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Reclaiming Women's Stories at the Border: Mexicana Migration, Catholicism, and Revolution, 1910-1930

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Abstract:

Scholarship concerning Mexican ancestry and Mexican-American communities in the United States during the early twentieth century has largely ignored women. Although Chicana feminist scholarship increased during the 1980's, it focused on the activities of independent women. The focus on revolutionary Mexican women, figures such as the *adelitas* or *soldaderas*, obscured the rich history and activities of everyday wives and mothers. This thesis explores how everyday women used domesticity and religiosity, "feminized" domains in Mexican culture, in order to navigate spaces and events of the revolution. The main evidence in this study involves the personal documents of Leonor Villegas de Magnón, courtesy of the University of Houston Library's special collections department, as well as her autobiographical novel *The Rebel/El Rebelde*. Magnón's work provides a portrait of activism in war time that was both radical while remaining within the bounds of gender propriety. This thesis also examines the more scattered life stories of Petra Guillen. Three oral histories exist for Guillen, who was a refugee of the Mexican Revolution and whose family settled in Houston's Second Ward. Guillen's testimony from the post-war period highlights the construction of women's community, notably in her participation in the Catechists of the Catholic church, Our Lady of Guadalupe. By exploring and comparing these narratives, the thesis documents the dynamic construction and understanding of women's communities as "border practices" during periods of intense historical change.

Contents

Introduction 3

Historiography..... 9

A Rebel, a Teacher, a Nurse; a Women: Leonor Villegas de Magnón.....16

Family, Religion and Activism in Our Lady of Guadalupe: Petra Guillen.....30

Conclusion.....43

Bibliography.....45

List of Figures.....48

Reclaiming Women's Stories at the Border:
Mexicana Migration, Catholicism, and Revolution,
1910-1930.

by

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Introduction

On February 9th, 1912 the *El Paso Herald* reported the arrest of three Mexican women, named as Mrs. Francisco Santas, Mrs. Angelina Oblea and Mrs. Dorotea Aquilia, by border customs. These women were charged with smuggling,

[Santas] six bolts of silk...29 silk mufflers, 24 silk handkerchiefs, and four mantillas, [Oblea] seven silk handkerchiefs, three silk shawls, four bolts (of) silk... one pipe, [Aquila], 45 yards of silk, 75 yards of blue silk and a silk shawl.¹

The reason for this attempted smuggling was that "... her [Santa's] husband Eugenio Alvarez, who is an *insurrecto* soldier, gave her the goods the night of the mutiny in Juarez. He was among the soldiers who departed with [Pascual] Orozco."² *The Herald's* implication was that wives were being pressured unfairly by husbands to engage in illicit economic activity to fund the

¹ *El Paso Herald*, "Mexican Women with Rich Loot." Feb. 9, 1912, From Library of Congress. (Accessed May 25, 2018). <<https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn88084272/1912-02-09/ed-1/seq-4/>>

For clarification Pascual Orozco was one of the military leaders who rose up with Francisco Madero to dispose of Porfirio Díaz. Although he would later side with the coup d'état against Madero in 1913. It should be further noted that this article was not a one time event.

See also *The Day Book*, "El Paso, Tex., May 6" May 6, 1914., From Library of Congress. (Accessed May 25, 2018). <<https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83045487/1914-05-06/ed-2/seq-31/>>

² *El Paso Herald*, "Mexican Women with Rich Loot." Feb. 9, 1912, From Library of Congress. (Accessed May 25, 2018). <<https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn88084272/1912-02-09/ed-1/seq-4/>>

Revolution. The reporter does not assign an understanding of these women's plight or examine why they would need to cross the border with such baggage, they instead are the object of criminal speculation. This arrest was a commonplace, even negligible border occurrence. My examination of *The Herald's* later issues revealed no further mention of these women. They disappear.

This article fits in the newspaper's, and by extension the United States's, focus on the Mexican Revolution as an opportunity to judge and find wanting the neighbor to the south.³ With headlines boasting 'Mexicans Fear U.S. Intervention', 'Mexican Troops are En Route' and 'Outrageous Action by Mexican Bandits' *The Herald*, like other newspapers--regardless of geographical location--- churned out articles sensationally and negatively focused on the ongoing Mexican Revolution. The Mexican Revolution and, by conjunction, the activities of all Mexicans during this period were subject to intense scrutinization. Given both the geographical proximity and its own economic and social interests, the United States government and business

³ Mark C. Anderson, "What's to be doe with 'Em?'" Images of Mexican Cultural Backwardness, Racial Limitations and Moral Decrepitude in the United States Press, 1913-1915", *Mexican Studies/Estudios Mexicanos* 14, no. 1 (1999). I am referring here to Anderson's own analysis of the pictorial representations of the Mexican Revolution. The widespread depiction of Mexicans as 'childlike' or 'barbaric' establish a position in which the United States (as represented by Uncle Sam) is the moral, ethical and racial superior to that of Mexicans. These depictions also revealed overwhelming public support -- in cities which had business interests in Mexico -- for United States intervention in the Mexican Revolution Ideologically compromised, these articles were being published in Los Angeles or Chicago displayed an extreme tonal shift for either supporting or detracting the revolution.

