrán Rendón was the granddaughter of José Rendón Peniche, an important political figure and railroad concessionaire in the southeast region of Mexico, so while she shared with her fellow female directors a social position favorable for transcending gender norms, she was also different from those directors in that she had no other social connection to the cinema, or even the performing arts more broadly – she never worked as an actress, instead earning her living in the increasingly heterosocial workforce as a public employee in the Mexico City town hall, and as an attendant at the Pierrot shoe store.[95]

How Beltrán Rendón completed her film – which she starred in, directed, produced, and designed the sets for – is not well-documented, but it is known that she financed the film independently and completed filming in Mexico City with the help of cinematographer Jorge

[95] Jose Rendón Peniche was also recognized as a hero in the war against the French. The railroad he was associated with travelled from Merida (Beltran Rendon's hometown) and Puerto Progreso. Perla Ciuk, *Diccionario De Directores Del Cine Mexicano,* 69 and Gabriel Ramírez Aznar *Crónica Del Cine Mudo Mexicano*. 248.

Stahl.[96] As she told *Excélsior,* she completed the project "with no incentive other than my dreams of being a true Mexican film artist, using Mexican environments, to make the first artistic film that has been made in Mexico."[97] Following the film's premiere at the Teatro Regis in Mexico City, Beltran's hometown daily *Yucutan Ilustrado* commended the film's high production values, which "demonstrate[d] the erudition" of Beltrán Rendón's cinematic knowledge. The paper also commended the film for capturing the beauty of Mexico City in a way no Mexican film before it had done.[98] It has been reported that Beltrán Rendón inaugurated the use of the flashback as a narrative device in Mexican cinema (a contention impossible to prove, even if a high percentage of Mexican silent films survived), but despite the critical and artistic success of the film, the challenges of making and distributing a film (augmented in the absence of institutional supports) contributed to Beltrán Rendón's departure from cinema, which was followed by a more prolific career in musical composition.[99] Kenya Marquez argues that Beltrán Rendón's is a case study in the challenges of independent filmmaking, be it in 1928 or 2019 – and taken together with the efforts of her peers, Beltrán Rendón's experience in film production suggests the double-edged sword that was artisanal film production in Mexico: while

[96] Anne Marie Stock also draws attention to Beltrán Rendón's film as an important instance of early transnational collaboration, because Beltrán Rendón cast Catalina Barcela and members of Barcela's Spanish theater company in the film *El secreto de la Abuela.* See Stock, Ann Marie. *Framing Latin American Cinema: Contemporary Critical Perspectives.* (Minneapolis: Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), xxix

[97] *Jueves de Excélsior*, 4/10/1928, en *Excélsior* "Candida Beltran Rendon fue actriz de 'El secreto de la abuela' una de las primeras peliculas mexicanas, Guadalupe Appendini, 17/12/1979, p.15-B quoted in Perla Ciuk, *Diccionario De Directores Del Cine Mexicano.* 70.

[98] Quoted in Gabriel Ramírez, *Crónica del cine mudo mexicano*, 248.

[99] "Mujeres Detrás De Cámara: Una Historia De Conquistas Y Victorias En El Cine Latinoamericano." *Nueva Sociedad* 218 (Nov-Dec 2008): 107-22.

an industrial glass ceiling did not exist, neither did the supports necessary to help filmmakers develop and succeed in a skill- and capital-intensive business.[100]

Clearly, in evaluating the output of Mexico's first female directors, we must be wary of judging the past by the standards of the present – for if we are looking for a filmic legacy represented by artistic innovation and/or obvious influence on later work, it is all too easy to dismiss the labors of (female) Mexican silent film directors. If, however, we consider the way these women navigated still-relevant challenges of motion picture production, including gender dynamics within localized film industries and unequal economic dynamics between international industries, their efforts take on enhanced historic relevance. More importantly, the successes and failures of female film producers compel historiographic renewal as scholars reconsider the criteria of historical relevance and the entanglement of those criteria with social and institutional power structures.

Women in the Press

While film acting and directing are accepted facets of film production, it is my contention that film journalists and exhibition workers, among others, also bear consideration as producers – after all, the labor of these auxiliary professionals shapes how audiences engage the images captured by filmmaking artists and technicians. In Mexico specifically, locally-produced

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[100] Márquez, Kenya; Luis Bernardo Jaime Vázquez . "Cándida Beltrán Rendón." In Jane Gaines, Radha Vatsal, and Monica Dall'Asta, eds.*Women Film Pioneers Project.* Center for Digital Research and Scholarship. New York, NY: Columbia University Libraries, 2013. Web. September 27, 2013. https://wfpp.cdrs.columbia.edu/pioneer/ccp-candida-beltran-rendon
Between the silent era and the 1980s (when female directors constituted approximately one third of working filmmakers), women's presence in the film industry was adversely affected by limited training opportunities and the work of male-dominated unions that excluded women from creative positions in filmmaking Hershfield, Joanne. "Women's Pictures: Identity and Representation in Recent Mexican Cinema." *Revue Canadienne d'Études cinématographiques / Canadian Journal of Film Studies* 6, no. 1 (1997): 62.

narrative cinema and modern journalism developed symbiotically in the midst of postrevolution creative effervescence. The press institutions and cinematic conventions crystallized between 1917 and 1931 would, in fact, remain largely unchanged for decades.[101] Though the press sometimes seemed to operate as an arm of the film industry – the "Reina del sur" contest, for example – the relationship between the film industry and the press was often more complex, with journalists critiquing the shortcomings of the local film industry and criticizing perceived ill effects of movie culture.[102] Most importantly, both journalism and film media stake claims on the representation of reality (journalism through recourse to historical fact, and motion pictures through the indexical quality of the image) and both were necessary vehicles for the materialization of a Mexican national identity. Moreover, the intersection of film and journalism amplified the complex and sometimes contradictory notions of femininity in postrevolution Mexico.

The partisan press outlets that flourished during the chaos of the revolution lost their necessity at the close of the fighting in 1917, and so a smaller number of publications aimed at a general audience soon emerged to consolidate the citizenry. Dailies representative of this trend included the moderate *El Universal* and conservative-leaning outlet *Excélsior*, which were founded in 1916 and 1917, respectively.[103] With taglines "El diario popular de la mañana" and

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[101] Patricia Torres San Martín, "Elena Sánchez Valenzuela," *Women Film Pioneers Project,* np.

[102] Ibid. Elena Sánchez Valenzuela began her affiliation with the cinema as an actress, including two films in which her director was journalist Luis G. Peredo. Between Peredo's career trajectory and Sánchez Valenzuela's, we may note the significant traffic of skills and ideas between print journalism and motion pictures in postrevolutionary Mexico.

[103] Ángel Miquel, *Por Las Pantallas De La Ciudad De México: Periodistas Del Cine Mudo.* (Universidad de Guadalajara, 1995), 41. These publications are today the oldest continuously operating newspapers in Mexico City.

"El periodico de la vida nacional," these publications made explicit their intention to speak *to* and *for* a wide range of individuals under the presumably unifying category of "Mexican." These publications maximized their potential readership (and advertising revenue) by catering to as many demographics as possible. Reportage covered international events as well as news from the capital and the provinces, sports, and social events; literary supplements and designated pages for women and children were also regular features. The range of products and services advertised included farm implements; automobiles; modern fashions for men, women, and children; personal care products; medicines; furniture, and more. The continued operation of these legacy outlets today affirms that they became a regular part of Mexican citizens' information diets.

The generalization of the press in Mexico following the revolution had the effect of reducing the number of niche publications in Mexico, especially in relation to similarly modernizing nation-states that did not undergo revolution at the start of the twentieth century. While in Mexico only two women's publications emerged in the first two decades of the twentieth century, Brazil boasted the arrival of seven new women's publications in the same timeframe.[104] One might see in the small number of Mexican women's publications reduced writing and reading opportunities specifically aimed at a female audience; on the other hand, the relative rarity of women's publications during the period of investigation suggests that those women who did venture into publishing had the potential to reach a more varied audience than they would have been able to access through more targeted venues. Cube Bonifant winked to readership that crossed gender boundaries in her column "Vanidad de Vanidades," wherein she

[104]Janet Greenberg, "Toward a History of Women's Periodicals in Latin America: A Working Bibliography." In *Women, Culture, and Politics in Latin America.* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 183-232, 185.

specifically addressed her male readers: "[M]y dear sirs (for I do believe that the mere fact of titling my page 'For Women Only' has drawn you to read it)."[105]

Of course, there is no way to know exactly how a Mexican reader might navigate the densely-packed pages of their daily paper any more than there exists a way to pin down how an individual moviegoer interpreted the images they saw on screen; what *is* apparent from the general contours of Mexican media in the postrevolution era is that varied interests existed side-by-side. One could not use the newspaper to plan an evening trip to the cinema or read reviews of new releases without flipping past stories about Mexican politics, the global economy, recent sporting news, and the like.[106] In this way, Mexican cinematic culture -- even when built upon the consumption of foreign films -- was physically embedded between pages of news documenting the crystallization of a specifically Mexican modernity, and the development of Mexican femininity was interwoven with it.

Elena Sánchez Valenzuela

In 1919, *El Heraldo* became the first periodical in which a woman was allowed to regularly publish a film column. Perhaps to better fit the masculine tradition of Mexican letters, that woman – Elena Sánchez Valenzuela—signed her pieces simply with the initials E.S.V. Though Sánchez Valenzuela's pioneering column was in publication for less than a month, it was but one episode in a long career that predated the publication of that column and continued

[105] Viviane A. Mahieux, "Cube Bonifant: Una Escritora Profesional En El México Post-Revolucionario," in *Revista de Critica Literaria Latinoamericana* 33 no. 66 (2007), 27.

[106] This claim is based on my own assessment of the newspapers in question, which are held at the Hemeroteca Nacional in Mexico City at the UNAM.

for decades after.[107] The column was especially notable for Sánchez Valenzuela's unique approach to the cinematic phenomenon, and that distinctive vision would characterize her career. In contrast to Carlos Noriega Hope and his more gossipy counterpart Jose Maria Sánchez Garcia who were recognized "cronistas de las estrellas," Sánchez Valenzuela spoke little of stars, instead musing on the pedagogical value of cinema and the material conditions of production.[108]

Sánchez Valenzuela's unique perspective – and the very opportunity to voice it in writing – surely owed to her prior experiences as a film actress. In 1917 she appeared in *Barranca trágica* (Santiago J. Sierra), after which she starred in the 1918 adaptation of Federico Gamboa's 1903 novel *Santa* (Luis G. Peredo). Peredo's was the first of several Mexican screen adaptations of the iconic literary work, and Sánchez Valenzuela later recalled that she won the part of a country girl tragically betrayed by her lover, disowned by her family, and finally destroyed by the city precisely because she was so different from the divas then dominating the Mexican theatrical circuit and cinematic box office:

> Peredo needed a protagonist, but he did not want to look for her in the theatre, because the heroine of Gamboa…had to provide the film with the youth of a fifteen-year-old and a natural naivety in her expression… I did not even use carmine in my cheeks; my student life was far away from that.[109]

Of course, Sánchez Valenzuela's self-representation as an outsider carries only so far. She was of sufficiently high status to attend the National Conservatory of Music, and when liberal daily *El*

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[107] Angel Miquel, *Por las Pantallas*, 97. The language Miquel uses in his history of Mexican cinema says that that "*El Heraldo* was the first publication to *give* a film column to a woman," (emphasis my own) implying a presumed masculine dominance that was so benevolent as to gift space to a woman's view. This first column was published only from 15-22 July in 1919, after which *El Heraldo* dropped its coverage of film and film artists for unknown reasons.

[108] San Martín, "Elena Sánchez Valenzuela." np

[109] Ibid.

Demócrata hired her as a foreign correspondent in 1920, the announcement emphasized that she "descend[ed] from an old and distinguished family."[110] This appointment was concurrent with Sánchez Valenzuela's cinematic training in Hollywood: also in 1920, the newly-established Secretariat of Publication Education under the administration of President Adolfo de la Huerta provided funding for Sánchez Valenzuela to travel to Los Angeles to study filmmaking techniques that she might then bring back to Mexico. Any doubts about Sanchez Valenzuela's qualifications on the basis of her youth or gender were preemptively dismissed by *El Demócrata,* which emphasized Sánchez Valenzuela's academic excellence and "the fact that Miss Valenzuela is a true artist, since she combines her delicate and sensitive temperament with a great love for the new silent art."[111] Rather than obscuring Sánchez Valenzuela's gender as *El Heraldo* had done, *El Demócrata* emphasized their correspondent's feminine virtues of delicacy, sensitivity, and love as proof of her suitability for a career in cinema and her legitimacy as a representative of Mexico abroad.

Though Sánchez Valenzuela reportedly entertained offers to act in Hollywood, she returned to Mexico to star in the film *En la hacienda* (Vollrath, 1921) at the request of the film's producer, Jose Vasconcelos.[112] As the "cultural caudillo" of the revolution, Vasconcelos' work

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[110] "Nuestra corresponsal cinematográfica en Los Ángeles, California," *El Demócrata*, August 30, 1920 p. 14. Sanchez Valenzuela was the daughter of Juana Valenzuela Sánchez, a descendant of Spanish aristocrats, and Abraham Sanchez Arce, a newspaper publisher.

[111] "Nuestra corresponsal cinematográfica," 14.

[112] Patricia Torres San Martín, "Elena Sánchez Valenzuela." In Jane Gaines, Radha Vatsal, and Monica Dall'Asta, eds.*Women Film Pioneers Project.* Center for Digital Research and Scholarship. New York, NY: Columbia University Libraries, 2013. Web. September 27, 2013. https://wfpp.cdrs.columbia.edu/pioneer/ccp-elena-sanchez-valenzuela/

(both on behalf of the state and as a private citizen) has been extensively debated. However, his forays into cinema have been only minimally discussed, perhaps because these efforts seem minor alongside Vasconcelos' wide-ranging activities in politics, philosophy, and the arts.[113] In fact, Vasconcelos' ventures into cinema as producer and later screenwriter extended his goal to unify and elevate the Mexican people – a mission complicated by the variable literacy of the public and the demographic diversity of the same. Murals depicting foundational national myths provided one medium through which to reach the people, and the Vasconcelos-commissioned, Diego Rivera-, José Clemente Orozco-, and David Alfaro Siquieros-painted public works of Mexican muralism remain some of the best-known applications of art in support of Mexican postrevolutionary nationalism. However, the muralism project Vasconcelos sponsored should be critiqued for its masculine bias – the above mentioned "big three" muralists were all men, and even the works that represent women foreground celebrated (but narrowly conceived) functions of woman as mother and supporter – for example, Orozco's *Maternidad* (1923) represents a nude mother holding an infant and surrounded by angelic figures.[114]

Like murals, cinema addressed a wide, diverse, and oft-illiterate audience – but unlike the epic paintings ordered by the state, the national cinema could not represent Mexican women without the active participation of human agents from the social group being represented. Vasconcelos could not complete *En la hacienda* without women collaborators, and Sánchez

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[113] Oaxaca-born José Vasconcelos applied his prodigious energy and vision to postrevolution national unification efforts, first as rector of the national university and then as Mexico's first secretary of education, in 1921.The literature exploring Vasconcelos' role in Mexican national history is broad and deep; for a readable, concise account that places Vasconcelos within the pantheon of modern Latin American reformers, see Enrique Krauze, *Redeemers: Ideas and Power in Latin America*, (New York: Harper, 2011).

[114] See Desmond Rochfort, *Mexican Muralists: Orozco, Rivera, Siqueiros.* (San Francisco: Chronicle, 1998.)

Valenzuela's training and pedigree qualified her for the job. Critiques of cinema's disposition toward women are certainly relevant here, but theoretical interrogation of the filmic apparatus is beyond the scope of this project. Rather, I want to emphasize that film as a collaborative (rather than individual) art form demands a degree of social integration during the production process which, while far from egalitarian, nonetheless brought women into the workforce and the national consciousness. The labor of muralists, on the other hand, was conceived and executed under the auspices of individual artistic 'visionaries.' After *En la hacienda* Vasconcelos moved away from film production, and by the late 1920s, he had concluded that cinema was "a typically US cultural product impossible to develop as a national form."[115] Though *En la hacienda* would be Sánchez Valenzuela's last acting credit, she continued to labor in the construction of Mexican film culture[116].

Sánchez Valenzuela's acting career was short, but also substantial: as Patricia Torres San Martín notes, Sánchez Valenzuela's performances in the first adaptation of *Santa* and in the celebrated *En la hacienda* helped establish thematic and stylistic concerns that would become characteristic of the of the Mexican Golden Age: the fallen women and the distinct aesthetic of the Mexican landscape dramatized in those early films became staples of national cinema in the sound era. Unfortunately, the films in which Sánchez Valenzuela performed have been lost save

[115] Vasconcelos, Padilla, and Camus were pictured together at the opening of Estudios Camus. "La inauguracion del estudio Camus," *El Universal,* 19 November 1920, p 7; Ana M López, "Facing up to Hollywood." in *Reinventing Film Studies*, eds. Christine Gledhill and Linda Williams. (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2000): 425.