sector were heavily invested in the conflict. The closer one got to the border, as with El Paso which lies on the Rio Grande River borderline, the more apparent the division of popular opinion regarding Mexican immigration and the Mexican Revolution became. Newspapers such as *The Herald* swung between tepid coverage to inflammatory reports; further east, near Houston, the *Bryan Daily Eagle* reported the arrest of a “white slaver” importing women from Mexico for “immoral” purposes.⁴ Given the stereotyped coverage given to the Mexican Revolution, it is these wives scurrying across the border with their dry goods who stand out to me. Captured in a singular moment and never again mentioned, their untold story hints at the quieter struggles of everyday women as well as their survival tactics. Their improvised yet seemingly purposeful action point overlooked dimensions of Mexican immigration resulting from revolution. This arrest of--perhaps boldly termed here, by me--refugee women by border customs and the dismissive tone that follows provides a much-needed corrective concerning gender, economics, and migration on the otherwise well-documented Mexican Revolution.⁵

⁴ *El Paso Herald*, “Mexican Women with Rich Loot.” Feb. 9, 1912, From Library of Congress. (Accessed May 25, 2018). <<https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn88084272/1912-02-09/ed-1/seq-4/>>

⁵ *The Spokane Press*, “How United States helps Diaz Prosecute Mexican Rebels”, Nov. 09, 1909, From Library of Congress. (Accessed on May 25, 2018) <<https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn88085947/1909-11-09/ed-1/seq-1/>>. The term refugee is only bold in the sense that it is not commonplace. While there were large groups of Mexican migrants coming into the US for work (one would argue as a result of the economic stagnation caused by the Diaz administration in which land and resources were being privatized by foreign businesses) There was still a relatively decent number of Mexicans coming into the

As a result of geopolitical “border” lines, their ethnicity, gender, class and religion, Mexican women of the early twentieth century have undergone a type of fractured study. Scholars and often historical subjects themselves will be concerned with the activities of women when it defies society’s rigid social and gender construct or when they want to define the womanly ideal, often tied to a masculinist political agenda: nationalism, anti-imperialism, or war. Rarely, however, are these women given the opportunity to articulate their experiences or sense of self and ideal. This invisibility cannot be accurately defined as being the result of a single process or ideology; rather it strikes me as the result of the general devaluing of the domestic work by women and, more significantly, the conscious choice of these same women to camouflage their own economic, political, and community work within the domestic sphere and its behavioral norms. Domesticity, while restricting, did not completely remove women from the

U.S. to escape the violence of the Revolution, as political exiles and later those fleeing the increasing anti-catholic liberal administration. This specific article by the Spokane press refers to the political radicals Ricardo Flores Magon and Antonio L. Villarreal as “political refugees”, sparking this larger question of what constitutes who is a refugee. I would propose that given the geographical separation of *The Spokane Press* which was published in Spokane, Wash. to that of the U.S.-Mexico border. The reasoning behind this might resonate with that of *The Day book*. *The Day book*., November 04, 1912, From Library of Congress,(Accessed on May 25, 2018).

This page has a portrait of a young women named Carolina Rodrigues which was accompanied with text “... a Mexican girl, a dry goods clerk in El Paso, Texas. She was driven to El Paso by the Mexican Revolution” This newspaper which published for only a short period---as an experiment in unadvertised publishing-- was a politically radical newspaper which had a focus on labor issues.

political struggle. It within the Mexican Revolution, that I have discovered nationalism and war to be explicitly gendered concepts thereby raising a larger question of historical value and female agency.⁶ Mrs. Santas, Oblea and Aguilar are the flickering evidence—Vicki Ruiz calls their presence “shadowed”—that women had a stake in the economics, politics, and accessibility of the border for a range of purposes that deserve attention.⁷ This thesis attempts to provide that attention, and begin to assemble a Mexican women’s narrative both during the revolution and after it.

In reclaiming shadowed stories that have been involuntarily or, sometimes, voluntarily concealed this study utilizes two personal narratives of women from during and after the revolution. It was only by happenstance that my search of the archives at the University of

⁶ Miriam Cooke, *Women and the War Story* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996): 33, 39-40. Cooke suggests that the basic premise of War is masculine and that men are meant to assume a protector role in this setting, leaving women to be the protectees. Yet as her theories of a gendered war are further developed she states that, “Women’s prominence as guerilla fighters, as military targets of bombs and rapes, and as subjects of debate about the gendering of the military and of combat has complicated the telling of the War Story. These women are telling their own counternarratives, revealing that what we had thought to be self-evidently true is true only for some, for those for whom this particular truth is useful...performance of new tasks and roles allowed for temporary transgressions of gender-prescribed behaviour---women could act like men without losing their femininity, men could act like women... Yet in the aftermath of war...this wavering, this gender instability and ambiguity, had to be sanitized.”

⁷ Vicki Ruiz, *From Out of the Shadows: Mexican Women in Twentieth Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998)

Houston and Houston Public Library, brought these two figures, Leonor Villegas Magnón (June 12, 1876-April 17, 1955) and Petra Guillen (Oct. 19, 1919-July 27, 2015), to the foreground. Magnón was a middle class woman who twice published her account; part novel, part autobiography— as *El Rebelde* (in Spanish) and *The Rebel* (in English). This work is a shape-shifting and shadowed text, which switches between the first and third person, Spanish and English, Mexican and American audiences, in an effort to document her revolutionary nursing organization *La Cruz Blanca*.⁸ Similar patterns of shifts in voice can be “heard” in Guillen’s oral story, as she was approached several times late in life to tell and retell the history of the major Mexican congregations in Houston, Our Lady of Guadalupe Catholic Church.⁹ Like Magnón’s text, Guillen’s narrative shifts and morphs as she attempts to translate, code, decode, and shape the story of her life. These narratives, with their twists, turns, and shifts, make a space capable of exploring how agency and community have been constructed by women against the backdrop of the Mexican Revolution and Mexican social issues—stories without a ready audience in their own time. These materials also allow for an examination of how these women not only constructed their perception of self and community and how they communicate this construction to others. In a sense, each had to invent themselves, imagine an audience, and contrive a

⁸ Leonor Villegas de Magnón, *The Rebel*, edited and introduced by Clara Lomas (Houston: Arte Público Press, 1994), xxix-xxi. See also Andrea Tinnemeyer, “Mediating the Desire of the Reader in Villegas de Magnón’s *The Rebel*,” in *Recovering the US Hispanic Literary Heritage*, vol. 3 edited by Maria Herrera-Sobek and Virginia Sanchez-Korrol, (Houston: Arte Publico Press, 2000). p. 124.

⁹ Natalie Garza “The Mother Church” of Mexican Catholicism in Houston” in *Houston History Magazine* 9, no. 1 (2011)

framework to make sense of an up-ending revolutionary moment in which women were presumptively silence or sidelined or both.

Magnón's family crossed the border sometime in 1882-1885, well before the beginning of the revolution. Magnón returned to Mexico in 1901 and then went back to the U.S. again in 1910, where she became involved with the émigré intellectual Mexican scene. In Texas, she began her important life's work, *La Cruz Blanca*. *La Cruz Blanca* was a nursing organization to administer aid to wounded soldiers and created a space for respectable women to become involved with the revolution. Her account of the Magnón family fleeing the violence of the Mexican Revolution reveals a set of improvisations about identity to meet unsettled and unsettling times: a border identity.

In 1921, a more populous and, perhaps, more desperate wave of migration accompanying the end of the revolution, Petra Guillen, the child of a working class refugee family, arrived in Texas. For much of her life, Guillen was actively involved both as a *catequista*—that is, a woman trained to “catechize” or prepare youth for confirmation in the church--and an activist within Our Lady of Guadalupe Church in Houston, Texas. In this post-war context, border activism meant providing education and support without the condition of americanization. Our Lady of Guadalupe was constructed to specifically house the rapidly growing Mexican parishioners who migrated to Texas. The aggressive policies of assimilation that Guillen, along with other women of this period was circumvented by her position as an educator within the church allowed her to retain not only Spanish as a transnational “container” for memory and identity, but also her Mexican religiosity as a means of social bonding and cultural survival.

Before delving into these women's texts, it is necessary to understand how Mexican women's history has been deprived a place in the larger historical narrative of nation states. The

Mexican Revolution particularly highlights this issue. Some scholarship emerged in the late 1980's that but since then work has stagnated. Initial reports of the Mexican Revolution reveal that much of women's revolutionary activities had been largely glossed over by both the media and by the revolutionaries themselves, or when it suited them, were used to prop up the actions of male figures, as in the case of journalistic coverage of the *soldadera* and *adelita* figures.¹⁰ The continual violence affected Mexicans through every level of society is part of the context for the absence of women. The efforts of Mexican women to subvert stereotypic *machismo* and americanization as well as retain cultural identity and solidarity were underscored by the focus given to their male counterparts. My reading of the evidence suggests that women displaced by the revolution underwent a concealment by the church, their male contemporaries, americanization programs and in some cases themselves. Women's activities within the larger revolutionary narrative has been both voluntarily and involuntarily concealed as a result its classification as "typical" group-oriented feminine activities that were took place in both domestic and religious space. These spaces, such as the church and the home, have had little

¹⁰ Clara Lomas, "Transborder Discourse: The Articulation of Gender in the Borderlands in the Early Twentieth Century", *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 24, no. 2 & 3 (2003): 60-61.