[116] For more on the way Vasconcelos' interest in cinema aligned with his legacy in the Mexican tradition of letters, see Robert Conn, "Vasconcelos as Screenwriter: Bolívar Remembered" in *Mexico Reading the United States* eds. Linda Egan and Mary K Long. (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2009), 41-56. Vasconcelos did not complete additional cinematic activities until he penned a unfilmed screenplay entitled *Simón Bolívar* in 1939.

a brief fragment of *En la hacienda* (a rather curious turn of events, considering that Sánchez Valenzuela would establish her nation's first film archive).[117] However, Sánchez Valenzuela's work is preserved in print accounts of her performances, and in her own writings on motion pictures. Moreover, her career highlights a pattern that enabled other women to enter productive roles in the cultural industries during the 1920s. Sánchez Valenzuela broke into cinema through the conventional feminine role of performer (a role she achieved at least in part thanks to her class status), and used the expertise gained therein to explore other creative endeavors that would otherwise be less accessible to women. As a journalist working throughout the 1920s, Sánchez Valenzuela's reportorial voice became more precise, even as her interests broadened: she wrote about the conditions of spectatorship in the city's movie theaters; she chronicled developments in film distribution at home and abroad; she reviewed films for their performances, screenplays, and cinematographic technique; and she executed comparative analyses of the various international cinemas that flickered across Mexico City movie screens – a method that surely owed to Sánchez Valenzuela's time in Hollywood, and helped her secure a post as a Paris-based foreign correspondent for *El Democrata* from 1930-1934.[118] In aggregate, Torres San Martín concludes, Sánchez Valenzuela's work shows the seriousness with which the journalist approached her craft. Her job was not merely to report on the films screened in the capital, but to

[117] This fragment is discussed in Chapter 3 of this dissertation as an example of the indigena films of the early 1920s.

[118] Patricia Torres San Martin, "Elena Sánchez Valenzuela" np. Sánchez also presumably used her knowledge to shape Mexican cinema spectatorship via state regulation as head of the Department of Censorship, a post to which she was appointed in 1923 – though little is known about her tenure there. Perla Ciuk, *Diccionario De Directores Del Cine Mexicano, 224.*

be knowledgeable in international cinematic developments so that she could educate her readers as both moviegoers and citizens.[119]

After the period under investigation here, Sánchez Valenzuela went on to write, produce, and direct the documentary *Michoacán* in 1936, which led the press to incorrectly identify her as the first woman to conceive and execute a film.[120] While the mis-labeling of Sánchez Valenzuela's directorial debut may have been a good faith effort to emphasize the magnitude of her achievement, such ill-informed trumpeting of 'firsts' – especially as they pertain to the achievements of women and other marginalized groups – tend to obscure relevant antecedents, thereby scrubbing the historical record of its depth and diversity. Sánchez Valenzuela's next project, the establishment of a national film archive, began in 1936 *before* the establishment of the Cinémathèque Française that same year, as Mexican film historian Manuel Casanova emphasizes. Sánchez Valenzuela founded a filmoteca under the office of the Secretary of Education, but that institution closed barely four years later when the political administration turned over, "a victim of … bureaucratic traditions."[121] Like the Ehlers sisters and Mimí Derba, Valenzuela's efforts were contingent upon state support, which can be transient and highly

[119] Sánchez Valenzuela's interest in cinema as a pedagogical tool likely also owes to her relationship to the Mexican feminist movement, which was largely comprised of middle-class educators. However, the only evidence I have found of this connection is Sánchez Valenzuela's attendance at the First Womens' Congress in Merida in 1915, which is mentioned in Patricia San Martin, *Crónica del cine silente mexicano,* 78.

[120] *Michoacán* is one of the Filmoteca UNAM's ten "most wanted" lost Mexican films. Most-wanted lists published by film archives around the world aim to recover lost films, but more importantly, to foster appreciation for the vital work of film preservation and restoration.

[121] Manuel González Casanova. "¿ Y Por Qué No Organizamos La Filmoteca Nacional?". *Boletín del Instituto de Investigaciones Bibliográficas*, no. 2 (2013), 411.

politicized in Latin America especially.[122] Sánchez Valenzuela persisted, however, and in 1942 she successfully founded a new Filmoteca, this time once that would become the antecedent of what is today the UNAM Filmoteca Nacional – a contribution that made Sánchez Valenzuela a steward of the very national film history that has until recently neglected to recognize the contributions of women.

Cube Bonifant

The most well-known female screen journalist of the silent era was surely Cube Bonifant, who began her more than two-decades long journalistic career in 1921 at the age of seventeen. [123] Like the other women discussed in this chapter, Bonifant's creative activity set her apart from prevailing norms in which creativity was coded as a masculine activity and consumption, with consumption as its feminine counterpart.[124] Creative agency was not the only thing Bonifant had in common with her movie-star peers: she too was a performer, by virtue of public position if not by profession. Viviene Mahieux observes that Bonifant used her column as a "stage" from which she projected a "recognizable public identity" as a modern, independent woman.[125] Like the

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[122] The Cinémathèque Française, meanwhile, became one of the most influential cinematic institutions in the world. For a history of the international film archive movement, see Penelope Huston, *Keepers of the Frame: The Film Archives*. (London: British Film Institute, 1994). For a history of the UNAM Filmoteca Nacional, see Noah Zweig, "Algunos Aspectos del Filmoteca de la UNAM." *Mediascape: UCLA'S Journal of Cinema and Media Studies* 1, no 1. (2005). http://www.tft.ucla.edu/mediascape/archive/volume01/number01/articles/zweig.htm

[123] Given name Antonia Bonifant Lopez, 'Cube" was the nickname used in her family. Rocío del Consuelo Pérez Solano. "Cube Bonifant." In Jane Gaines, Radha Vatsal, and Monica Dall'Asta, eds. *Women Film Pioneers Project.* Center for Digital Research and Scholarship. New York, NY: Columbia University Libraries, 2013. Web. September 27, 2013. https://wfpp.cdrs.columbia.edu/pioneer/ccp-cube-bonifant/

[124] Viviane Mahieux, "Cube Bonifant: Una Escritora Profesional," 135.

[125] Viviane Mahieux, "Cube Bonifant: The Little Marquise De Sade of the Mexican Crónica." *Review: Literature and Arts of the Americas* 43, no. 1 (2010): 22.

movie stars she sometimes wrote about, Bonifant's persona was a product of her look and individual voice, which she cultivated through the author's photo that accompanied her column and through addressing her readers with sardonic intimacy.[126] Unlike the majority of Mexican actresses of the silent era, however, Bonifant was not born to a wealthy or well-connected family: hailing from Sinaloa, Bonifant fled the violence of the revolution and settled in Mexico City with her mother and sisters in 1920, where she took up writing to help support her family. In this way, Bonifant embodied the new physical and social mobility of the modern girl.[127] Moreover, the titles of Bonifant's film column -- *El cine visto por una mujer,* in 1928 renamed *Opiniones de una cineasta de buena fe* – foregrounded Bonifant's modern feminine sensibility as relevant journalistic credential.[128] Bonifant's gendered viewpoint helped to speak to and for an audience of women whose perspectives had not previously been part of public discourse.

Arguably, Bonifant was a modern girl by profession: she was self-made public figure who wore makeup and kept her hair short, frankly critiqued the lifestyles of the bourgeoisie (*la gente decente*), and wrote about wide-ranging topics not conventionally covered by women including bullfighting, soccer, and crime. She was "as far removed from the traditional ideal of the selfless woman as…. from the model of public-spirited femininity promoted by postrevolutionary officialdom,"[129] and as such, her critics weaponized traditional ideas about

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[126] Bonifant would refer to her imagined reader with pet names like "querida," as she often did in her column for *El Democrata*.

[127] Ageeth Sluis. *Deco Body, Deco City,* 86-88.

[128] Rocío del Consuelo Pérez Solano, "Cube Bonifant." np. Bonifant used the pen name "Luz Alba" for her film journalism, which appeared among general interest items in *El Universal Ilustrado,* in contrast to her earlier work that appeared on the women's pages in the daily newspaper *El Universal.*

[129] Viviane Mahieux, "Cube Bonifant: The Little Marquise De Sade," 24. .

femininity against her. “Serious” male intellectuals – most notably the caricaturist Ernesto García Cabral – positioned themselves in contrast to Bonifant, much as movie critics defined themselves as objective aesthetes by establishing a rhetorical opposition between themselves and putatively emotional, impressionable female spectators. Cabral mocked Bonifant repeatedly for her unladylike behavior through a series of caricatures that appeared in 1923, in which Cabral attacked Bonifant for her “intellectual ambitions” – a tactic that hailed the traditional segregation of intellectual and rational activity as a realm constructed apart from the very essence of femininity– and also “ her selfish and headstrong modernity, and her personal life.”[130] Cabral’s rhetorical deployment of modernity as a flaw in Bonifant’s character makes explicit his presumption that traditional values of maternal femininity were superior to those options opened by modernity; perhaps ironically, his critique of her private life in a public forum also brought under erasure the divide that had for centuries divided the private sphere as feminine and the public one as masculine.

Though Bonifant did dabble in acting, she wrote unfavorably of the experience as “annoying,” “frustrating,” and “not worth it,” so her lasting contribution to cinema came through

[130] Ernesto García Cabral, nickname *Chango,* helped to define Postrevolution visual culture through his cartoons, art deco illustrations, and later, movie poster designs for Mexican films. See Kristine Somerville, "Making It Modern: The Art Deco Illustrations of Ernesto García Cabral." *The Missouri Review* 41, no. 2 (2018): 95-107, and Armando Enriquez Vazquez, Enríquez Vázquez, Armando. "Cabral: Coinventando El Cine." *Nexos: Sociedad, Ciencia, Literatura* 40, no. 491 (2018): 84. Accessed Feb 9, 2018. https://www.nexos.com.mx/?p=39903: The feud between Cabral and Bonifant is detailed in Cube Bonifant, *Una Pequeña Marquesa De Sade: Crónicas Selectas (1921-1948),* ed Viviane Mahieux. (Mexico City: Dirección de Literatura, UNAM, 2009)

prose rather than performance.[131] Not only was Bonifant an early advocate for attention to the role of the director in the finished film, she served as an essential primary witness to the historic development of cinema in Mexico. Rocío del Consuelo Pérez Solano points out that Bonifant's columns provided the basis for later film histories written by widely-cited Mexican film historians Emilio García Riera, Aurelio de los Reyes, and Ángel Miquel. Bonifant's space in the Mexican papers was predicated on the distinction of her feminine viewpoint, and her interests – the things she deemed worthy of discussion and the way she framed them – went on to shape the foundation of Mexican film historiography itself. While film critic Jorge Ayala Blanco has called Bonifant 'the first solid antecedent of film criticism in Mexico," Bonifant's disappearance from the very film history she made possible is an ironic, and even depressing indication of how changing regimes of social and intellectual value condition the present's understanding of the past – but the revelation of Bonifant's foundational role in film history and historiography affirms the argument at the heart of this dissertation. Cinema did in fact provide an unprecedented means for women to participate in the construction of Mexican (cinema) culture, often in complex and unexpected ways. [132]

Women In Exhibition

As Nicholas Poppe and Rielle Navitski have observed, the market dominance of imported films in Mexico and elsewhere in Latin America fostered "a thriving exhibition and fan culture,

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[131] Rocío del Consuelo Pérez Solano, "Cube Bonifant." Np. Bonifant appeared in *La Gran Noticia* (Carlos Noriega Hope, 1922). Noriega Hope was director of *El Universal Ilustrado* and Bonifant at the time wrote advice columns for that publication. She did not turn her full attention to film criticism until 1927.

[132] For details on the later development of Mexican film criticism and film studies in general, see Carlos A. Gutiérrez, "Y Tu Crítica También: The Development of Mexican Film Studies at Home and Abroad." *The SAGE Handbook of Film Studies,* eds. James Donald and Michael Renov (Los Angeles: SAGE Publications, 2008), 101

as well as social practices that provided novel means of participating in the public sphere for emergent social actors in growing cities – particularly immigrants, internal migrants to urban centers, the working classes, and women."[133] Jacob Granat, for example, was an immigrant who participated in the cultural life of his new nation through ownership of the Salón Rojo, and the first chapter of this dissertation explored how the exhibition practices of the Salón Rojo and other venues opened the public sphere to women and other marginalized groups in postrevolution Mexico City. This chapter, however, is concerned with the productive labor of women in the nascent Mexican film industry, and women who owned and operated their own motion-picture exhibition venues were also present during the silent era. In cinema's first decades, many women who worked in cinema likely did so as part of family enterprises, completing a range of duties for smaller theaters and itinerant exhibition companies. This business arrangement all but assures that women's efforts in early cinema exhibition have been underestimated, because such labor would have been cast as an extension of familial duty rather than a form of gainful employment. However, surviving records confirm that at least two women directly shaped Mexican film exhibition as the proprietors of movie theaters that would become cultural institutions and landmarks of modernization in the expanding metropolis.

Esperanza Iris

Esperanza Iris came to be the proprietor of a movie theater via her achievements as a diva of the Mexican stage and her associations with powerful men in Mexican society – a path not dissimilar to Mimi Derba's. Iris was a Tabasco native, given name María Esperanza Bonfil. She

[133] Rielle Navitski, and Nicolas Poppe, "Introduction," in *Cosmopolitan Film Cultures in Latin America, 1896-1960,* eds. Rielle Navitski and Nicholas Poppe (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2017), 3.

began acting in 1902 at the age of 14 in the role of a newsboy in the current-events satire *La cuarta plana* at the famed Mexico City venue Teatro Principal.[134] A year later, Iris married the director of the Teatro Principal, Miguel Gutiérrez, and the couple had two sons.[135] Over the coming decades, Iris made her fame – and her fortune – in the genre called *zarzuela grande* – a three act play on serious subjects structurally related to the Viennese operetta.[136] As a stage performer Iris was famous for skirting the boundaries of decent behavior, and as a public figure, she was known to have relationships with married men – but she maintained a necessary measure of Porfirian respectability thanks to the high-class character of her labor in European-styled entertainments.

When Gutiérrez died, Iris stepped into her husband's managerial duties at the Teatro Principal, and soon, after the young widow began working professionally with Cuban singer Juan Palmer (whom she later married), she succeeded in constructing and managing a theater of her own.[137] The Italian-style Teatro Esperanza Iris opened May 15, 1918 and its construction was financed with the earnings from Iris' tour of Latin America. Venustiano Carranza attended the grand opening of the venue, and 'the Iris' went on to host live entertainment for the city's upper classes including operas, zarzuelas, ballets, and symphonies.[138] The theater's high-class pretensions were evident in its architecture as well as its location in the city: as Paulina Suarez-

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[134] Ageeth Sluis. *Deco Body, Deco City*, 25.

[135] Araceli Rico. *El Teatro Esperanza Iris: La Pasión Por Las Tablas: Medio Siglo De Arte Teatral En México.* (Mexico City: Plaza y Valdés, 1999) 64.

[136] Ageeth Sluis. *Deco Body, Deco City* 31.

[137] Ibid 36.

[138] Araceli Rico, *El Teatro Esperanza Iris,* 26; "El Sr. Carranza asistio a la inauguracion del Teatro 'Esperanza Iris,'" *Excélsior*, May 26, 1918, pg 1.

Hesketh notes, "Theaters west of the central square, in the *primer cuadro* or zone one," near the Zócalo Plaza at the heart of Mexico City "cater[ed] to an elite and middlebrow public."[139] But the theater's initial reliance on elevated entertainments proved financially untenable, and by 1924, the theater was outfitted to screen moving pictures.

Iris' theater was a major cultural venue in Mexico City during the 1920s. In 1924, five days after a major city scandal in which young women with bobbed hair were assaulted by male students of the National Medical School and the National Preparatory School, the Teatro Iris announced two special film screenings for women only. At these screenings, Esperanza Iris herself delivered a lecture entitled "The Right to Have Short Hair, Dedicated Especially to Las Pelonas." [140] Esperanza Iris may have made her fame as a diva, but she was not beyond striking an alliance with the controversial pelonas (even if her motive was profit). 'El Iris' became an MGM property in 1934, but the theater was in poor repair and partially abandoned at the time of Iris' death in 1962.[141] In 1976 the government of Mexico City took over the theater, which they renamed Teatro de la Ciudad – erasing Iris' name from the venue she had built into a hub of cultural activity in postrevolution Mexico City. In 2008, however, the city restored Iris' name to the venue. While the current trend toward corporate-sponsored public spaces cheapens the significance of naming rights as something merely transactional, the rechristening of 'el Iris' provides a monument to feminine labors that exists alongside a library named for Vasconcelos

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[139] Paulina Suarez-Hesketh, "The Frivolous Scene," 109.

[140] Anne Rubenstein, "The War on Las Pelonas," 69.

[141] Araceli Rico, *El Teatro Esperanza Iris,* 13. I have been unable to ascertain the exact nature of MGM's control over the venue, be it rental, investment, outright ownership, or otherwise. Regardless of ownership structure, this change meant that the venue screened MGM films exclusively.

and countless official monuments to male generals and politicians, thereby serving as a material reminder of how women helped to shape the contours of postrevolution Mexico City.

Adelina Barrasa

Adelina Barrasa owned the Cine Odeón, a 3,000 seat first-run movie theater at 29 Mosqueta, four kilometers northwest of the Zócalo in Mexico City. Barrasa's direct involvement in daily operations remains unclear, as is how she came to own the venue which, upon its opening in 1922, was celebrated by the *Heraldo de México* as "the premiere cinema in the capital."[142] Odeón architect Carlos Crombé was also responsible for designing other Mexico City movie theaters including the Olimpia, and the spacious – even imposing – venues Crombé designed helped to change the shape and scale of Mexico City.

As Laura Isabel Serna's review of the 1923 Mexican Department of Labor census has revealed, Barrasa was at that time the only woman listed as the manager or owner of a movie theater.[143] Barrasa reported 26 employees: 24 were men who worked as projectionists, musicians, and facilities staff, and two were women who worked as *taquillistas* (ticket sellers) and earned 2.50 pesos a day.[144] Serna reads Barrasa's census entry as indicative of both the relative exceptionality of women in exhibition, and the tendency for those who did work in cinemas to be restricted to low-paying jobs like ticket sales. However, Serna notes that Barrasa

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[142] "El Gran Cine 'Odeón,' se inaugura hoy en la tarde." *Heraldo de México* (4 May 1922): 6. Quoted in Laura Isabel Serna, "Adelina Barrasa." In Jane Gaines, Radha Vatsal, and Monica Dall'Asta, eds.*Women Film Pioneers Project.* Center for Digital Research and Scholarship. New York, NY: Columbia University Libraries, 2013. Web. September 27, 2013. 0 https://wfpp.cdrs.columbia.edu/pioneer/ccp-adelina-barrasa/

[143] Esperanza Iris was not counted as a movie theater owner in this census because her theater had not yet begin to screen motion pictures.