Lomas characterizes this as an appropriation of women's voices. In her examination of the newspaper *La Voz de La Mujer*, she noted specifically that while the politics were gendered they lacked substantial examination of women's conditions or rights and instead correlated with larger male revolutionary rhetoric. Additionally, as it will become later clear, for the purpose of this work a distinction has been made between the roles of *soldadera* and *adelita*. They are not interchangeable terms and their construction will mean two very different things.

attention as revolutionary domains, nor have they been queried for how women navigated or altered them during the period of upheaval.

Much of the feminist scholarship on modern Catholicism and women, especially Mexican women, emphasizes historical oppression by the Catholic church. Focusing solely on the activities of oppression enforced on these women obscures the ways in which women were navigating the church to their own ends. In fact, the primary legacy of “modernization” concerning Mexicana Catholicism is the shifting of women from their home altars and neighborhood shrines into parish life and new public or semi-public solidarities such as women’s community groups or in the case of Guillen, activities involving education and catechism. It is in this space between the Mexican Revolution and immigrant experience in Texas that this thesis uses the narratives of both Magnón and Guillen to explore how agency and community have been constructed by women, though not in privileged modes easily “read” or “visible” within the dominant anglo-american constructs of agency, individualism, and rights.

Historiography

The most promising thread of historical scholarship that links the Church and revolution—where women thus might be found—generally partakes of the general erasure of women in wartime as a whole. A foundational study that displays these signal moves of erasure of women can be found in the monograph, *The Mexican Revolution and the Catholic Church 1910-1929* (1986) by Robert Quirk. Given the plentitude of works on the Mexican Revolution, scholarship with a Catholic focus was at first limited to that pertaining to the rise of anti-clericalism within the revolution. Anti-clericalism was of special interest because as previously noted religiosity was a women's space and yet the church structure was still overwhelmingly patriarchal. It should also be noted that given the secular politics of revolutionaries, the church in this period was an embattled topic. Quirk, along with scholars such as Dolan and Heranjosa, have located ample written evidence which reveal the extent to which the intellectualist movement had been vehemently opposed to the church and sided with revolutionaries; a prominent critique accused clerics of preying both financially and sexually on overly pious women.¹¹ Any account of religious women on their own terms was decidedly missing. Before

¹¹ Robert Quirk, *The Mexican Revolution and the Catholic Church, 1910-1929* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1979), 96. Quirk notes that in 1917 debates concerning the church in Yucatán specifically attacked the confessional booth, citing that "...wives pouring family secrets into the 'crapulous' ears of the priests and of the priests using the intimacy of the confessional booth to seduce innocent wives and daughters". This argument is a clear play on both anti-clerical sentiments and machismo culture.

exploring Magnón's secularism or Guillen's piety, I will assess the anti-clericalism within the Mexican Revolution discourse and historiography.

Quirk's study from 1986 has remained foundational to modern scholars such as Jay Dolan, Gilberto Hinojosa and Matthew Butler on the topic of anti-clericalism. His work provided the foundation for understanding the political power of the church in Mexico, the intertwining of anticlerical and revolutionary ideology as well as foreign, especially U.S., interest in condition of the church. Quirk assembled a comprehensive history, mostly based on the religious press, of the relationship between Church and State during the revolution which, as defined by Quirk, occurred in bursts: a series of assassinations, public malcontent and combative engagements between political factions which put Mexico in a constant state of upheaval. One of the core features of this continual state of revolt was the increasingly radical ideology which presented the Church as the enemy of change. Written campaigns and violent aggression against the church by revolutionaries chipped away at the social and political authority of the Church, as part of a larger agenda of destabilization and radicalization. Already on notice for years from the religious press, many foreign Catholic lay members and societies became outraged at policies later passed by the revolutionaries. Their policies expelled ecclesiastical authorities from the country, seized church properties, shut down parishes and essentially transferred the power of the church to perform civil services to that of the state.¹²

Dolan, Jay P., and Hinojosa, Gilberto Miguel. *Mexican Americans and the Catholic Church, 1900-1965*. Notre Dame History of Hispanic Catholics in the U.S (Notre Dame:University of Notre Dame Press, 1994).

¹² Quirk, *The Mexican Revolution*, 85-92. More specifically this refers to the Constitution of 1917 which was proposed by the Carranza administration but would be radically applied in the

Quirk's research on the subject is considered comprehensive, yet demonstrates a clear focus on the complexities of the male supporters and detractors in this debate while remaining silent on the subject of women. It is not as if women were not actively involved. In fact, Quirk himself notes several times the grassroots activism of women in both support of the church and revolutionaries. One notable occurrence within his monograph gives precedence to women's involvement in a protest in Jalisco on February 23 1926,

The news that the church had been closed and the priests arrested spread quickly through the parish...Within fifteen minutes, a crowd of 2,000 women had gathered before the church to demand the curates' release. When the police tried to break up the demonstration and disperse the crowd, the women set upon them with stones and brickbats. The police then called for aid from the fire department. The firemen turned their hoses upon the angry, shouting mob, and though it was one of the coldest days of the year and the women were thoroughly soaked, they refused to leave.¹³

later Obregón administration. This Constitution separate Church and State, civil and educational services were barred from church control, General Francisco José Múgica in favor of these new policies had this to say on the subject, "In the history of our country studied impartially. The clergy appears as the most cruel and tenacious enemy of our liberties. The doctrine of the clergy has been the interests of the Church before the interests of the people.", see also page 90.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 154. The conditions for this protest were that the current Secretary of Education J. M. Puig Casauranc had ordered that Article 3 of the 1917 Constitution would be implemented. This article ordered that all priests were required to register with the government or risk closure. The issue however is that by registering the priests would be be conceding that secular authority precedes religious. It should also be noted that at this same time Casauranc was also calling investigation into Catholic schools. Also see pages 60, 75, 99, 110 and 172 for further examples of women protesting secular policies.

This section however was accompanied by no analysis despite the fact that it indicates a strong resistance to the anticlerical ideology being perpetuated by revolutionary factions. If the protesters were men, perhaps Quirk would have likely contributed dozens of pages dedicated to understanding the complexities of their own activism in the grander context of nationalist history. Instead he glossed over the event, leaving the impression that these actions by women were unremarkable due to their presumed inconsequentiality in perpetuating long-term change. It is clear that despite their numerous rallies, grassroots organizations, and protests, women are not considered significant by Quirk or the numerous scholars who subsequently reference his work. Like most intellectual historians, Quirk's book privileges authorship, published texts, and consistent, reasoned exchange of ideas. Most Mexicans ---especially during the revolution--- did not meet this standard for inclusion in historical analysis and narrative. Thus a change of research strategy became necessary to compensate for this deficit. My research approach had to be expanded to even begin to understand the life of Mexican women during this period.

Before engaging with that expansion, however, I will further explore, historiographically, the general role of women within the revolution itself. As noted above, there is an expansive visual and oral discourse surrounding the culturally popular *soldadera* (female soldier) and *adelita* (love interest) figures. These female types exist primarily in journalistic and propagandistic photographs, posed and circulated by the media and revolution as well as in folk songs and *corridos*.

The issue with the *soldaderas* is that their image is hotly contested. The lack of authorship in periodicals leaves space for speculation as to source and point of view. Are these images a reflection of women's own role as participants, a pose staged by their *compañeros*, or some other media manipulation? The oversaturation of visual material in regards to the

soldaderas and *adelitas* cannot substitute for the general lack of discourse surrounding other women in this period. It must also be considered that for just as much scholarship exists on the role of *soldaderas* and *adelitas* within the revolution, there is just as much on disseminating the mythologization of these women by male revolutionary contemporaries and modern popular culture.

The effect of the revolution on the lives of women, in regards to spirituality, migration and intellectual are profound to consider. For this project, it became necessary then to pull from a variety of subject matter and tease out a woman's narrative. It was during this process that it became clear that in the wake of the gender deficiency among revolutionary historians there has emerged a small group of feminist historians. Pioneer scholar Anna Macias and, from the next generation, Clara Lomas (now at Colorado College) have established a firm foundation for an emerging discourse community ready to look beyond the propaganda of the *soldadera* and *adelita*. Their work has not only been cited in a wide range of topics concerning Mexican Revolution but one might even go so far as to claim that any work produced on Mexican women during this period would be insufficient without considering the work done by these scholars.

Macias in particular undertook the painstaking work of providing a comprehensive history of women's involvement of the Mexican Revolution. From the burgeoning intellectual movement found in pamphlets, speeches, and news coverage which condemned the patriarchal church structure to the working and lower class women who had to choose between migration or participation in a violent civil war.¹⁴ Her work is clearly a response to the absence of women from the larger established history of the Mexican Revolution. In fact while Macias includes the

¹⁴Ana Macias, "Women and the Mexican Revolution, 1910-1920", *The Americas* 37, no. 1 (July, 1980): 53-82.

history of *soldaderas*, she does not limit women to this role as other scholars have done. What Macias does is instead is provide a roadmap to understanding the complex lives that women led during the revolution. Through an examination of three key women--- Juana Belén Gutiérrez de Mendoza, Dolores Jiménez y Muro and Hermila Galindo de Topete-- along with a feminist lens she has examined the intellectualism and social conditions of women in the revolution. These women, like Magnón, were educated and politically radical in their writing, calling out the church and other revolutionary leaders out in their mistreatment of the poor and women. In addition their writing, has offered Macias the opportunity to expand her understanding of the condition of women, who were not educated or afforded a middle-class lifestyle. The preservation of these women’s writings--- although at times spotty--- has fostered new, gender-sensitive research surrounding the *intelectualista* movement.