[144] This amount was approximately equal to $1.25 in US dollars in 1923.

was something of an exception to the pattern of theater management in the 1920s, since Barrasa was an independent theater owner in an era marked by increasing corporatization of exhibition.

Other Film Workers

Mexican silent films were accompanied by the musical stylings of marimbas, jazz bands, orchestras, or single pianists, depending upon the size and grandeur of the venue. Aurelio De Los Reyes suggests that several motion picture pianists were women, as musical training was part of a cultured woman's upbringing.[145] The presence of these musicians prior to the implementation of synchronized sound also heightened the "liveness" of the cinematic experience for silent-era movie goers, a feature that enhanced the public quality of the movie theater as social institution. Though contemporary critics described how the variability in musical accompaniment led to stylistically regrettable combinations, such as the reported playing of the danzon alongside *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari,* this variability also gave musicians the freedom to guide the viewing experience through their musical selections and performances.[146] While the ephemeral quality of live music in the exhibition setting makes qualification of these women's impact all but impossible, the fact of their presence and the potential of their creative input at the point of exhibition suggests the extent to which women shaped the Mexican cinematic experience. Traditionally, piano playing was taught for enjoyment in the domestic realm, so the transition of this skill from the home to the workplace mirrors a larger trend in the way women moved from relative segregation in the domestic sphere to greater participation in public life.

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[145] Aurelio de los Reyes "La música en el cine mudo in México," *La música de México* 4 (1984): 107.

[146] Angel Miquel *Por Las Pantallas,* 111.

Unfortunately, hierarchies of labor grant primacy to tasks coded as masculine, which has allowed deficiencies in historical accounts of other gendered labors within the Mexican silent film industry. Female *taquillistas,* for example, appear in the labor census but not in film reviews, and so there are fewer artifacts through which scholars can appraise the presence and function of that labor. In the U.S. context, Shelley Stamp has illustrated how female ticket-sellers and ushers acted as "added attractions" at the theater.[147] One account from the Mexican press suggests a similar phenomenon at work in the capital city, though the taquillista in question entered the historical record for macabre reasons: twenty-year-old Salón Rojo ticket counter girl Angelina Ruiz, who was reportedly "esteemed and admired" by the venue's patrons, died by suicide when she jumped from one of the towers of the National Cathedral in the Zócalo Plaza.[148] The location Ruiz chose could not have been arbitrary; as late as 1929, the National Cathedral was one of only 362 buildings higher than four stories tall out of the nearly 40,000 structures in Mexico City. More importantly, the well-trafficked Zócalo was the center of Mexico City political life and demographic mixing [figure 7].[149] Ruiz, whose employment supported her mother and sisters, reportedly left a note that attributed her decision to romantic betrayal.[150] Ruiz' portrait appeared in the newspaper, and the site of her death became a

[147] Shelley Stamp, "Women and the Silent Screen," 3.

[148] Aurelio de los Reyes, *Cine y Sociedad II*, 64-5.

[149] Teresa Matabuena Peláez, *La Ciudad de Mexico,* 22. For a comparative analysis of the plaza as a center of public life in Latin American cities, see Anton Rosenthal, "Spectacle, Fear, and Protest." *Social Science History* 24, no. 01 (2000): 33-73.

[150] Aurelio de los Reyes, *Cine y Sociedad II*, 64-5.

pilgrimage site where flowers, candles and poems were left in commemoration of her passing. [151] Kathryn Sloan has shown how urban Mexicans conceived of urban suicide as a "fever" symptomatic of modernization (the effects of which were especially devastating for lovelorn young women), and Ruiz' death highlights how life and death, the banal and the sensational were overlaid in the public space of Mexico City. [152] In relation to the cinema specifically, Ruiz's employment as a taquillista at one of the city's most well-known movie theaters added to her notoriety and the perceived tragedy of her death. In life she emblematized urbanization, modernization, and the shifting contours of femininity, but as a 'pink collar' worker, she entered the historical record by way of her death, which in its spectacular public quality was made to emblematize the dangers of modernity.

In another study of US filmmaking, Miranda Banks has illuminated how costume design is coded as feminine and devalued through its association with the leisure activity of shopping. Some human agent was responsible for the clothes worn by performers in Mexican-produced silent films, and the clothes themselves were contemporaneously recognized as one of the pleasurable aspects of motion pictures – but the task of dressing actors was either not a specified division of labor, or was not seen as sufficiently valuable to be reported on by the contemporary press and tracked by later generations of film scholars (in contrast, the postrevolution Mexican press and scholars of Mexican cinema have been sure to include the names of screenwriters in reporting and academic writing). It is conceivable and even likely, given the broad contours of gender and labor relations in the postrevolution Mexico, that female theater workers were a

[151] "Una Continua peregrinacion al sitio en que l asenorita ruiz se privo de la vida," *El Universal*, jueves 29 de Julio de 1920, p 9.

[152] Kathryn A Sloan, *Death in the City: Suicide and the Social Imaginary in Modern Mexico*. (Oakland: University of California Press, 2017), 5.

regular part of the spectacle of the cinematic experience, and that women helped manufacture and select the clothing that appeared onscreen – but affirmation and analysis of these labors remain elusive largely because these types of work were poorly documented in their era precisely because these were feminine and therefore devalued as banal, everyday kinds of work.

Conclusion

This chapter has not provided an exhaustive account of women working in silent cinema. It has not, for example, engaged the implications of below-the-line labor (e.g. editors and script supervisors): I have been unable to find good information about these tasks, in part because those roles have been historically de-emphasized relative to above-the-line creative work like directing, performing, and screenwriting, and also because the division of labor was not well-codified in the artisanal production environment of Mexican silent cinema. In other international industries, women working below-the-line often fared the transition to sound better than their above-the-line counterparts, and their ability to thrive in patriarchal industries (albeit in gendered roles) is a rejoinder to those who would bring female filmmakers under erasure by critiquing totalizing gender discrimination of film production.[153] Full recognition of the ways women worked in below-the-line roles in Mexican silent cinema is complicated by several factors, including the fragmented production documents that survive, the artisanal character of production in which specialized labor was not uniformly divided from one project to another (as would be the standard in studio cinema), and inconsistent nomenclature for the various roles played by film workers.[154] Nonetheless, we must assume that women worked in these roles in

[153] Jane Gaines, *Pink-Slipped*, 137.

[154]Paulo Antonio Paranagua, "Pioneers: Women Film-Makers in Latin America." *Framework* 37 (1989): 129-38, 130.As Paranagua explains, the Mexican silent cinema

Mexico as they did in other film production centers: as Jane Gaines argues, it may seem at odds with the demands of rigorous historiography to rely on such scant evidence, but evidentiary standards that serve patriarchal power must be opposed if we are to recognize women's influence throughout the past.[155]

Despite the fact that the silent era was marked by uneven, artisanal production, this chapter has argued that women filmmakers fundamentally contributed to postrevolution film culture and established precedents for later developments in the sound era. Moreover, cinema altered the already-shifting landscape of female labor by creating both new tasks for women to perform, and be delivering new images of what a woman's work might look like. The era saw women transitioning from domestic labor as part of their familial duty to more visible labor undertaken under the logic of capitalist necessity – jobs like film journalist and director were available to a few women, but their efforts were familiar to women who worked as teachers, secretaries, typists, salespeople, film exhibition workers, and also those who fulfilled traditional maternal and familial duties. The work of female film producers produced images of modern femininity that helped to structure the interests and consumptive habits of those women whose wage labor expanded their acquisitive power. These feminized domains in turn shaped the visual experience of Mexican modernity in the postrevolution era, when red-lipped pelonas and indigenas in regional costume shared both the social space of the city and the imaginative space of the city's movie screens.

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commonly made a distinction between the "artistic" directing of actors and the "technical" directing, which could apply to cinematography, lighting, and editing.

[155] Jane Gaines, *Pink-Slipped*.

Chapter 3: Personajes

In this chapter, I am interested in the way that silent Mexican films constructed modern feminine identities in the form of three types: the diva, the indigena, and the pelona, as well as how those identities bore witness to social conflicts in Mexico City. [1] Here, a caveat: throughout the silent era, imported pictures suffused Mexican theaters: between 400 and 500 new films premiered in Mexico City *every year* from 1920 to 1929, while the number of Mexican-produced films to premiere in the city peaked at fourteen in 1917.[2] As a consequence, the feminine characters seen on Mexican screens often acted as ambassadors of globalized modernity rather than as icons of Mexico's internal sociopolitical zeitgeist. This did not, however, preclude the discursive positioning of feminine representations produced abroad within the nationalist project, nor does it absolve scholars from taking seriously the films produced in Mexico. [3] Few Mexican silent features were made, and even fewer remain to be viewed today – but that small sample bears outsized symbolic power. In a screen environment populated by European and Hollywood films, the national productions that reached Mexican screens attracted heightened attention (and

[1] Owing to the urban focus of this project, I have privileged films made in the city – though a minority of Mexican silent-era film production also occurred in other regions, especially Veracruz and Yucatan.

[2] Angel Miquel, *Acercamientos,* 40-41.This fact was celebrated by American distributors, who saw profitability in the imbalance. *The Film Daily* reported that 90% of pictures screened in Mexico were from the US, 6% were from Germany, and the remaining 4 from all other countries. *The Film Daily,* Monday January 18 1926, vol XXXV no 14

[3] For more on the discursive positioning of Hollywood within the nationalist project, see Serna's monograph *Making Cinelandia.*

scrutiny) as representative of the status of the Mexican film industry as a whole.[4] It is unlikely that the surviving corpus of films will be expanded with new discoveries, but even if such a fortuitous event is to occur, the contextualization of gendered dynamics in Mexican silent cinema through available traces of the past is a necessary intervention.[5] My purpose here, then, is to analyze Mexican cultural production *within* a field of national discourse traversed by international forces.

Conventional accounts of postrevolution culture emphasize the role of muralism, primitivism, and socialism in the construction of postrevolution mexicanidad – a state project that aimed to consolidate power and create modern citizens by shifting Mexicans' allegiances *away* from the church and their regional/local communities and *toward* the nation-state through the elaboration of national myths, rituals, and symbols evocative of national cultural heritage. Recent research, however, emphasizes the role of capitalist popular culture in this process, and focuses on how women navigated the contradictions of a patriarchal project whose professed aim was achievement of an egalitarian utopia. In *Imagining la Chica Moderna,* Joanne Hershfield explores how visual imagery of the modern woman embodied pervasive ideas and anxieties about sexuality, work, motherhood, and femininity, while in *Deco City, Deco Body* Ageeth Sluis describes how gender ideals shaped the built and social environment of modern Mexico City

[4] Irene García, in her extensive analysis of film reviews from 1917, observes that many Mexican journalists "believed that it was up to them to point out errors," in every aspect of film form, from screenplay to mise-en-scene to performance, "because this would encourage the film industry in progress." "Mimi Derba and Azteca Films," 109. This supports my assertion that film writers belong among the cadre of Mexican "film producers," as writers clearly conceived of an important role for themselves in the development of the national film scene.

[5] While lost silent films are sometimes "discovered" in far-flung archives, as was the case when a copy of Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* (1927) appeared in an Argentine archive in 2008, the limited international distribution of Mexican films makes it unlikely that lost Mexican silents will be discovered outside the country.

through analysis of architecture and the performing arts. Laura Isabel Serna's *Making Cinelandia* demonstrates how the Mexican public enlisted Hollywood film to advance discourses of national modernization, and Rielle Navitski reveals how Mexican journalists' responses to Italian cinema constructed the role of filmgoers and film critics in postrevolution Mexico City. These works have shifted the field of Mexican media history toward the popular, the ephemeral, and the feminine in an extraordinary and illuminating way, but none specifically interrogates the national cinema and its responsibility in the articulation of modern Mexican femininity.[6] And yet – a "powerful and prosperous Mexican film industry" was a hoped-for achievement imagined by Mexican audiences, filmmakers, and government officials alike in the years before the coming of sound, which assured that nationally-produced silent films were important, if few in number.[7] As Mimí Derba said in a February 1917 interview with the daily newspaper *El Nacional,* making national cinema was important to demonstrate the "clean," "capable," and "middle class" face of Mexico that foreign films failed to capture.[8] A refined national cinema competitive with products from Europe and the US could both unify the Mexican public and improve Mexico's image abroad, and images of Mexican women were especially important in both regards.

Significantly, the dynamic character of Mexican femininity intersects questions of sexuality, class, race, (dis)ability, nationalism, and colonialism; and within the domain of

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[6] Though Hershfield mentions the Mexican cinema in passing, her interest in the web of images woven by visual culture makes it impossible (and unhelpful, by the terms of her investigation) to focus on the thread of Mexican cinematic production.

[7] Aurelio de los Reyes, *Cine y Sociedad II*, 202.

[8] Derba continued that these middle-class images would be a corrective to "the ragged, filthy outcasts who are always in the spotlight and clear the way for denigrating opinions." 'Progresa en Mexico el complicado arte de la cinematografia," quote in Angel Miquel, *Mimi Derba*, (Mexico City: Archivo Filmico Agrasanchez/Filmoteca de la UNAM, 2000)

feminine representation, uneven and contradictory shifts along these vectors were apparent even between 1917 and 1931 – though certain constants held.[9] One constant was a presumptive insistence on heterosexuality symptomatic of the *La Malinche*/*La Virgen* binary, which conceptualizes female sexuality as alternately feared and fetishized, but always heterosexual and reproductive as a matter of course.[10] Class, on the other hand, was at the forefront of public consciousness as Mexico angled to become increasingly middle-class under postrevolution economic restructuring.[11] Analysis of the filmic discourses produced in Mexico during this time will reveal that representation shifted from a focus on the elite social milieu to one more popular in character along with the egalitarian rhetoric of the revolution, though this was not without controversy.[12] Where the question of race is concerned, Mexican silent cinema *performed* an ideal of inclusivity – cinematic representations capitalized on the symbolic value of the Indian to certify their national bona fides, but the role of the indigena was always played by a member of

[9] In Mexican silent cinema, disability is portrayed only as a problem, sometimes deployed as a tragic narrative device as in *The Miracle of Guadalupana:* a young man is paralyzed, but miraculously restored to health by the virgin of Guadalupe.

[10] For a study of Malinche's re-conceptualization in Chicana feminism, see Norma Alarcón,"Chicana's Feminist Literature: A Re-vision Through Malintzin/or Malintzin: Putting Flesh Back on the Object." In *This Bridge Called my Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*. eds. Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa (New York: Kitchen Table/Women of Color Press, 1983), 182-190.

[11] James Wilkie and Paul D. Wilkins. "Quantifying the class structure of Mexico."

[12] Class still mattered, of course, and generally overlaid race/ethnicity as a vector of oppression for those at the bottom of the social hierarchy; for example, Chapter 2 of this dissertation emphasized how social class preferentially allocated production opportunities to women of high status who were also, overall, white or *mestiza* – but *not* indigenous.

the urban upper or middle class rather than a woman from the Indian community portrayed.[13] The pelona who usurped the diva as the emblem of modern femininity de-emphasized the problem of race in favor of style and shape – but in Mexican cinema, this ideal was repeatedly de-nationalized even as more and more Mexican women adopted it. Taken together, these films perform a balancing act between novel iterations of femininity on the one hand and the containment of challenges to Mexican gender norms on the other – though I hope that my focus on gender is not taken as exclusive of other vectors of identity, but rather, indicative of ways gender can converse with and augment knowledge creation in other domains.

Theorizing Representation

Cinema is a medium in which social ideals are rendered visible and meaningful for an audience (through the appearance/performance of the characters, and through the choices and outcomes experienced by those characters in the narrative). Hailed as "popular" phenomena, cinema visualizes the dynamic intersection of cultural, political, and economic spheres at specific instances in space and time. Within the broader entity of cinema, representations of gender matter – they carry psychic power through internalization, and social power through the effects of their dissemination.[14] Mexican journalist Carlos Monsiváis holds that cinema shapes national identity by remaking culture in the image of the "nation," which enables cinema to dramatize social problems and relations in a way that makes culture intelligible to mass audiences. Cinema

[13] As Alan Knight argues in his scholarship of Mexican race relations, the question of "race" is often better framed in the Mexican context as a question of "ethnicity" because the population of Mexico has over generations undergone such extensive miscegenation that race is an ineffective concept for the structuring and analysis of social stratification. "Racism, Revolution, and Indigenismo"

[14] For a concise introduction to theoretical approaches to cinematic representation, see Robert Stam. *Film Theory: An Introduction*. (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, 2017)

interprets culture. It is an efficient "structure of mediation," and as such, cinematic representations can function as mechanisms of social control or as emblems of social liberation, depending upon the character of the image and audience in question.[15] Often, cultural stereotypes – especially conventional cinematic ones – seem to work against women, but the types of femininity represented in Mexican silent cinema also illustrate how Mexican moviemakers and moviegoers were reconfiguring and redefining their notions of what it meant to be a woman through the late 1910s and 20s. Moreover, Joanne Hershfield's conclusion that notions of femininity apparent in Golden Age cinema were rooted in centuries of Mexican tradition, and that these notions imbued representations of women with great cultural and political power, should lead to an inquiry of the way these representations inflected Mexico's earliest cinematic productions.[16] Significantly, such "images do not reflect the world; they are part of the realm of social discourse that participates in the context of everyday life; they are both responsive to as well as constructive of this life. Images function as elements of discourses, providing people with information and knowledge."[17] This means that representations of divas, indigenas, and pelonas on Mexican cinema screens participated in a reciprocal relationship with the broader culture that both fed into and fed on nationalist and transnational discourses.

In my analyses, I am wary to overemphasize character and plot at the expense of the specificity of cinematic representation. Cinema's ability to shape gender dynamics in postrevolution Mexico was in part a product of its status as a popular art form, a consumer

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[15] Carlos Monsiváis, "Mexican cinema: Of myths and demystifications." *Mediating Two Worlds: Cinematic Encounters in the Americas* (1993): 139-146, 142-144.