Lomas continues this research into the *intelectualista* movement that both preceded the revolution and proceeded it in the form of feminist movements. Of particular interest are the numerous periodicals published on the borderlands and the works of Magnón, specifically her contributions to the newspaper *La Cronica* and her autobiography *La Rebelde*. Lomas, like Macias, is responding to a deficiency in the scholarship surrounding women during this period. This is perhaps best illustrated by the fact that the availability of her primary source material is solely the result of Lomas’ “archeological pursuit” to salvage Magnón’s personal documents and remaining autobiographical manuscript *La Rebelde*. Magnón’s activism and literary works had virtually been buried by both historians and publishers to the point that if not for Lomas interviewing her remaining living descendants--daughter Leonor Grubbs and granddaughter Leonor Smith--in 1983, these documents would have never had the opportunity to resurface.¹⁵

¹⁵ “Introduction” by Clara Lomas in *The Rebel*, (Houston: Arte Público Press. 1994.): viii

While the focus of understanding the revolutionary contributions of Magnón rely on Macias and Lomas, of equal important to this study are the works of Mark Resiler, Treviño, David Badillo, and Michael J. Gonzales. Their research will be used to provide a foundation for understanding the immigrant and Tejano experience of 1910-1920. Resiler's article "Always the Laborer, Never the Citizen" is a detailed study of Anglo-perceptions of Mexicans during the 1920's. His work examines the systematic discrimination and stereotypes that Anglo-Americans had about Mexican-Americans. Taking a different approach however, Badillo documents the religious experience and border identification of Mexicans. His work will support the claim of importance in regards to Guillen's catechist work for the Mexican community of Second Ward. Following this Gonzales work will along with others provide a base understanding of the Mexican Revolution to further situate Magnón's work, *The Rebel*. These works along with others will construct the critical foundation will provide the context to primarily understand the narrative of Guillen and Magnón's later activist work in Mexican-American communities.

Returning however to the issue of everyday life and the concerns of Mexican-American women, scholars such as Kristen Gunnell, Jeanne Petit, Cynthia Morales and Mary Odem provide helpful context. Gunnell specifically looks at the missionary work provided by the Daughters of Charity within Mexican-American communities in Los Angeles. She argues that through respecting cultural boundaries and relating with the Mexican community, these nuns were able to administer aid to the community where other more americanization focused

Lomas remarks on the irony of a woman's whose lifework was to bring public notice to the work of women in the revolution, in a manner which removed it from folklore, ultimately died without seeing her work ever published.

programs failed.¹⁶ Petit, like Gunnell has also examined the role of Anglo Catholic women in americanizing Mexican-American communities but as opposed to Los Angeles her work focuses on San Antonio, Texas. Both of these works will provide an understanding of the extent of Anglo-American missionary work within Mexican-American communities. It is important to understand how deeply entrenched americanization was in the resources offered to Mexican-American communities to understand how profound and lasting Magnón and Guillens activism work truly was. Following this the both Morales and Odem will provide a framework to understand both the “immigrant church” as it has been termed and Mexican women’s activism within the U.S. from a non-religious background. All together this thesis has utilized an expansive bibliography covering subjects from the revolution to americanization in the 1920’s and 1930’s to support the analysis of Magnón and Guillen.

¹⁶ Kristine Gunnell, “The Daughters of Charity as Cultural Intermediaries: Women, Religion, and Race in Early Twentieth-Century Los Angeles,” *U.S. Catholic Historian*, vol. 31, no. 2 (2013). While useful to understanding the structure of americanization from a Catholic perspective this work also highlights an issue within the scholarship that has plagued the Guillen section. This being the simple fact that scholarship on Mexican and Mexican-American communities are primarily centered within Los Angeles. In comparison the work done within Houston is sparse, so it became necessary to pull from both research rooted within L.A. to supplement the existing work done in Texas.

A Rebel, a Teacher, a Nurse; a Woman: Leonor Magnón

My son born on American soil. My daughter in Mexican territory... A Mexican flag shall be yours. I will wrap it together with your brother's. His shall be an American flag, but they shall be like one to me.¹⁷

The borderlands are considered an ambiguous territory, both Mexican and American, separated only by arbitrary factors such as a “border”. It was in this space that cities such as Laredo, Texas--only five miles away from its sister city Nuevo Laredo, Mx.-- had to contend with the reality that the Mexican Revolution was not in fact a conflict that they could ignore. Especially considering that it's Mexican population, increasing with immigrants and political exiles, became just as involved on the American side of the border. This was expected, what was perhaps unexpected was the fervent participation of Mexican women and their articulation of transnationalism within the Laredo. Evidence from published borderlands sources indicate that there were an abundance of evidence of female participation in the Mexican Revolution from the American side of the border. They revealed that women were just as impassioned and willing to organize for either side in the revolution. Yet within the historical record there is an emphasis on

¹⁷ Leonor Villegas de Magnón, *The Rebel*. (Houston: Arte Público Press. 1994): 7

The focus of nationalism or more specifically a transborder nationalism is a core feature of Magnón's work. The Mexican Revolution was not something that solely affected Mexicans but those of Mexican ancestry and Mexican-Americans within the United States. It should be noted that within the Mexican community a transborder identity or multinational family similar to Magnón's was not uncommon.

only the *adelitas* and *soldaderas* figures that have been immortalized within folklore, songs, photographs, and art which shroud them with an air of mystery and grandeur. It is only recently through the combined efforts of historians Anna Macias and Clara Lomas that a feminist intellectual movement has been brought into the forefront of the historical record. Among these intellectuals stands out Leonor Villegas de Magnón, a woman who was desperate to preserve not just the work of an organization that she dedicated her life to but also to the women who provided the spirit and backbone for *La Cruz Blanca*. She demonstrates a feminist conscience that while radical, was just enough within the bounds of propriety to attract women from all social classes. This engrossing narrative of women being drawn into the fervor of revolutionary idol and patriotism, compelled Magnón to write *The Rebel* as a means of solidifying the role of women during this momentous period. To commemorate the women who worked tirelessly to support the revolution in its infancy, Magnón spent the last few decades of her life pushing for her autobiography to be published. She went so far as to even create two versions of her work in Spanish and English as an appeal to readers in the face of pushback from both Mexicans and American publishers. Ultimately after having received twenty-six letters of rejection from various American and Mexican publishing houses, her work would instead remain hidden among her affects and inaccessible to the public up until the late 1980's.¹⁸ In this section of my work, I

¹⁸ Leonor Villegas de Magnón, *The Rebel*. (Houston: Arte Público Press. 1994): vii-v

Her exhaustive efforts were indicative of how undervalued women's autobiographical work was, despite not only editing each version to appeal the tastes of both Mexican and American audiences she was still told that no one wanted to read about a woman's perspective. In addition, I would like to state that for the purpose of this study this section relies heavily on the American

will examine her text along with financial records and personal documents of *La Cruz Blanca* to understand the methods that Magnón utilized to convey the work of the *La Cruz Blanca* nurses as well as her more nuanced commentary concerning borderlands gender roles. Prior to delving into the work of Magnón however it is necessary to understand the history behind the *soldadera* and *adelita*, to supplement a nuanced comprehension of Magnón's work.

While the terms *adelita* and *soldadera* both refer to women involved in combat situations, the nuances are pivotal to understanding their usage. The term *adelita* is commonly used to refer to a camp follower--usually the wife, sister or mother of a soldier--or nurse. These women occupied safe and gender conforming roles within the frontline. Figure 1, a newspaper clipping that Magnón herself preserved, details the 'original' revolutionary folksong, *Adelita*.

version of her autobiography. Given that there is a focus in both the Magnón and Guillen sections on their lives on the American side of the border it only seemed appropriate.