[16] Joanne Hershfield, *Mexican Cinema/Mexican Woman, 1940-1950.* Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1996: 20, 29.

[17] Joanne Hershfield, *Imagining La Chica Moderna*, 14.

commodity, and a modern technological marvel, but cinema's specific formal capabilities also differentiated it from other media: lens choice, framing, performance, narrative structure – these and other formal aspects inflect cinematic representations to make them extremely affective and effective forms of social communication. But at the same time, the low survival rate of Mexican silent films necessitates recourse to plot summaries, journalistic responses, advertising campaigns, and the like to identify patterns of imagery and meaning in Mexican silent cinema.[18] Thus, much of the analysis that follows is necessarily discursive. While the loss of the films is regrettable, the discursive method that addresses this loss also confers the advantage of grounding analysis in the socio-historical conditions of production and reception.

Today, Mexican silent cinema is more accessible internationally than it was even in its own era, but Anglophone writing remains focused on a select few films.[19] Though the films I

[18] Advertisements are one iteration of what John Fiske calls "second level" texts – that is, any review, publicity material, or "official" public discourse about a "first-level" text (the film itself) which, through intertextuality, promotes various interpretations of the first-level text. As Manuel Casanova notes, the UNAM has been able to restore a dozen Mexican silent shorts and features (documentary and fiction), but what is known of the rest of the corpus is thanks entirely to periodicals. Manuel González Casanova, "¿Y Por Qué No Organizamos La Filmoteca Nacional?" *Boletín del Instituto de Investigaciones Bibliográficas* 2 (1988), accessed Dec 28 2018, http://publicaciones.iib.unam.mx/index.php/boletin/article/view/458

[19] The UNAM Filmoteca Nacional has digitized and made freely available restorations of Mexican silent features *Tepeyac*, *El puno de hierro* and *El tren fantasma* with subtitles in translation, and other Mexican silent films like *El Automovil gris* appear in whole or in part on freely accessible platforms like YouTube. As (newly-)accessible historical evidence, these films have been the focus of scholarly film analyses, while the lost films have been largely ignored. See Mónica García Blizzard, "Whiteness and the Ideal of Modern Mexican Citizenship in Tepeyac (1917)." *Vivomatografías. Revista de estudios sobre precine y cine silente en Latinoamérica* 1 (2015): 72-95., William M Drew and Esperanza Vázquez Bernal. "El Puño de Hierro, a Mexican Silent Film Classic."*Journal of Film Preservation* 66 (2003): 10; and Charles Ramirez Berg, "El Autómovil Gris and the Advent of Mexican Classicism." In *Visible Nations: Latin American Cinema and Video*, edited by Chon A. Noriega.

discuss do not remain to be seen, that does not mean that those films were not influential in their era, nor should it exempt film historians from grappling with them. I believe the paucity of literature on the films made in Mexico during the silent era makes the films that do survive less appealing to those who might otherwise include Mexican silent film in their pedagogy (of history, film studies, gender studies, etc). While the film medium preserves its subjects in an everlasting present – "change mummified" to borrow from Bazin – the Janus-faced silent Mexican cinema was both retrospective (in its recourse to history and its reliance on traditional tropes of womanhood) and visionary (in its elaboration of gendered imagery and themes that would structure the renowned films of the Golden Age).[20]

Visions of Femininity

In her study of later Golden Age and contemporary Mexican cinema, Joanne Hershfield asserts that Mexican cinema

> "…sought to present a female national identity that would encompass the myth of the revolution, which promised social equality for all, and at the same time honor the conditions of Mexico's own form of patriarchy, *machismo*, which demanded the perpetuation of gender inequality as well as socially sanctioned forms of sexual subjugation."[21]

A not dissimilar ideological process unfolded in the Mexican silent cinema. One significant difference, however, was that the state had yet to involve itself directly in film financing and

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[20] Though the Porfiriato fomented the sentiments that fueled the revolution, the Porfiriato was not explicitly acknowledged as the setting of any silent film. Such representations would also be anomalous in the Golden Age. See Jacqueline Avila, "México De Mis Inventos: Salon Music, Lyric Theater, and Nostalgia in Cine De Añoranza Porfiriana," *Revista de Música Latinoamericana* 38, no. 1 (2017): 1-27. accessed February 9, 2019. http://www2.lib.ku.edu/login?URL=http://search.ebscohost.com.www2.lib.ku.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=aph&AN=123487930&site=ehost-liv

[21] Joanne Hershfield, "Women's Pictures: Identity and Representation in Recent Mexican Cinema," 63.

production in the silent era. So, the relationship between motion pictures and the crystallizing nationalist project in the postrevolution, pre-Golden Age was rather more diffuse and, to a degree, popular in character (though *unofficial* state facilitation of film production did occasionally occur).[22] In the analysis that follows, I consider the three primary feminine types that appeared in Mexican cinema during the silent era and the discourses that constructed those figures. While not exhaustive, the figures of the diva, the indigena, and the pelona were emblems of Mexican femininity recurrent in cinema and prevalent across popular (and sometimes official) culture. These figures captured the major currents that shaped the evolution of femininity in postrevolution Mexico City, and a comparison of these types reveals distinct and overlapping values at play in cinematic representations of gender ideals.

Before 1917 the only feature films produced in Mexico were documentaries, many of which granted urban audiences a glimpse of the "epochal, fratricidal struggle" occurring in the countryside.[23] When the fighting ended, the promise of newfound stability and attendant hope for a bright Mexican future invigorated narrative film production. This political change ushered in a new era of feminine representations along with it: while documentary's preoccupation with politics and revolution produced a rich archive of images dominated by men, the features produced in Mexico City in 1917 were dominated by female protagonists.[24] Mexican audiences

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[22] As Matt Losada has argued of Argentine silent cinema, artisanal production was often more democratic than the state-orchestrated production of the studio era. "Allegories of Authenticity in the Argentine Cinema of the 1910s," *Hispanic Review* 8 no 3 (2012): 485-506. Paulo Antonio Paranagua makes a similar, if less developed, argument for the extended artisanal phase of Mexican film production as a virtue that enabled the development of a distinct point of view. See "Ten Reasons to Love or Hate Mexican Cinema," 1.

[23] Mora, *Mexican Cinema*, 15.

[24] Ana López, "Early Cinema and Modernity in Latin America." Mexico was a unique case among Latin American countries as a consequence of the revolution.

were familiar with female leads from international cinema, but the *production* of cinema concerned with women's stories was new. This trend was in part facilitated by the audience's fatigue with war, but the theme of revolution was also consciously avoided: it was believed that representations of the conflict would only play into the Hollywood stereotypes Mexican filmmakers wanted to counteract.[25] Though Mexican film historian Angel Miquel asserts that only a few silent narrative features made "timid allusions to the real world," I argue that the domestic melodramas, rural romances, and adventure films made in Mexico from 1917-1931 were very much about the real world.[26] As contemporaneous public conversations about cinema and national culture suggest, these films metaphorically engaged social conflicts not readily played out in the documentary mode, especially as those conflicts pertained to gendered modernity.

Diva

The triangulation of influences from Europe, the United States, and national culture characterized film production across Latin America throughout the silent era, but the choice of *which* influences to adapt and *how* is nonetheless telling – and the Italian diva films copied by Mexican filmmakers uniquely resonated with the transformations of Mexican society in the postrevolution era.[27] Italian diva films starring Francesca Bertini, Lyda Borelli, and Pina Menicelli were extremely popular in postrevolution Mexico, but these films did not enjoy the same exclusive domain over Mexican screens that Hollywood films would claim in the late

[25] Emilio García Riera, *Breve Historia Del Cine Mexicano,* 33.

[26] Angel Francisco Miquel Rendon, *Acercamientos Al Cine Silente Mexicano.* (Universidad Autonoma del Estad de Morelos 2005), 55.

[27] Paul A Schroeder Rodríguez, "Latin American Silent Cinema."

1920s. Instead, Mexican audiences could choose from a variety of international films playing in city theaters, including French serials, German fables, and Hollywood comedies. But though the *Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* and *Golem 1920* were also popular with Mexican audiences, filmmakers did not set out to replicate those pictures.[28]

What, then, were the eminently emulable diva films? As film programmer Mariann Lewinski writes, "[The diva film] is a wonderful genre: the films are as gorgeous as birds of paradise, with plots that have no use whatsoever for probability."[29] Put another way, diva films are instantly recognizable by their supremely melodramatic excesses: the operatic performances (a "Style [that] makes visible the depths of interiority,") extravagant costumes, and sensational plots of these films put glamorous female protagonists front and center. [30] Divas also occupy a rarified social milieu, and even in the face of financial ruin they retain outsized glamour. Ultimately, diva films – both Italian and Mexican in origin – were a phenomenon inextricable from urban modernity, which appealed uniquely to female audiences through emergent logics of sexuality and consumerism while grappling with timely social issues in a stylish manner, thereby elaborating key characteristics of postrevolution Mexican femininity. [31]

The first Mexican narrative feature was a remake of an Italian film. In the summer of 1917, Mexico-Lux Film produced *La Luz: triptico de la vida moderna* (dir. Manuel de la Bandera), which starred "the beautiful artist Emma Padilla, who bears a striking resemblance to

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[28] Angel Miquel, *Por Las Pantallas,* 124.

[29] Liner notes, Sangue Bleu (Oxila, 1914). DVD, Cineteca di Bologna.

[30] Angela Dalle Vacche, *Diva*, 20.

[31] Michele Canosa writes (again in the *Sangue Bleu* DVD liner notes), "A diva does not arise from the sea foam, but is shot out of the bustling metropolis."

Pina Menichelli." The film adapted *Il Fuoco* (*The Fire: The Spark, The Flame, The Ashes*, Pastrone, 1915) which starred none other than Menichelli herself. Other diva-inspired Mexican films premiered soon after *La Luz,* including *En defensa propia*, *Alma de sacrificio*, *La soñadora*, and *En la sombra*, all starring Mimí Derba; as well as *La tigresa*, which starred actress Sarah Uthoff under Derba's direction. [32] The latter five were all produced over the course of a single year by Derba and Rosa's company, Azteca films – a firm whose name evokes a sense of pride in the historic character of Mexico, even as the films that firm produced were fashionable, Italian-style melodramas.[33] Two reviews of Azteca films from *El Pueblo* evoke the ambivalence of Mexico's apparent position on the periphery of Euro-American modernity: the anonymous reviewer of *La soñadora* would prefer to see Derba on screen performing Mexican folkloric dance in a traditional Mexican costume, but was nonetheless happy to see progress made in Mexican film production by a talented Mexican artist, while the mononymous reviewer Solfa praised *En defensa propia* as the best Mexican-produced film to date because it was "the first Mexican film that could be a European product."[34] Mexican films of the diva genre came to embody what Antonia del Rey calls "nacionalismo cosmopolita"– an approach to national film production that conveyed Mexico's fluency in international cinematic language through the

[32] Preceding two quotes from Salvador Ignacio Díaz (Redactor de "Semana Cinematográfica.") *Cine-Mundial* October 1917, Vol. II, No. 10, p. 519. Diaz notes the production of these films and identifies their stars (but not their directors).

[33]Federico Davalos Orozco and Esperanza Vázquez Bernal. *Filmografía General Del Cine Mexicano (1906-1931).* (Puebla: Universidad Autonoma de Pueba, 1985). Production company names are fascinating articulations of Mexican heritage in their own right. Azteca, Cauhetemoc, and Colonial are but a select few.

[34] "La soñadora," *El Pueblo*, September 27, 1917 pg 6; "Un Triunfo Merecido para "En Defense Propia," La primera Pelicula Artistica de Manufactura Nacional." *El Pueblo,* 7-16-1917.

idiom of Mexican mise-en-scene.[35] Del Rey describes the success of this approach as decidedly uneven, for while some scenes captured national customs and landscapes, other scenes – for example, one of a venetian-style gondola piloted by a gondolier dressed as a charro in *La luz* – inadvertently emphasized the disjuncture between Mexican films and their European inspirations.[36]

La luz is lost, and today occupies the number one spot on the Filmoteca UNAM's "Most Wanted" lost films list.[37] Surviving documentation indicates that the film was structured around three phases of the day (dawn, noon, and sunset), with most of the film shot outside to maximize natural light. Cinematographer Ezequiel Carrasco reportedly deployed emotional close-ups of his star actress and improvised a dolly using bicycle wheels to create moving shots – two cinematographic techniques used to great effect in Italian diva pictures.[38] The plot is as follows: the protagonist, a young woman simply called Ella (she), meets a young man (El, he) as both are walking through a park in Coyoacán. When the man's car breaks down, the woman gives him a ride in her own vehicle and a romance blossoms. Scenes of the couple's relationship unfold in

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[35] Antonia del Rey, *El Cine Mudo Mexicano*, 8.

[36] Ibid 10. The *charro c*an be considered the male counterpart to the china poblana. The charro's costume included a broad hat and tight pants; though the look was rooted in the rural landowning elite, the charro would become the prevailing masculine national costume and a fixture of Golden Age cinema. See Rick López, *Crafting Mexico,* 36. For more on these types, see also Ricardo Pérez Montfort, *Expresiones Populares Y Estereotipos Culturales En México, Siglos XIX Y XX: Diez Ensayos.* (Mexico City: Centro de Investigaciones y Estudios Superiores en Antropologia Social, 2007).

[37] Alejando Salazar Hernandez, *Reportaje: Imagenes perdidas del cine mexicano; las diez peliculas mas buscadas por la filmoteca de le UNAM,* Tesis de Licenciatura en Ciencias de la Comunicacion, UNAM, ed. A.S.H, Mexico, 2000.

[38] Elisa Lozano,"Ezequiel Carrasco, Del Cine Silente Al Sonoro." Carrasco continued his work as a cinematographer in Mexico until 1969, and the popularity of his later work has been a primary motivator for research into his initial labors in the silent cinema.

San Angel and Chapultepec, but Ella grows bored and leaves El in search of a new suitor. Later, El comes upon Ella in Xochimilco, where the sight of Ella in another man's arms provokes a terminal case of heartbreak in El. Though Ella reads of her past lover's illness in the newspaper and goes in her car to see him, she is too late – when she arrives, El is dead. Grief-stricken, Ella cuts a lock of her hair and places it in her deceased lover's hands. The plot summary alone suggests both modernity and national specificity: automobiles as a means of mobility throughout the city, and Ella's status as a woman who can both possess and pilot her own car, are significant. The sites visited by the couple over the course of their relationship are also important; Xochimilco and Coyoacán are among Mexico City's most recognizable public spaces, while Coyoacán and San Angel are affluent colonial neighborhoods.[39] In regards to the mise-en-scene, the film's cinematographer later explained, "in Mexico we can and we must show our beautiful scenery on screen."[40] For the young national cinema, these locations served a triple purpose: they established the high-class mise-en-scene befitting a proper diva film, they affirmed the national character of the film itself, and they communicated a level of refinement that refuted the foreign imaginary 'bandido' Mexico.

After months of fanfare leading up to the release of *La luz*, including the interview with star Emma Padilla that opens this dissertation, the film premiered at the Salón Rojo on June 8, 1917. Advertisements heralded "a brilliant day for the national cinema" attributable to the "beautiful work of patriotic art." This ad copy suggested that, regardless of the film's content, the very act of its creation was a labor of national pride, and the film's national import was

[39] These neighborhoods are famous in part as the home of Diego Rivera and Frida Kahlo; Rivera's studio was in San Angel and Kahlo's home was in Coyoacán.

[40] "La cinematografia nacional." *El Universal Ilustrado*, 1 February 1934, 39.

legitimized by the President of the Republic Venustiano Carranza's presence at the premiere.[41] Following the premiere, the Salón Rojo exhibited *La luz* on all three of its screens to satisfy "popular demand."[42]

The most important feature of any diva film, however, is the diva herself – and in *La luz*, she is a woman whose sensuality is so powerful that it drives her spurned lover to ruin, and who suffers significant emotional trauma as a result. Such a woman certainly incorporates aspects of the femme fatale, but as Angela Dalle Vacche points out, a diva is distinct from a femme fatale in that her manipulations flow not from materialistic greed, but from a desire for more autonomy than society will allow one of her gender. In the Mexican context, then, a diva performance like that of Emma Padilla as Ella embodies inhibited independence and errant sexuality evocative of la Malinche – but the diva avoids falling into this irredeemable category largely through the experience of suffering evocative of another recognizable type: the *mater dolorosa*, or suffering mother, epitomized by none other than the Virgin Mary.[43] In other Mexican diva films, this latter pole is even more strongly emphasized. In *Alma de sacrificio*, for example, Mimí Derba's character is an orphan named Rosa who gives up her own chance at happiness by pretending to be the mother of her sister's illegitimate child and accepting society's judgment, while her sister

[41] Aurelio de los Reyes, *Cine y Sociedad II*, 205.

[42] All advertising quotes in the preceding paragraph from the advertisement for *La Luz, triptico de la vida moderna,* at the Salón Rojo. *El Universal*, 10 June 1917. The advertisement indicates that *La Luz* shared a bill with the short *His Wedding Night* (Arbuckle, 1917).

[43] Octavio Paz describes the Virgin of Guadalupe as "pure receptivity, and the benefits she bestows are of the same order: she consoles, quiets, dies tears, calms passion." *Labyrinth Of Solitude.* Translated by Lysander Kemp.(Penguin, 1967), 76. That is to say, she embodies nurturing and self-sacrifice as the proper characteristics of Mexican womanhood.

falls in love and marries.[44] Though lost, a promotional still from the film suggests how the film visualized Rosa's world, and the implications of her choice: in a large and high-ceilinged room, Derba's Rosa stands at frame right with her eyes downcast, one hand on the shoulder of her adopted child and one at her chest, while four men in tuxedoes and four women in fashionable dresses – their faces and gestures suggesting tension, and even anger – are positioned along the lefthand side of the frame, as if on the opposite side of an unbridgeable divide.[45]

Across Mexican diva films, it becomes apparent that the diva embodies the impossibility of the Malinche/Virgen duality – the films uniformly end tragically, revealing through the protagonists' thwarted hopes the limitations of a patriarchal culture seemingly out of pace with social changes visible elsewhere (in Hollywood cinema, for example). So, contemporary critics and later Mexican film scholars who decried the superficiality of diva films (and the fans of those films) largely missed the point.[46] There is no denying the pleasurable appeal of these films' extravagant mise-en-scene and charismatic performers, but the elite social milieu of the diva films did not render them "completely alien" to the sociohistorical context in question.[47] Quite the opposite – diva films engaged social issues deeply relevant to women in a Catholic-patriarchal society especially. These narratives centered women grappling with love, betrayal,

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[44] Federico Davalos Orozco and Esperanza Vázquez Bernal. *Filmografía General,* 36.

[45] Image reproduced in José María Sánchez García, Federico Dávalos Orozco, Carlos Arturo Flores Villela, and Francisco Peredo Castro. *Historia Del Cine Mexicano (1896-1929): Edición Facsimilar De Las Crónicas De José María Sánchez García.* (Mexico, DF: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2013), 50.

[46] Aurelio del lo Reyes, in his historical anthology of Mexican silent cinema, captures multiple voices that denigrated the Mexican diva film as vapid entertainment rather than socially relevant material.

[47] Manuel González Casanova, *Las Vistas : Una Época Del Cine En México*. (México, D.F.: Instituto Nacional De Estudios Históricos De La Revolución Mexicana, 1992), 56.

(illegitimate) childbearing, public reputation, and financial power at a time when women had been granted the right to divorce legally but were decades away from gaining suffrage. This configuration of social – but not political – rights captures the way Mexican women found themselves on the cusp of modernity: divorce, Monsiváis argues, was an important first step, because "if women can separate from men, autonomy is already conceivable."[48]

Even the static images used to promote the films and their stars spoke to the paradoxical position of women in Mexican society: as Mira Liehm points out, the Italian diva always looks melancholic regardless of her social position, which evokes the mixture of rebellion and subordination that characterize *divismo* (diva-hood).[49] Images of Emma Padilla supplied to Mexican newspapers in advance of the premiere of *La luz* similarly depict a woman in elegant evening attire, looking wistfully into the distance or defiantly into the camera's lens, but never smiling and always in a state of glamorous repose. So, whether the Mexican diva films achieved the same artistic heights as their Italian counterparts matters little – the framing of the Mexican texts through marketing materials and journalistic responses all but assured that they would be read through the same set of genre expectations as Italian diva films.[50] In Mexico as in Italy, the social awareness of this female-focused cinema strengthened its bond with female audiences especially, and the melodramatic mode played to the hilt in diva films would become the

[48] Carlos Monsiváis, "Foreward: When Gender Can't Be Seen," 10.

[49] Mira Liehm, *Passion and Defiance: Italian Film from 1942 to the Present*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 11.

[50] In one particularly sour review of Padilla's screen debut, the anonymous reviewer of *El Pueblo* complained that Padilla imitated Menichelli too much with "her attitudes, movements, and gestures," which was to Padilla's disadvantage. "La primera cinta mexicana." *El Pueblo,* 18 June 1917, p 7.

dominant register of Latin American cinema through the 1960s.[51] The power of such a cinema to bring women lacking in social power into communities of emotional solidarity and strength was a novel development in the context of postrevolution Mexican culture.[52]

In addition to highlighting the way the patriarchally-constructed Malinche/Virgin duality trapped women, diva films evoked the particularities of modern Mexican femininity through their unique treatment of feminine sexuality and consumer culture, two phenomena effecting transformation in metropoles around the world in the early twentieth century. First, the heightened femininity performed by divas encompassed a new, more liberated sexuality. This may seem surprising, considering the way that the plots of diva films featured women crashing tragically into the expectations of their societies – but in the very attempt of defiance, characters like Ella in *La luz* or Rosa's sister in *Alma de sacrificio* posited a notion of feminine sexuality based on desire rather than state- and church-sanctioned reproduction. In this way, the films also nod to the genre's theatrical antecedents – the performances that Mimi Derba, Esperanza Iris, and their peers starred in had been accepted by the Porfirian elite as "elevated, modern, and deliciously indecent" even as the divas themselves pushed the bounds of how *senoras decentes*

[51] Angela Dalle Vacche, *Diva*.

[52] Sadlier, *Latin American Melodrama,* 15. This edited collection considers the aesthetics and cultural significance of melodrama in Latin American sound cinema. Further research could better illuminate the connections between silent and sound melodramas, which Sadlier acknowledges but does not develop. While the root word 'melos' in melodrama originally implied the centrality of music in this dramatic form, Sadlier points out that by the mid-19th century, the term was more closely associated with "spectacular action, improbable twists of fate, intense expressions of emotion, last-minute rescues, and vivid conflicts between bad and virtuous characters." Ibid 2. See also López, Ana M. "Tears and Desire: Women and Melodrama in the 'Old' Mexican Cinema." In *The Latin American Cultural Studies Readers*, edited by Ana Del Sarto, Alicia Ríos and Abril Trigo, (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), 441-58.

could behave outside the private realm.[53] As Janet Staiger writes in her study of sexuality in North American cinema a decade earlier, such representations "…didn't necessarily free women from the constraints of a patriarchal society that delimited sexual and gender identities - but the move was progress, insofar as sexuality as a signifier of a woman's identity and agency took on a more positive spin than it had previously."[54] In this way the divas of *La luz* and the Azteca films set the stage for their short-haired successors, the pelonas: divas were compelling protagonists and role models on the basis of their defiant, individual desires. The dangerous – that is, potentially liberating – view of feminine sexuality conveyed in diva films was not lost on Mexican critics, who fussed over the female fan "activated by erotic desire, emotional excess, and nervous overstimulation."[55] When female fans adopted the superficial trappings of *divismo* in their dress and gesture, the fashion was concerning precisely because these visual changes suggested a deeper challenge to the prevailing social order. This was akin to the phenomenon Miriam Hansen has described in the United States around the same time, wherein filmmakers' and exhibitors' desires to expand their consumer base to include women led them to produce and project films that liberalized ideas about feminine sexuality – even if those same films were at odds with powerful social agents and institutions invested in the conservative regulation of feminine sexuality. In the case of Mexico, these institutions included the state and the church, two bodies that were often at odds throughout the revolutionary period, but whose interests

[53] Ageeth Sluis, *Deco City, Deco Body*, 36-37.

[54] Janet Staiger, *Bad Women,* 10. Staiger's argument asserts that when "woman" is no longer framed only by her role in the mode of production (namely, as wife and mother) but now also as a consumer with a "lifestyle," the cultural meaning of sexuality changes.

[55] Rielle Navitski, "Early Film Critics and Fanatical Fans," 78.

aligned in the continued sexual subjugation of women.[56]

An important distinction between the US and Mexican contexts, however, is that the films Hansen attributes with the power to reconfigure notions of feminine sexuality were movies starring male sex symbol Rudolph Valentino, whereas in Mexico, the films that liberalized spectatorial expressions of female sexuality were movies that provided female sexual role models (as opposed to a male object of sexual desire). Beyond the challenge the divas posed to social expectations of feminine behavior, diva films also helped integrate female audience members into modern consumer culture, which happened through the images of commodities that populated the sumptuous mise-en-scene of the divas' world. As Mariann Lewinsky argues, diva films are always a kind of catwalk in which the protagonist models numerous contemporary fashions (sometimes as many as twenty outfit changes in a single film!).[57] These images sparked desire, but their power was magnified by venues such as the Mexican department store Palacio de Hierro, which sold dresses and high-heeled shoes named after Bertini, "La reina del Cine en Mexico," and even provided the décor for some Mexican silent films.[58]

The essential feature to note here is that the divas were allowed the latitude to challenge social norms because they still adhered to characteristics of refined femininity: the divas were of high social status, gracious, and classically beautiful as well as defiant, so the subversive

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[56] For an introduction to the various motivations, manifestations, and impacts of Mexican anticlericalism, see Adrian A Bantjes, "Mexican revolutionary Anticlericalism: Concepts and Typologies." *The Americas* 65, no. 4 (2009): 467-481, accessed February 9, 2019, http://www2.lib.ku.edu/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.www2.lib.ku.edu/docview/748413641?accountid=14556467-480.

[57] For more on the diva films' relationship to consumer culture, see Ch 1.

[58] Ad for Palacio de Hierro, *Excélsior* 20 July 1920; Federico Davalos Orozco and Esperanza Vázquez Bernal. *Filmografía General*, 63.

potential of their sex-symbol status was neatly interwoven with traditionally feminine characteristics that mitigated the threat they posed.[59] The Mexican screen divas thus harked back to their Porfirian predecessors, the stage divas of the opera and the zarzuela, but they also began to articulate new ideas about the modern Mexican woman, providing a bridge between eras in a moment of historic change. Converse to early Mexican film historians' assertion that the class milieu of diva films (both Italian and Mexican in origin) made these films irrelevant to the realities of the Mexican fans, the film's extraordinary settings and imaginative plots wrapped subversive behavior in the cloak of fantasy. The Mexican diva films allowed their protagonists to embody the position of women poised at the cusp of Mexican modernity.

Indigena

Unlike divas and pelonas, the indigena is distinct from the other feminine types examined here in that it appeals to Mexican folklore, which promises "national unity in the form of patrimony that transcends the divisions among classes and ethnic groups."[60] And yet at the same time, much like the diva and the pelona, the indigena was an ideal of Mexican femininity shaped by transnational economic and cultural currents. Postrevolution *indigenismo* – the belief that the roots of modern Mexican identity could be found in contemporary Indian culture, which provided a link to the pre-Columbian past – was deeply influenced by the picturesque images of Mexican "popular types" created and sold by Europeans fascinated with the "exoticism" of

[59] Ageeth Sluis. *Deco Body, Deco City*, 67.

[60] Néstor García Canclini, *Hybrid Cultures: Strategies for Entering and Leaving Modernity*, trans. Christopher L Chiappari and Silvia L Lopez. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), 155. García Canclini identifies folklore as one of modern societies' principal strategies for staging the popular.

Mexico in the 19th century.[61] Mexican indigenismo thus entailed multiple internal contradictions, not least that the emblematization of Mexico's indigenous people was predicated upon the Orientalist gaze of Europeans against whom Mexicans sought to differentiate themselves.[62] The female Indian especially became a key symbol of mexicanidad when nationalist cultural projects adapted aesthetic conventions of representing Mexico from abroad and "transformed these images and types into national self-portraits."[63] Mexican silent movies that featured female indigena characters purported to offer a "real" depiction of Mexico different from earlier European-styled Mexican cinema on the one hand, and degrading images of Mexicans from the United States on the other. But in effect, silent films representing Mexican 'indigenous' female types on the whole served only to infuse outmoded ideals of passive femininity with a bit of movie-star glamour – though these films also, perhaps unexpectedly, participated in the integration of feminized capitalist consumer culture into the Mexican context.

In the 1920s, the "the *traje*-dressed female character emerged as a major star" in the Mexican silent cinema.[64] *Traje*, in this context, refers to either of two ensembles representative

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[61] Mexican *indigenismo* was not a civil rights movement but an ideological project concerned with constructing a notion of "the Indian" as representative of Mexico: The Indians themselves were the objects, not the authors, of indigenismo. See Alan Knight "Racism, revolution, and Indigenismo,"*76.* Joanne Hershfield, *Imagining la Chica Moderna*,132-133

[62] Francie Chassen-López, "The Traje De Tehuana," 287. For a very concise summary of Mexican indiginismo, see Estelle Tarica, "Indigenismo," in *Oxford Research Encyclopedias: Latin American History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016.) http://oxfordre.com/latinamericanhistory/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780199366439.001.0001/acrefore-9780199366439-e-68

[63] Joanne Hershfield, *Imagining the Chica Moderna,* 136. Historically, indigenous peoples had been typecast as passive and feminine, so it should not surprise us that it was indigenous women who emerged as national symbols.

[64] Ibid, 82.

of Mexican folkloric feminine types: the *tehuana* and the *china poblana.* Both figures are recognizable by their long dark hair and elaborately embroidered blouses, but the connotations of the exuberantly adorned *tehuana,* which is a type derived from the style of the women in the Isthmus of Tehuantepecin Southern Mexico*,* are more regal and celebratory, while the simpler aesthetic of the *china poblana,* a type derived from the regional style of dress from the state of Puebla, connotes the everyday appearance of Indian peasants. Though the types derive from distinct historical lineages, postrevolution Mexican cinema utilized both as indigenas without regard to real-world distinctions: these outfits became "culturally and politically safe and racially neutral," so that "they provided a nonthreatening way to celebrate popular culture." These features granted the female indigena a strong cultural cachet, for the figures both evoked European folk regionalism and distinct mexicanidad; the china poblana and tehuana were so much en vogue in the early 1920s that the styles were adopted for festivals, theater, and public cultural events.[65]

Cinematic images of indigenas were present from the beginning of national narrative production: Mimí Derba's production company, Azteca, integrated the figure of the indigena into each of its films through the company bumper (the logo that preceded each of the studio's products, e.g. the MGM lion). In that brief sequence, a china poblana discovered an Aztec calendar carved in stone, over which the words "Azteca Film" were superimposed. This sequence was filmed by Derba's partner Rosas at the National Museum of Anthropology, an institution vital to the consecration of the nation's indigenous heritage as paramount to its identity.[66] Later Mexican silent films that featured indigenas in primary roles, including *En la*

[65] Rick Lopez, *Crafting Mexico,* 36.

[66] Rosario Vidal, *Surgimiento De La Industria Cinematográfica,* 113.The Museum was then called National Museum of Archaeology, History and Ethnography. As Ana Maria Alonso

hacienda (1921, Vollrath) and *La raza azteca* (Contreras Torres, 1922), evince how exoticism, as Isabel Santaolalla writes, "appropriates a 'colonised', domesticated version of an Other to meet its own needs," – a strategy that would be more fully elaborated in the Mexican Golden Age.[67] All of these films relied on the premise that "women embodied a sphere of atemporal authenticity seemingly untouched by the alienation and fragmentation of modern life," which granted representations of female indigenas with the ability to soothe anxieties about the changing character of Mexico and Mexican women.[68]

The José Vasconcelos-produced film *En la hacienda,* which premiered at Chapultepec Castle for an audience that included Mexican President Alvaro Obregón, offers significant insight to the cinematic articulation of indiginismo.[69] This film (now lost save a brief fragment) narrates a romance set in rural Mexico, with Elena Sánchez Valenzuela starring as Petrilla "the innocent little Indian." The plot establishes rural landowners Pascualito and his son, Pepe, as tyrannical figures that abuse and extort the people who work their estate. The peasant-vs-landowner conflict escalates when Pepe sets his licentious sights on Petrilla. In an attempt to defend her honor, goodhearted farmhand Blas inadvertently kills Pepe, but the death of the cruel young boss paves the way for Blas and Petrilla to fall in love and live happily ever after. Multiple scholars have attached Vasconcelos to the film, though the exact character of his

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writes, "anthropology has tried to heal the split between the Spanish and the Indian, both within the nation and within the subjective experience of Mexicans." Ana María Alonso, "Conforming Disconformity: 'Mestizaje,' Hybridity, and the Aesthetics of Mexican Nationalism," *Cultural Anthropology* 19, no. 4 (2004): 476, accessed April 3, 2019, https://doi-org.www2.lib.ku.edu/10.1525/can.2004.19.4.459

[67] Isabel Santaolalla, "Introduction: What Is 'New'in 'New' exoticisms?". *New" Exoticisms: Changing Patterns in the Construction of Otherness* (Brill Rodopi, 2000): 9-17., 10.

[68] Rita Felski, *The Gender of Modernity*, 16.

[69] Patricia Torres San Martín, "Elena Sánchez Valenzuela.".

involvement remains unclear. The apparent resonance between the beautiful and heroic Indians as portrayed in the film and Vasconcelos' eventual articulation in 1925 of Latin American peoples as the founders of a utopian future in his landmark philosophical essay "La Raza Cosmica" here suggests the way indigenismo ideology infused popular cultural forms as well as elite discourse. This fits within the broad contours of postrevolutionary cultural conflict as described by Joanne Hershfield, in which two parties competed in decades-long political/cultural effort to fashion a national citizen and foster solidarity among diverse peoples: intellectual elites made images to promote their version of a political modernity, but also equally forceful was push for sphere of popular "transnational" culture situated in the marketplace.[70]

In a publicity shot for *En la hacienda* that appeared on the cover of *El Universal Ilustrado* in May 1921, Sánchez Valenzuela's Petrilla is the undeniable focus of the image. Dressed in the style of the *china poblana* (short-sleeved embroidered while blouse; a full-length colored skirt; beaded jewelry, and hair worn in two long braids) with the low-roofed buildings of the titular hacienda in soft focus behind her, she appears seated on the ground, petting the dog in front of her and looking solemnly up at her beloved Blas.[71] Petrilla is passive, but nurturing, and very much a part of her environment; all of these factors evoke the characteristics of femininity and indigeneity as "natural" and receptive that have structured discourse around these markers of identity in the Mexican context for centuries.[72] The surviving fragment of the film emphasizes Petrilla's beauty and passivity even more pointedly; in a dirt-floored, humbly appointed domestic space, barefoot Petrilla struggles to escape the forceful advances of mustachioed Pepe, but

[70] Joanne Hershfield, *Imagining la Chica Moderna*, 4.

[71] Federico Dávalos Orozco and Esperanza Vázquez Bernal. *Filmografía General,* 64.

[72] Francie Chassen-López, "The Traje De Tehuana."

without success. [73] Tension builds through cross cutting as Blas is shown performing athletic feats, running and jumping over obstacles on his way to rescue his love who is progressively backed into a corner by her assailant. At the last moment, Blas bursts through the door. Pepe then attacks Blas. In the ensuing physical altercation, the men are framed in long shot to capture the physicality of their grappling, while softly-lit close-up inserts emphasize Petrilla's emotional response to the action in front of her.

The film opened on 20 screens after its premiere at Chapultepec, and more than 30 articles were published about a film that cultural magazine *El Illustrado* would later deem the best Mexican picture of 1921.[74] *Cine-Mundial* correspondent Epifanio Soto commended the film's director Enrique Vollrath for representing the "most real Mexican atmosphere seen in cinema to date," which at last ended the "mania for Europeanizing" Mexican culture seen in earlier Mexican films.[75] With his praise, Soto positioned the fictional narrative of *En la hacienda* as more "real" than the true-crime story of Vollrath's earlier directorial effort, *El automovil gris* (1919) which dramatized the activities of a crime syndicate in Mexico City. In the discursive

[73] The film has been made available to the public through a private corporation – Cine Nostalgia, a sort of Mexican counterpart to Turner Classic Movies.

[74] San Martin, "Elena Sánchez Valenzuela." "Best film of 1921" was an achievement that came replete with an actual gold medal. Angel Miquiel, *Por Las Pantallas,* 110. Through the contest to name the best Mexican film of the year, we can see that the need to stimulate an audience was an essential prerequisite to stimulate national production. The paper wrote that it hoped that the contest would "stimulate and encourage" national production -- a demand-side approach to the national cinema's underdevelopment. It would not be until the sound era that the state would become involved with the supply side of the equation by directly funding film production.

[75] Epifanio Soto, "Cronica de Mejico," *Cine-Mundial,* March 1922, 144. The film's "best innovation is the way Vollrath presents us, he has ended the mania for "Europeanizing our customs," and what he achieves in this work is the most real and typical ambiance that has been seen in Mexican films to date."

battle to define authentic Mexico, Soto was not alone in feeling that idealized indigenous culture offered a desirable alternative to transnationally-inflected urban life; a similar desire for the domestic exotic is manifest in the other silent indigena films as well. A newspaper advertisement for *De raza azteca* (1921) from *Excélsior* pictures a woman dressed in the china poblana style, with accompanying text that repeatedly foregrounds the Mexican character of the film, including the pitch line "The Mexican production with noble national qualities." As with *En la hacienda*, the 'india mexicana' (portrayed here by actress Irma Dominguez) is not the protagonist of the film, but rather the love interest of the male hero. As a general rule, the silent indigena films put Mexican women back in supporting roles, defined by their relationship to men. The 1922 film *Fulguracion de la raza* (Resplendence of the Race, Contreras Torres) goes a step farther, imaginatively conveying the dire consequences of unrestrained women and deviation from "true" Mexican identity. In the film, indigena Lupita cheats on her boyfriend Juan and bears a child out of wedlock with a hacendado. The hacendado, Pablo, kills Lupita's father and flees to the city with Lupita, leaving Juan to raise the child himself in Xochimilco. In the city, Lupita becomes a "frivolous woman" and Pablo is incarcerated for murder and attempted fraud. Disgraced and sick from her indulgent lifestyle, Lupita returns to her village. There, she dies in the hospital, cared for by Juan (who in her absence has been ordained as a priest) and an altar boy who turns out to be her illegitimate son.[76] Both *De raza azteca* and *Fulguracion de la raza* were directed by revolutionary-officer-turned-filmmaker Miguel Contreras Torres, whose work García Riera evaluated as "without a doubt the most important of the twenties," in part because his films were "imbued with a patriotic spirit similar to the one that animates commemorative political

[76] Federico Davalos Orozco and Esperanza Vázquez Bernal. *Filmografía General,* 55 and Aurelio de los Reyes, *Cine y Sociedad II*, 222-224.

speeches."[77] The postrevolution state and its agents –both officially recognized state actors and unofficial advocates in the private sector, like Contreras – found political and social utility in the sign of the Indian woman.

The 'boom' (as it were) in indigena films in 1921 and 1922 corresponded to the Obregón administration's lavish commemoration of the Mexican centennial, which emphasized "contemporary indigenous culture as integral to Mexican national identity."[78] The novelty of fêteing contemporary Indians bears emphasis, because the Porfirian elite had regarded 'unassimilated' living Indians as a black eye of backwardness on the positivist face of Mexico. The Porfirian discourse on contemporary Indians debated whether this social group, which comprised 40 percent of the nation's population, "could ever be lifted from their primitive social and economic state," and courted European immigrants in an effort to "whiten" the population.[79] After nearly a decade of fighting, the architects of the new Mexican state pushed aside Porfirian race ideology in favor of what Ana Maria Alonso calls a "new revolutionary mythohistory."[80] This revised history traced the roots of Mexican civilization not to the Spanish conquest, but rather, to the Aztec empire, and re-cast Mexico's Indian population as living heirs to that glorious past. The month-long Centennial jubilee drew tens of thousands of people from the provinces to the capital for a slate of events that included a state dinner at Teotihuacan, screenings of Mexican films, baseball games, aircraft demonstrations, charity functions, and other entertainments. The most popular attraction, with an estimated attendance of 500,000

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[77] Emilio García Riera, *Breve Historia Del Cine Mexicano*, 20.

[78] Michael J. Gonzales, "Imagining Mexico in 1921," 250.

[79] Jonathan Kandell. *La Capital,* 373.

[80] Ana María Alonso, "Conforming Disconformity," 462.

people, was the grand "Noche Mexicana" hosted at Chapultepec Park. The "Noche Mexicana" included indigenous cuisine and art, a folkloric ballet, and the coronation of the "India Bonita," an indigenous woman who won her title in a beauty contest administered by the Mexico City daily *El Universal*.[81] President Obregón himself crowned the winner, 15-year-old Mirina Bibiana Uribe of Puebla, and the "India Bonita" soon entered cinemas via documentary films that captured events of the centennial on celluloid.[82] Like the indigena melodramas set in the Mexican *campo*, the *Centenario* documentaries that represented the India Bonita within the cityscape delivered an idealized image of purportedly timeless, authentically Mexican femininity to urban Mexican audiences, stitching together city and *campo* in a constructed vision of the collective imaginary "with greater credibility than that of books, personal experiences, or textbook History."[83]

If mexicanidad was the needle, indigenismo was the thread that tied together past and present, city and country, and elite and popular classes. As Rick López points out, "[f]or every elite play, song, or poem composed in [the India Bonita's] honor, there was also a working-class bar, milk-stand, or corner snack shop named for her."[84] The name "La India Bonita" was even

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[81] For further scholarship on this contest, Rick A. Lopez "The Noche Mexicana and the Exhibition of Popular Arts: Two Ways of Exalting Indianness" 23-42 in *The Eagle and the Virgin: Nation and Cultural revolution in Mexico* (Durham: Duke University Press 2006).

[82] At least two feature-length documentary films took the centennial as their subject: *Las fiestas del centenario de la consumacion de la independencia* (Toscano, 1921) and *Los grandes y solemnes festejos del centenario* (dir. Unk.,1921); Federico Davalos Orozco and Esperanza Vázquez Bernal. *Filmografía General,* 78-79.

[83] Carlos Monsiváis, "Introduction: When Gender Can't Be Seen," 18.

[84] Rick López, *Crafting Mexico: Intellectuals, Artisans, and the State after the revolution.* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 45. Lopez also documents how, at the start of the *India Bonita* contest, some were so put off by the very idea of Indian beauty that they tried to subvert

adopted for a brand of huarache sandals that capitalized on the new cache for all things Indian – a shift in fashion from the high-heeled shoes named after European icon Francesca Bertini, but a similar means of consuming idealized femininity.[85] Middle-class and elite women embraced the trajes of tehuanas and chinas poblanas, donning fashions coded as 'national costume' for special occasions – though, as Chassin-López points out, many of the garments that communicated national pride were, ironically, industrially manufactured in Europe.[86] Many urban women would be familiar with the tehuana and the china poblana only through the mediation of popular cultural representations such as cinema and advertising; so in addition to signifying their purchase of mexicanidad, the traje as fashion reveals how, in modern societies, "ethnically marked materials and individuals become fetishized for public consumption, labelled 'authentic,' and marketed to suit all pockets." [87] As conspicuous consumers of fashions associated with mexicanidad, urban women participated simultaneously in the modernization-expansion of the market and the visual reproduction of revolutionary myths – both essential functions as Mexico

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the contest by sending in photographs of white women – and in one case, a man – dressed as indigenas.

[85] Apen Ruiz, "'La India Bonita': National Beauty in revolutionary Mexico." *Cultural Dynamics* 14, no. 3 (2002): 288.

[86] Francie Chassein-López,, "The Traje De Tehuana," 292

[87] Isabel Santaolalla, "Introduction: What Is 'New'in 'New'exoticisms?" 10. Discussion of what *indigina* films achieved for women in the urban mass audience should not obscure what these films (and the accompanying ideology of *indiginismo*) failed to achieve for the women who were symbolized: As Sluis notes, the romanticization of indigeneity by cultural elites contrasted with the reception of flesh-and-blood rural women who emigrated to the capital , which was often cast as a problem Ageeth Sluis. *Deco Body, Deco City* 18.

endeavored to gain full purchase of modernity.[88]

While the indigena films' fascination with the Indian heritage of Mexico might on the surface seem anti-modern, an affinity for the past is broadly symptomatic of modernity in which the "mourning of an idealized past" characterized the "yearning for an imaginary edenic condition that has been lost."[89] In the indigena films, Mexican cultural history was mined for subject material and imaginatively rendered for the contemporary urban audience. The classic situation of "women in distress" seen in *En la hacienda* was complemented with the idea of "woman a*s* distress" in *Fulguracion de la raza,* so that women were depicted as both vulnerable and threatening, even as women's agency as protagonists of their own lives was denied: The novel screen representation of indigenas was thus contained by prevailing historical conceptions of femininity and revolutionary discourse on the relationship between the sexes. The sensational plots of indigena films dramatize the vulnerability of Mexican femininity in a way that echoes countless films of the ur-Mexican *cabaratera* genre that emerged in response to the wave of urbanization that hit Mexico City in the 1940s; specifically, the corrupting influence of the city and the dangers that await women who engage in sex (or any other activity, really) outside the "holy zone" of the domestic sphere figure as prominent and persistent threats.[90] A similar anxiety about the corruption of Mexican femininity would manifest itself in response to the pelona, but the ascendance of that cosmopolitan figure did not mean that representations of indigenous

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[88] A sartorial footnote: during the Centenario of 1910, the Diaz administration distributed thousands of pairs of factory-made pants to the peasants, "who were exhorted to wear them in place of their traditional rough white trousers, and thus impress upon foreigners that even working-class Mexicans had shed their backwardness." Jonathan Kandell. *La Capital*, 395

[89] Rita Felski, *The Gender of Modernity*, 40

[90] Carlos Monsiváis, "Foreward: When Gender Can't Be Seen," 2

women disappeared – instead, the indigena receded from the cinema's focus through the end of the silent era, only to appear with renewed vitality in the Golden Age under the direction of Emilio "El Indio" Fernandez.[91]

Pelona

When las pelonas arrived on the streets and screens of Mexico City, they brought with them anxieties about the character of Mexican femininity and the encroachment of American mass culture.[92] The word pelona, literally means "baldy" but in fact referred to the bobbed hair of Hollywood flappers, which soon became shorthand for a particular type of modern femininity. As Anne Rubenstein writes, "given its connection to the movies, getting such a haircut represented a commitment to 'the modern' and a break with 'tradition' anywhere a woman tried it."[93] Pelonas were further identified by their adoption of new modes of femininity, their quest for personal liberation, and their intense engagement with consumer culture. In Mexico City, some commentators vilified these modern women as *unas malinchistas* – women abetting the hostile infiltration of US culture, and therefore traitorous, thus tying this new mode of modern femininity to the sins of a woman who was Mexico's persistent shame.[94] Others accused the

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[91] Mathew J. K. Hill, "The Indigenismo of Emilio 'El Indio' Fernández: Myth, Mestizaje, and Modern Mexico." (master's thesis, Brigham Young University, 2009). https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/etd/1915

[92] Laura Isabel Serna, *Making Cinelandia,* 177. Joanne Hershfield notes that Lupe Velez posed in a 1926 issue of "Revista de Revistas" as an "ultramodern" flapper; "the quintessential transnational symbol of the modern: a familiar local figure in the guise of an exotic global icon" *Imagining la Chica Moderna,* 59; However, Velez also posed in a traje de tehuana in photo shoots, suggesting the traffic between the two types. See Chassein-Lopez, np. Similarly, Mimi Derba adopted the styles of European divas and "national costumes" including beaded sombreros and the traje de tehuana for photos distributed as postcards.

[93] Anne Rubenstein, "The War on Las Pelonas," 57.

[94] Joanne Hershfield, *Imagining the Chica Moderna*, 59.

pelonas of being traitors not only to their country, but to their gender as well, because the pelonas were trying to 'masculinize' themselves.[95] The pelonas were also rhetorically linked to other, more immediate iterations of deviant femininity, including prostitutes and the working-class women who had, as a consequence of urbanization, recently become a visible presence on city streets. As Ageeth Sluis concludes, "…as women and archetypes, [pelonas, prostitutes, and working class women] occupied visible positions in social movements of the day and were seen as undermining revolutionary efforts to strengthen nuclear families and socialize women to embrace their 'proper roles' as mothers and wives."[96] Despite the distress caused by pelonas – or perhaps because such anxieties gave the figure a unique cachet – Mexican filmmakers quickly adopted the pelona as protagonist. However, filmmakers in Mexico City devised strategies to neutralize the pelona's subversive potential so they could capitalize on the appeal of transnationally-inflected modern femininity while navigating historically entrenched notions of idealized Mexican femininity. By the end of the 1920s, however, such containment efforts were limited by the imperatives of the market and the broader transformation of Mexican society.

The production of *La gran noticia,* which began in 1921 under the direction of journalist Carlos Noriega Hope, shows how quickly transnational trends in feminine beauty were adopted in Mexico City – a rapid uptake that surely fed anxieties about these *chicas modernas*.[97] The cast of that film was comprised of Noriega's coworkers, including short-haired, outspoken journalist

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[95] Santin de Fortoura quoted in Anne Rubenstein, "The War on Las Pelonas," 61

[96] Ageeth Sluis, *Deco City, Deco Body*, 2.

[97] Angel Miquel *Acercamientos* 94-95. Miquel reports that Noriega Hope originally desired to make a film about an "india bonita" in response to the society ladies and faux aristocrats who populated the earliest Mexican narrative features. It is unknown why Noriega Hope abandoned this plan to make *La gran noticia* instead.

Cube Bonifant in the lead female role. The film's plot follows Mexico City journalist Lauro, who takes a vacation to Lake Chapala on the condition that he investigates a local crime ring during his time away. The film's two storylines follow Lauro's romance with a French woman (played by Bonifant), and Lauro's interaction with the murderous head of the criminal gang, a rancher named *El Pintado*. In the film's climax, *El Pintado* attempts to harm Lauro's love interest. Lauro defends her, leaving *El Pintado* mortally wounded. *El Pintado* confesses to his crimes and reveals where he has hidden his ill-begotten riches before dying, making Lauro a hero who brings justice to the community once terrorized by *El Pintado's* criminal gang. When Lauro returns to the city, however, his "big news" has nothing to do with his crime-fighting adventures: what Lauro excitedly shares is that he has married the French woman.[98]

When *La gran noticia* "star" Cube Bonifant appeared on the cover of *El Universal Ilustrado* in 1921, her flowered cloche and cheekbone-skimming bob affirmed her modern sensibility (the film would be Bonifant's only silent-era screen credit).[99] Bonifant's appearance on the cover of one of Mexico City's premiere cultural magazines was no coincidence; Carlos Noriega Hope was the editor-in-chief of *El Univeral Ilustrado* from 1920 until his death in 1934, and he used that publication to both build the profile of national cinematic production in general and to promote his own directorial effort (the film would be Noriega's only credit as director).

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[98] Moisés Viñas, *Índice cronológico del cine mexicano*, *1896-1992*, (México, Dirección General de Actividades Cinematográficas, UNAM, 1992). The plot of this film also points to the articulation of postrevolution masculinity, as Lauro is a man of upstanding character whose duty as protector and husband trumps his experience as adventuring bachelor – but this is beyond the scope of this project.

[99] The cover text also proclaimed of Bonifant that "She uses Wildflower Soap." When India Bonita contest winner Marina Bibiana Uribe appeared on the cover of *El Universal Ilustrado*, the slogan "usa jabon flores del campo" also appeared. Whatever the prevailing ideal of beauty, a woman could be assured she would be one step closer to it if she purchased the proper soap.

When the film premiered on January 6 1923, it screened at twelve Mexico City theaters, bringing a Mexican-produced pelona to venues across the city.[100] However, while the film was billed as a national production, and while Bonifant's public profile as a writer made it likely that viewers would recognize her as a Mexican, the character she played in the film was a French national – not a Mexican woman. [101] Perhaps Noriega, who also wrote the screenplay, hoped to convey the international appeal of the Mexican countryside when he decided to code his bobbed protagonist as foreign, and in the absence of insight from Noriega it is impossible to say. Regardless of intent, the effect of this decision was to displace the modernity evoked by Bonifant's character, ensuring that those who saw the pelona as incompatible with Mexican femininity would not be offended – while retaining whatever bankable appeal such a modern woman could infuse into the film (and here we should recall how *Revista de Revistas* caricaturist Ernesto Garcia Cabral publicly attacked Cube Bonifant's pelona persona as unfit for Mexican modernity).[102] As Cabral

[100] Virginia Medina Ávila, "Carlos Noriega Hope El Ilustrado Del Periodismo, Cine Y Radio," in *Comunicación y Espectáculo,* eds Helena Lima, Ana Isabel Reis, and Pedro Costa (Universidade de Porto: 2017), 6. http://www.ashiscom.org/images/pdfs/Libro_Actas_XVI_Congreso_AHC.pdf.

[101] Viviane Mahieux, "Cube Bonifant: The Little Marquise De Sade," 20. Mahieux writes that "a few months after Cube Bonifant joined the *Ilustrado,* no reader, however distracted, could possibly fail to recognize her name and face," because her column took up a whole page near the front of the magazine and she was a regular presence in the society pages.

[102] Cabral was not alone in this line of thinking. **"**Many European intellectuals and writers also openly attacked the "New Woman" as unfit for modernity, which, they argued, made women prone to hysteria (a nervous condition thought to afflict only women), morphine addiction, and excessive libidinous instincts." Sluis, *Deco City, Deco Body,* 28.

and others saw it, the pelona didn't fit into Mexico's binaristic gender repertoire, so the de-nationalization of the pelona in *La gran noticia* took nationalism out of the equation.[103]

Bonifant was certainly an early adopter of the pelona style, but it only took a few years for the fashion to become sufficiently popular as to provoke public backlash. In 1924, three pelonas were abducted, verbally abused, and had their heads shaven by a gang of men opposed to changing norms of gendered fashion and behavior. Much of the issue, Anne Rubenstein reports, stemmed from the fact that, by 1924, the vogue for short hair, short skirts and red lips had crossed Mexican class and racial boundaries. The style was first adopted by elite women, but when working class and Indian women picked it up, visible markers of social status came under erasure, which threatened to upend the prevailing order of Mexican society.[104] Opponents specifically argued that cutting one's long, dark hair was a betrayal of *la raza* – and so here the anxieties about Mexican femininity under siege echoed previous grievances about screen divas. In 1924 as in 1917, the project of revolutionary nationalism was weaponized against women who embraced international popular culture to fashion their own identities. However, unlike the reassuringly classed and historicized institution of the diva, pelonas threatened postrevolution Mexican nationalism by their very newness. Pelona was a novel, modern, internationally recognizable, and imminently purchasable identity one needed no special pedigree to claim. In

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[103] One female journalist to wrote that the "third sex" of pelonas threatened *la raza*, and Catholic priests threatened to bar women with bobbed hair from their churches. Mary Kay Vaughan, "Introduction," 12.

[104] "As fashion was of the utmost importance in maintaining class boundaries, elite women in Latin American cities were identified by their hairstyles and haute couture designed for their public appearances on streets, in parks, and at the theater." Sluis, *Deco City, Deco Body,* 28. Pelonismo made the height of fashion imminently accessible, and so opposition to the style was cast in terms of defending national or racial purity. See Anne Rubenstein, "The War on Las Pelonas," 58.

contrast, the preferred identification with Mexican history manifest in indigenismo relied on a shared past as a source of legitimacy, so it was not an identity that could be adopted on a whim (though as the preceding discussion of indigenas made clear, women did buy their participation in the indigena ideal through their consumption of trajes as fashion).

It was in this milieu that the film *Fanny o el robo de veinte millones* (Manuel Sánchez Valtierra, 1924) premiered. Rielle Navitski has illuminated how this film, like *El automovil gris* before it, cast urban crime as both compelling entertainment and as proof of the city's modernity, but *Fanny* is also representative of anxieties about modern women in Mexico City.[105] While not funded by the state, the financing for this production could be described as state adjacent. General Rafael Cal y Mayor put up the money for the film's production to repair the reputation of the military after a well-publicized scandal in which a soldier reportedly stole military plans 'vital for national security' from the Secretary of War, with the intention of delivering those plans to the United States.[106] Perhaps unexpectedly for a film made with the interests of the Mexican military at heart, *Fanny* is an action-adventure with a female main character in the style of US film serials.

The story of the film revolves around an American girl named Fanny Goodman, played by Mexican actress Maria Cozzi. In the film, Fanny's Mexican lover Roberto teams up with an accomplice, Ruiz, to steal the titular millions from the Mexican treasury. In an attempt to keep

[105] The film is lost, but Navitski accessed the film's script in the Mexican National Archive.

[106] Aurelio de los Reyes, *Cine y Sociedad II,* 92. Reyes asserts that the film was pulled from exhibition in Mexico City by the municipal censorship authority, but Navitski speculates that poor box office returns were equally likely. The General also supplied soldiers to appear as extras in the film's dramatic conclusion as Fanny is apprehended, and used his clout to secure favorable exhibition arrangements for the film – though the film was released to only ten of the movie theaters in the city, and was screened for only three days.

the riches for himself, Ruiz hides the millions and draws a map to their location. The anger of betrayal leads to a deadly fight between the former partners, during which time the map is ripped in half. Half of the map remains with the corpse of Ruiz and is ultimately turned over to military authorities, while Roberto survives and retains the other half. The Macguffin thus established, Fanny determines to help her lover recover the rest of the map at any cost. To achieve her goal, Fanny seduces Mexican military Captain Aguirre. She invites him to meet her in a hotel, and as Navitski reports, the script dictates that the following sequence play out via parallel editing. While Fanny tries to get Aguirre drunk so she can abscond with the map, Aguirre's dutiful wife Alma tearfully awaits her husband's safe return home. Fanny and Roberto eventually secure the missing half of the map, then lead Aguirre on a chase that employs three technologies of modern mobility. First, Aguirre pursues Fanny and Roberto by automobile; next, Fanny and Roberto hijack an airplane; and finally, Fanny and Roberto jump from their plane onto a passing train. Per the script, at intervals throughout the chase, the film returns to Alma who is seen waiting and praying in front of *la Virgen* for Aguirre's safe return. When Fanny and Roberto try to lose the authorities for good by jumping off the train, Roberto falls to his death in a steep canyon and Fanny is forced to surrender to the authorities. Finally, Aguirre returns home to his wife and children.

Advertisements for the film position short-haired Fanny as the star of the picture, asserting that she "carries out daring exploits that make her equal to the most famous female stars of adventure films." But, as Rielle Navitski argues, the character of Fanny is also "an agent of moral corruption," which makes Fanny an anti-heroine, and allows the film to operate as a

critique of the same North American serials that inspired it.[107] The film's daring stunts made it remarkably similar to serials like *The Perils of Pauline,* and this aspect of the film's production was covered in the popular press in advance of the film's release. Would-be Mexican serial queen Mary Cozzi was said to have done her own stunts at great risk, certifying her status as a true rival to American stars.[108] But while akin to American serials in pacing and daring, the Mexican film's most remarkable difference from its referents lies in its treatment of the female protagonist. The heroine of *The Perils of Pauline* is independent and athletic to a remarkable degree, but she is also depicted as a positive force. Conversely, *Fanny o el robo de veinte millones* encouraged its audience to enjoy the pelona's exploits, but it also made sure to condemn her as villainous in the end. To make this exceedingly clear, scandalous American Fanny is contrasted with virtuous Mexican woman Alma, which "implicitly condemn[s] American cinema's potentially deleterious effects on the Mexican family" while advancing the dutiful, domestic femininity embodied by Alma as superior.[109]

The ambivalence manifest in both the plot and the reception of the film *Fanny o el robo de veinte millones* lays bare the contradictory and complex public sentiment expressed toward pelonas in the early 1920s. Moreover, it reveals the difficult position in which Mexican filmmakers found themselves: not only did they have to compete with the appeal of North American films, but they had to navigate a cultural landscape that often positioned mexicanidad

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[107] Previous quotes in this paragraph from Rielle Navitski, *Public Spectacles of Violence: Sensational Cinema and Journalism in Early Twentieth-Century Mexico and Brazil.* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017), 173-4.

[108] Besides Pearl White at Pathe, other serial stars included Universal's Grace Cunard, Helen Holmes at Kalem, and Kathlyn Williams at Selig Polyscope. See Marina Dahlquist, "Pearl White," *Women Film Pioneers Project.*

[109] Rielle Navitski, *Public Spectacles of Violence*, 175

at odds with American influence. In a review of the film published in *Cine-Mundial*, Epifanio Soto attempted to influence his reader's perception of the film by encouraging them to focus on certain aspects of the character of Fanny while deemphasizing others. He specifically suggested that audiences "forget" that the character of Fanny was American "in order to remember that her interpreter, Maria Cozzi, is a limber and agreeable girl, with as much capacity to make a thrilling serial as any American 'miss.'"[110] Soto's commentary on Cozzi also shows how difficult it was for Mexican women to escape being seen through their biological difference, or to get beyond the conventional equation of women as sex objects: the "agreeableness" of her appearance and "limber" body place emphasis on appearance as a primary means of assessing feminine value – a framing that worked to contain the difference set into play by the Mexican serial queen. As such, Mexican pelona films executed "one of the primary areas of cultural work in the early twentieth century [which] was to objectify women and provide rhetorical strategies that encourage women to internalize their experience of being an object who is judged on the basis of appearance."[111] Soto's comment also brings to mind Sluis' observation that, in 1920s Mexico City, proponents of the revolution were "always happy to nationalize greatness," even when the achievements they celebrated were not readily reconciled with preferred articulations of national ideology.[112] This operation, then, suggests more about the pervasive discourse of mexicanidad and the entities that sought to manage it than it does about whatever mexicanidad might be. Serial queens were a "new and independent type of female protagonist" that "offered women a novel template for

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[110] Epifanio Soto, "La Produccion Mexicana," *Cine Mundial,* December 1922, 688.

[111] Lori Landay, "The Flapper Film: Comedy, Dance, and the Jazz Age," in Jane Gaines and Diane Negra, *A Feminist Reader in Early Cinema,* 226.

[112] Sluis, *Deco City, Deco Body*, 67

negotiating gender stereotypes" wherever in the world they appeared, which made these films an uncomfortable presence in a nation where female subjugation was a foundation of social stability, and wherein the institutions that upheld these regulatory discourses were invested in a reproductive notion of femininity at odds with the new ideal of femininity embraced by pelonas in the capital city.[113]

Where *Fanny* did fit postrevolution feminine ideals was in the contrast it established between anti-heroine Fanny and Alma, the wife of Captain Aguirre. Alma – whose name literally means "soul" – is a passive woman. Alma is both a dutiful wife and a faithful Catholic who has borne children to her husband (an operative of the Mexican nation-state). While images of Alma's character are not known to survive, one can safely surmise that she did not share her foil's bobbed hair and short skirts. By punishing glamorous Fanny and granting minor character Alma a happy ending, the film suggests that Mexican women should embrace their role as supporting characters in the development of Mexican modernity – but at the same time, as a motion picture, the alluring images of an adventurous young woman portrayed by a Mexican actress likely suggested to female audience members that an alternative was possible.

Though *Fanny* was not long for the theater screens of Mexico City – it was reportedly pulled after three days, though whether this was an act of censorship or a consequence of a small audience remains unknown – the pelona did not disappear from Mexico. The style in fact demonstrated considerable staying power: 1928, *El Jueves del Excélsior* ran a piece with the headline "Women Reveal their Character with their Hairstyle," accompanied by photographs of internationally famous film flappers Louise Brooks and Mary Brian alongside advice for how to

[113] Marina Dahlquist, *Exporting Perilous Pauline: Pearl White and the Serial Film Craze.* (Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 2013), 3.

tailor a short, chic hairstyle to one's face.[114] Even more telling is that, by 1926, the pelona aesthetic was so common that the pelona could be both the "good girl" and the "fallen woman" in a Mexican-produced motion picture. Gabriel Garcia Moreno's *El tren fantasma* (1926) features two pelonas who are each others' foils – one is the demure love interest of the hero, while the other is the cigarette-smoking mistress of a criminal. The 'good girl' love interest wears white while the 'fallen woman' wears black, but both are supporting characters who keep their dark hair short and wear clothing that is similar in shape if not in color. *El tren fantasma*, which was produced with North American distribution in mind thus provides evidence that the threat of the pelona figure was attenuated through its eventual assimilation with accepted categories of feminine identity within Mexican culture.

Toward A Geneology of Feminine Ideals

If the diva, the indigena, and the pelona were, as I have endeavored to illustrate, the prevailing feminine ideals manifest in the Mexican silent cinema, and if, as I suggest, the silent cinema significantly inflected the shape of Mexican sound cinema in the studio era, what became of these foundational figures? While the scope of this project prohibits the robust Foucauldian genealogy of feminine types the topic surely merits – that is to say, "a form of history which can account for the constitution of knowledges, discourses, domains of objects, etc., without having to make reference to a subject which is either transcendental in relation to the field of events or runs its empty sameness through the course of history," it is possible – and I hope suggestive of the viability of future research on the topic – to consider how ideas about femininity and women in Mexican cinema developed as the result of contingent turns of history, rather than as the

[114] "Ellas Revelan su Carácter en el Peinado." *Jueves del Excélsior,* Spetember 27 1928.

inevitable outcome of a rational, directed process.[115] Indeed, in the early twentieth century, the diva, the indigena, and the pelona were in many ways surprising feminine icons for a nation steeped in Catholic-patriarchal ideology and emerging from a protracted civil war: the divas' defiant sexuality, the indigena's ethnic pedigree, and the pelona's aggressive individuality pushed against chaste, selfless, domestic ideal of femininity encapsulated by marianismo (even if these figures also upheld ideas about what a woman should look like, or how she should participate in society). As I have argued, the primacy of these feminine figures grew from the interaction of multiple discourses and imperatives around the pressing questions of Mexican national identity and the Mexicanization of modernity.

Later, in the 1930s and 1940s, as sound cinema became the global standard and the studio model structured Mexican cinematic production, recognizable feminine types retained an important function for movie-makers and movie-goers, who could look to a beloved star or see an iconic feminine image and know, almost immediately, what kind of movie such a woman would appear in. In a film economy that relied upon genre to calibrate the studio's supply of films with audience demand by balancing standardization and novelty, standardized feminine types served both economic and ideological ends. These new screen women were indebted to the diva, the indigena, and the pelona, but they also necessarily modified and innovated accepted ways of being feminine for the imperatives of a distinct historical moment.

The diva is an appropriate point of origin for a provisional sketch of the trajectory of the feminine types described above. Thanks to the historical prestige and high-class connotation of divismo, as well as the emotional complexity and individual distinctiveness of the women to

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[115] Michel Foucaul, "Truth and Power", *in Power / Knowlegde: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1971-1977*, ed. C. Gordon, trans. C. Gordon, L. Marshall, J. Mepham, K. Soper (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1980), p. 117

whom the distinction applied, the "diva" type retained its utility as an identifier for later film actresses. The term was most often applied to Maria Félix, who was famed as much for her beauty as her tempestuous off-screen persona. Novelist Carlos Fuentes asserted that Felix was an "independent woman in a country where the women over the centuries were destined to be nuns or whores," – and so she, like her predecessors Emma Padilla and Mimi Derba, played sensual on screen roles that clashed against the social expectations of her gender.[116] Félix, however, enjoyed a degree of personal autonomy and career success those earlier divas were unable to achieve within the constraints of the 1920s and the limitations of an underdeveloped film industry.

The honorific "diva" is also often bestowed upon Félix's contemporary, Dolores del Rio – though del Rio's onscreen persona was a curious amalgam of the diva and the indigena. Del Rio's star text was built on roles that combined the glamour and tragedy that suffused earlier diva films, but she achieved her greatest success in Mexico playing humble indigenous characters (as she did in *Maria Candelaria* and *Flor Silvestre*). In these roles, del Rio embodied a manicured – and even mannered—glamour which is readily recognizable as the mark of a true diva. But her glamour, improbable and antirealist as it may have been, did not prevent her from earning acclaim and becoming a beloved screen icon on the basis of her portrayals of Mexican indigenous women. Del Rio's career highlights several important tendencies. The first is how, even as Mexican film production became standardized and 'Hollywood-esque', the notion of Mexican particularity grounded in indigenous heritage retained its centrality in the Mexican imagination. Certainly del Rio's career trajectory also perpetuated the fetishization of female

[116] Carlos Fuentes quoted in "Maria Felix," *The Telegraph,* 11 April 2002. https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/obituaries/1390397/Maria-Felix.html

indigeneity as a signifier of mexicanidad, insofar as she represented a beautiful fantasy of an idyllic Mexico. In this regard, del Rio's indigena characters might be seen as analogous to those that appeared on the silent screen: though these images, a desired national romance glossed over material inequities and ongoing challenges of the neocolonial experience.

The pelona is a figure whose lineage is less obvious – after all, much of the cache of the pelona was her very newness, and novelty is a quality that cannot be maintained. However, the pelona's militant independence and her connotation of urban modernity are readily apprehensible in the characters played by Ninón Sevilla and other stars of the *cabaretera* genre – a sort of Mexican noir that dramatized the dangers of city life with a focus on strong-willed female characters (characters whose sexuality and independence were defining personal features). Of course, the preceding genealogy lines are necessarily rather perfunctory, but it is my hope that they are also illustrative of the staying power of feminine ideals in the context of Mexican cinema as well as the linkage between the silent era and the sound era, which deserves to be the focus of future inquiries.

Conclusion

Once might reasonably argue that most Mexican silent films have been lost, and so to find such depth of meaning in a set of absent signifiers is to play too imaginatively with the past – but as I have asserted from the beginning, the discourses and practices surrounding the lost films described here tell us as much (if not more!) about the way those texts were positioned and understood within larger social structures than the texts alone ever could. Moreover, the loss of film artifacts does not correspond to a loss in the historical importance of those artifacts (even if loss adversely affects *historiographic* value), and the interpretations suggested here have been formulated with cognizance of both international cinematic trends and the specificity of the

postrevolution urban Mexican context in mind. [117] Anxieties about shifting gender roles have characterized modernity across the board, but these anxieties were especially strong in Mexico, where ideas of female comportment were grounded in religious tradition and framed as the foundation of the middle class family (and, by extension, the nation itself). One response to this anxiety was to remodel existing power structures in the style of the new aesthetic and intellectual trends.[118] For example, consider how all of the films discussed here domesticate the social issues they dramatize – that is, women's problems were depicted as localized to and generally resolvable within the family, or the heterosexual couple that is the basis for the family.

In Mexican silent cinema, efforts to modernize and stabilize the patriarchy in the face of rapid postrevolutionary social, economic, and political change took various guises: representations of divas championed a version of elegant femininity with strong upper-class connotations, *indigenas* foregrounded the passivity and purity of femininity, and *pelonas* were portrayed as a corrupting foreign influence rather than an organic response to the contradictions of modernity in a peripheral country. In these ways, these films – and more importantly, the discourses that constituted and developed from them – articulated normative behavior for women based on a narrow range of preferred characteristics. Each of these representations, however, also forced modification to the existing mold of Mexican femininity: the diva's errant sexuality, the indigena's humble class status, and the pelona's international appeal could not be brought into the discursive construction of modern Mexican femininity without modifications to that

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[117] Sumiko Higashi identifies a similar operation in Hollywood silent cinema. The assimilation of "dangerous" feminine types emphasized the redeemability of characters like the vampire by bringing them under the umbrella of normative feminine morality. See *Virgins, Vamps, and Flappers : The American Silent Movie Heroine*. (St. Albans, Vt.: Eden Press Women's Publications, 1978)

[118] Mary Kay Vaughan, "Introduction."

paradigm. The changes ultimately influenced women's roles throughout the twentieth century- and the symbolic value of femininity ensured that representations of women became increasingly important as Mexican cinema developed its own identity in the international economy of motion pictures.[119]

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[119] For a similar study of Mexican arts, see Mia Lynn Romano, "Excessive Femininity as Resistance in Twentieth- and Twenty-First Century Mexican Narrative and Visual Art." Doctor of Philosophy, Rutgers The State University of New Jersey, 2015.

Conclusion

In 1922, *El Universal Ilustrado* published Arqueles Vela's landmark avant-garde novella *La Señorita Etcétera,* which thematized the influence of cinema and changing gender norms.[1] In Vela's story, the middle-class male protagonist becomes the reader's guide to modern, urban experience in Mexico City. Throughout the dream-like tale, the protagonist is transfixed by the figure of the modern woman, who appears to him in various guises as a train passenger, a beauty parlor patron, a waitress, and ultimately, as a pattern of light flickering on the silver screen. Importantly, *La Señorita Etcétera* eschews the organizing principles of chronology and logic. Instead, the recurrent presence of the modern woman – 'la señorita etcétera' — lends continuity and cohesion to the various episodes. For Vela and others in the Mexican avant-garde movement, "the feminine image is inextricably linked to modernity," though male authors usually understood expanded feminine autonomy as a "bewildering symptom of modernity," rather than as a complement to other social struggles ongoing at the same time, such as labor and agrarian movements.[2] In *La Señorita Etcétera, the* modern woman is at her most beguiling (and most unattainable) when she takes the form of a motion-picture spectacle; she represents at once the allure and the alienation of Mexican modernity, while cinema is the means by which the sign of the modern woman becomes emblematic of that ambivalence. Throughout the silent era, intellectuals (like Vela), artists, social activists, businesspeople, state agents, religious reformers,

[1] Vela belonged to the Stridentist group, an avant-garde Mexican literary and artistic group of the 1920s. From 1921 to 1925, the movement was centered in Mexico City. The movement was "an unusual combination of artistic internationalism and political nationalism." Deborah Caplow. "Stridentist Movement (1921–1928)." *The Routledge Encyclopedia of Modernism.* Taylor and Francis, 2016. DOI: 10.4324/9781135000356-REM190-1

[2] Elissa Rashkin, The Stridentist Movement in Mexico: The Avant-Garde and Cultural Change in the 1920s (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2009), 137, 138.

and everyday people continued to elaborate a discourse that linked femininity and motion pictures as representative of Mexican modernity.

In considering how women interacted with cinema culture in Mexico City, then, it would be misleading to consider only the women who appeared on screen at the expense of the women who brought those images to life, and the women who consumed those images. In Mexico, the cinema created a new vocation for a select few women; for a far larger number, the cinema allowed for a new social role as spectator, as well as broader public visibility. Because women contributed to early film cultures in ways that go beyond acting and directing, we can consider women as pioneers of Mexican cinema and builders of Mexican film culture, too – though in order to give these women their due, one must necessarily employ informed speculation and evidence-based imagination, as the Mexican state in particular and the discipline of history more broadly have tended to omit feminine and everyday activities from the official accounting of the past. For women living in Mexico City in the postrevolution era, each dimension of film culture provided its own opportunities and its own constraints, which underscores how cinema – a phenomenon that is at once social, economic, technological, and artistic – can operate as a mechanism for social change and social control, often at the same time and in the same place, depending upon the vector under analysis. The preceding discussion also affirms the importance of the city as a locus of transformation: whether turning Mexican girls into movie stars or forging modern societies from divided factions, the city was a crucible of development where various human agents and historical imperatives intersected.

Film spectatorship helped to weaken the spatial, sartorial, and imagined boundaries that separated women of Mexico's upper, middle, and popular classes. This was facilitated by the economic imperatives of film distribution and exhibition, as well as the film medium's alliance

with consumer culture. In the early 1920s, film exhibitors attempted to emulate the exhibition models of Hollywood especially through the construction of movie palaces, but the class structure of postrevolution Mexico made such an economic model untenable: only one in five Mexicans could be considered "middle class" during the period 1917-1931, and the elite classes were the domain of only one percent of the populace. To turn a profit, exhibitors had to cater to the 80 percent of Mexicans who found themselves in the "popular class," which led to theaters reducing admissions prices and shrinking pricing tiers between the best and the most economic seats. Moreover, theaters that had in the Porfiriato derived their profits from expensive spectacles associated with the leisure class – operas and zarzuelas in particular – outfitted themselves for film exhibition to keep up with the new economy of leisure in Mexico City.

Film distribution operated with the aim to extract maximum profits from any given print of a film, which meant that moviegoers across the class-segregated spaces of the city came to share common cultural touchstones and role models of modernity. Movies were "windowed" – they premiered at more exclusive central venues where moviegoers paid a premium for the privilege to see new material first, and then the film prints made their way to increasingly smaller and more peripheral venues. At each tier in the windowing system, the audience for the original film text grew, and the price of admission dropped. While this system of profit maximization was still hierarchized, it was markedly different from the entertainment economy of traditional theater that dominated the Porfirian cultural scene. It would have been ridiculous for Pina Menicelli to travel to Mexico, to originate a role in the city's most opulent venue, and then to continue playing that role at productions in middle-class theaters, and again until she had performed at last for the patrons of the city's carpas – but via the "magic" of celluloid (and the more banal conditions of the film business) this is exactly what she did. The preeminence of the

movie star as a role model of modern femininity was aided by consumer culture, which encouraged women to self-fashion their own modern identities through the purchase of clothing and cosmetics. The movie screen doubled as a shop window, and shops were filled with items seen on movie screens. Most importantly, these material goods were a manifestation of women's real relationship to the imagined world of the movies – an imaginative space that female moviegoers could share, even if they were spatially segregated.

Film production tended to rely upon, and thereby reify, class distinctions held over from the prerevolution era. Opportunities to participate in the most prominent aspects of movie-making – acting and directing – were preferentially allocated to women whose social capital allowed them to transgress gendered labor domains. This meant that the majority of women involved in above-the-line filmmaking roles got there through their personal or familial connections to powerful men: Mimi Derba founded her production company with the financial backing of General Pablo Gonzalez, the Ehlers Sisters received training and government posts via the patronage of Venustiano Carranza, Esperanza Iris was aided in her rise to stardom and her acquisition of her own theater by her husbands who were established figures of the Mexican theatrical scene, and Elena Sánchez Valenzuela's position as a member of the Mexican upper class helped her secure opportunities to study film, act, and write. Cube Bonifant was the exception that proved the rule – she did not break into film via powerful political or social connections; instead, she migrated from the provinces to the city to escape the horrors of war and used her sharp insights to craft a recognizable and influential persona as a film writer. Women who worked in less-visible production roles – from uncredited below-the-line labor like costuming actors, to exhibition labor like providing musical accompaniment and selling movie tickets – have also been rendered invisible by the discipline of history, which must appraise the

efforts of these women through an extremely limited archive of materials. Nonetheless, the movie business provided one avenue through which women integrated themselves into the visible workforce of the city, and thereby the life of the nation.

The films produced during the late silent era were, in a sense, the most conservative aspect of Mexican movie culture: unlike spectatorship, which was open to any woman with ten centavos to spare, and unlike production, which allowed some women to use their social capital to transgress gendered divisions of labor, film texts tended to adapt pre-existing notions of femininity as templates for images. These images were always composed with a gaze at least peripherally oriented toward to the rest of the world, despite the pervasive discourse of postrevolution nationalism. Sometimes, as with the diva films, Mexican production mimicked European art cinema to demonstrate the refinement and capability of Mexicans to a world that presumably knew the nation only as the site of revolutionary bloodshed. On other occasions, the films took up foreign models to compete with the dominance of imported movies, as was the case in the pelona films. It is perhaps ironic that the rhetoric of mexicanidad was deployed by film marketers and film makers to describe texts that were based on European and North American models, but this common practice suggests both the centrality of nationalist discourse during the postrevolution era, and how the definition of mexicanidad itself was adapted to the imperatives of transnational modernity and capitalism.

Each feminine "type" that crossed Mexican screens in the silent era was a mix of the familiar and the novel, and as such, each nodded toward some aspect of tradition while enlarging the ideal of Mexican femininity in another way. Divas were high-class, hyper-feminine characters, and the "European" prestige they connoted allowed them to push the limits of expression for feminine sexual desire. Indigenas were passive, nurturing, and in need of

protection from men, so this type offered the clearest articulation of the machismo/marianismo binary – but at the same time, these films took contemporary Indians as their heros, which was a distinctive maneuver. Previous political administrations and social configurations had conceived of contemporary Indians as a problem to be corrected – but the appropriative, exoticizing character of postrevolution *indigenismo* served the interests of the postrevolutionary cultural project without regard for the actual political and social conditions faced by Mexican Indians. Finally, pelonas were both physically and morally liberated, which made them dangerous figures – but their appeal was so great that filmmakers dared not leave them off screen entirely. Filmmakers first attempted to neutralize the pelona by coding pelona characters as foreign, which occurred alongside simultaneous celebration of the Mexican actresses who played these roles. Eventually, the appeal of the pelona had extended through Mexican class structure and Mexican geography that it was simply assimilated to prevailing tropes of binaristic femininity in the form of good girl/fallen woman, thus making the pelona a modern dress-up of historically subjugating ideas about what it meant to be a woman.

The comparative analysis of the three core areas of film culture – film spectatorship, film production, and film texts – shows how cinema interfaced with various vectors of feminine identity in a context shaped by the collision of postrevolution nationalism and transnational modernity. On screen and off, women were both emblems and agents of a specifically Mexican modernity: the types of femininity represented both onscreen and in the practice of movie going disrupted the class and racial boundaries intersecting feminine identities, thereby expanding the viable spectrum of modern female mexicanidad. These effects were certainly significant for women living Mexico during the silent era and beyond, and what's more, the developments documented in this dissertation had significant implications for the contours of later Mexican

cinema, as well. Consider Carl Mora's assertion that the success of the Mexican movie industry from the 1940s to the 1960s had repercussions on the popular culture of all Latin America and Spain: after all, in the mid-twentieth century, Mexico established itself as the leading film market in the Spanish-speaking world.[3] This means that the way the silent era conceived of its audiences, elaborated a set of characteristically national themes and images, and developed filmmaking talent is not really as niche a concern as it may seem. Without resorting to a post hoc ergo prompter hoc argument, one can recognize that the Mexican Golden age did not emerge from nothing; state intervention and industrial development contemporaneous with that WWII era Mexican Cinema's ascendance were in part predicated upon in the conditions of Mexican culture forged in the postrevolution era, and built upon the successes and failures of the silent age. Additional research could help to illuminate the connections between the silent era and the later sound cinema. This dissertation has also suggested ways that Mexican silent cinema culture was similar to the silent cinema culture of its neighbor to the north, and ways in which the particularities of the Mexican context yielded results different than those that have been shown in the well-developed scholarship of European and North American silent cinema. I continue to hope that the lost celluloid documents discussed in this dissertation will someday be recovered, but even if they are never found, research on Mexican silent cinema should continue to interrogate how race, sexuality, gender, and other dimensions of identity were implicated in Mexican silent film culture. Together, these and other research programs will help to expand knowledge of the way historical agents have engaged cinema to navigate their position in the modern world.

[3] Carl J Mora, *Mexican Cinema* 3.

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Appendix: Figures

Figure 1 – Actress Emma Padilla.
Picture from *Photoplay* magazine, January 1922. Wikimedia Commons.

Figure 2 – Urban shrine to the Virgin of Guadalupe
This image appears on the exterior wall of a family home in Coyoacán, 2016. Formal and makeshift shrines to *la Virgen* appear throughout Mexico City. Photo by the author.

Figure 3 – Two women of the soldadera type.
Photo in *Biografia ilustrada del General Francisco Villa 1878-1966.* Mexico: Editorial Gustavo Casasola, 1969.

Figure 4 – The Salón Rojo.
The Salón Rojo was the first purpose-built movie theater in Mexico City, and it remained one of the premiere cinemas in the city throughout the silent era. Note the shrine to the Virgen at the roofline. Author unknown, photo hosted by cinesilentemexicano.wordpress.com.

Figure 5 – "Barbarous Mexico"

Mexican filmmakers who articulated a desire to improve Mexico's image abroad responded to the North American convention of representing Mexico as a lawless place peopled by bandits and plagued by violence. The above ad for the America's Feature Film Co documentary "A Trip Thru Barbarous Mexico," exemplifies the trend. Public domain.

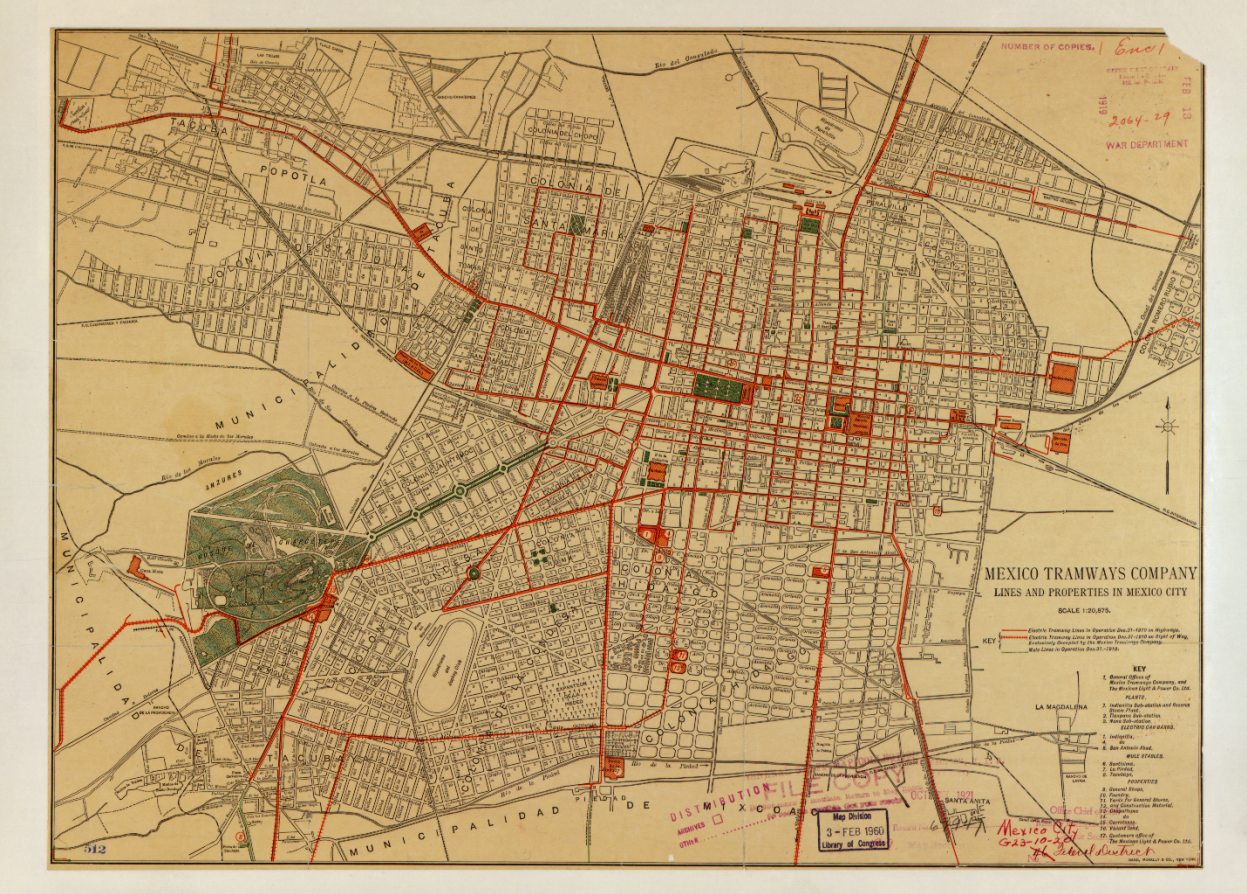

Figure 6 - Mexico Tramways Company Map, 1910
This map shows the routes of Mexico City's electric streetcars in 1910. The outbreak of revolution stalled planned extensions of the rail line, so the map would have looked similar in 1917. The densely-packed grid at center left marks the city center, though as the map illustrates, tram access radiated out from the city center toward the edges of the urban environment.

Figure 7 - National Cathedral, Zócalo Plaza
This stereograph depicts the Mexican National Cathedral as it appeared in 1931. Visible in the photo are the streetcars that connected various city sectors to this center of public life, as well as ongoing preparations for the 1931 commemoration of Mexican Independence. Library of Congress.

Figure 8 – Frames from *En la hacienda*

The above still frames from *En la hacienda* (Vollrath, 1921) show Elena Sánchez Valenzuela's character Petrilla, a china poblana, responding to the physical altercation between her suitor and her assailant. The "Cine Nostalgia" watermark foregrounds how archival materials related to film history are dispersed across academic institutions, open-access platforms, and private entities in Mexico. Images retrieved from Youtube.