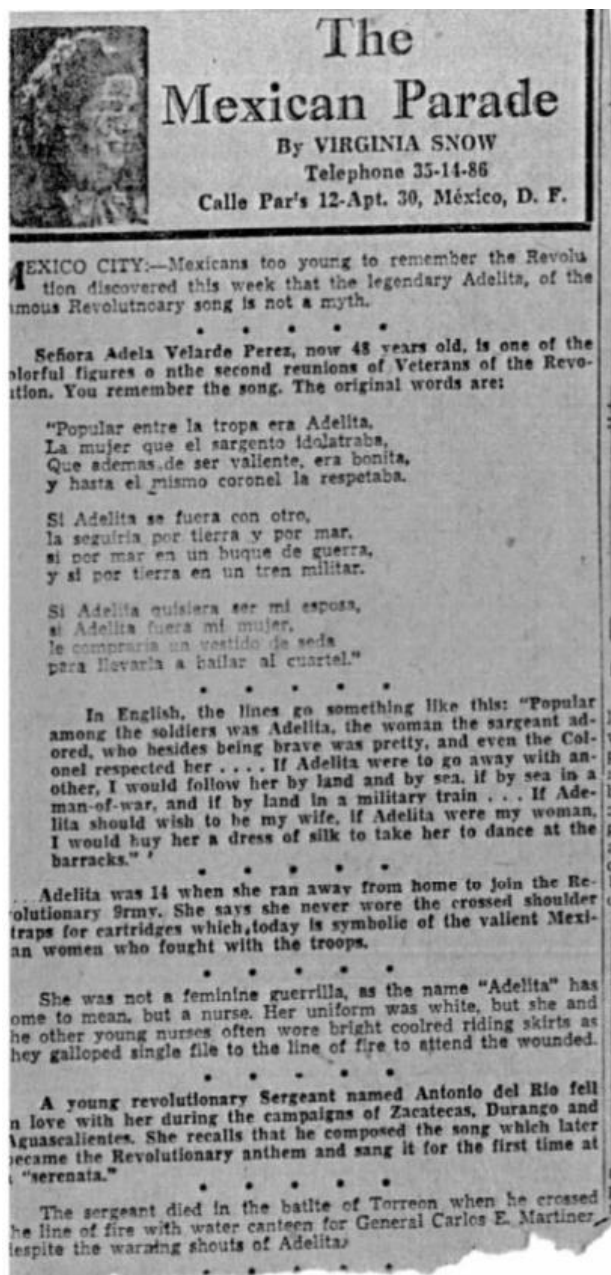


Figure 1. News Clipping Taken from Magnon's personal documents. Depicts the revolutionary folk song Adelita. Courtesy of University of Houston.

This song describes a very young girl who, through her patriotic participation in the revolution, had caught the adoration of a revolutionary sergeant. This girl, provided not only medical aid but a form of escapism to the soldiers as she was a pretty, virginal girl; a good

patriotic girl that was respected and accepted by the other men in the army. This song--a famous revolutionary *corrido*-- provides an insight into the feminine revolutionary ideal as defined by how the men view her as opposed to her actions. It is only in a description following the song that we are given a sense of just who Adelita is, and why she has joined the war effort. Yet even this explanation of the *adelita* is restrained as the author makes it a point to say that the *adelita*, was not a “..feminine guerrilla, as the name “Adelita” has come to mean, but a nurse.”¹⁹ The *adelita* was an ideal woman who could be involved within the revolution without challenging the existing gender and social norms. She was safe, a figure that required protection and love from the revolutionary men thus making her more palatable in comparison to the *soldadera*.

The *soldadera*, by contrast, was actively involved within combat situations—at least in theory. These women dressed in masculine clothing, and bore arms alongside their male counterparts. Their actions were praised through periodicals and post-war art for joining the war effort like the *adelita* but their refusal to adhere to gender norms frustrated their contemporary male revolutionaries.²⁰ Unlike the *adelita*, these women were outspoken in their desire for social

¹⁹ Leonor Villegas de Magnón, *Villegas de Magnón Papers*, Box 6, folder 3, doc. 8, 1906-1982. Houston: University of Houston Libraries. This clipping was from what appeared to be an Anglo-American newspaper. Any identifying information for where this clipping has come from or when it was published is unknown given the way it was clipped. The retention of this article however indicates Magnón's

²⁰ Jessica Lynn Orzulak. "Picturing Soldaderas: Agency, Allegory, and Memory in Images of the 1910 Mexican Revolution." (Thesis, University of California Riverside: 2014), 14-15 and 60-62. Orzulak provides a much more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the *soldadera* as well as the pro-ganster material being produced with their images. For the sake of brevity

change regarding women's rights and made it clear that when the revolution was over they would not be content to return to life as it had been before 1910. Whereas the *adelita* was spoken of in song and folklore, the *soldaderas* had photographs taken of them in the camps and gave interviews to journalists. In one interview that was published in the *Evening Star*, *soldadera* Romana Flores affirmed women's active nationalism. In response to the question of why she was determined to be involved with the revolution:

“I see no reason,” she said. “Why women, and especially Mexican women should not fight for their country when the occasion demands we have suffered more than the men: our slavery has been more degrading and unmerciful... We have worked always like oxen with no chance to better ourselves... The revolution has thrown open the door of light and we women who are fighting are only showing that we are as much entitled to emancipation as the men.”²¹

The revolution in this perspective is shifted into an event that emphasizes female agency and women's stake in nationalism. Women, regardless of their education and class, entered a new understanding of their ability to participate in national events as well as the beginning of a feminist conscience. It is perhaps this potentially disruptive, autonomous agency by the *soldadera* that became mythologized and then redeployed by male revolutionaries to support their endeavors. In both cases, the *soldadera* and *adelita* ultimately became stripped of its agency

however this work has taken a rather reductionist view of these women, this understanding however is reflective of how Magnón herself has conceptualized the roles.

²¹ *The Evening Star*. “Fearless Women Fight with Mexican Revolutionaries”, December 31, 1916, From Library of Congress (Accessed May 25, 2018) Accompanied with this interview is a picture of Flores standing self-assured with a gun in her hand and what is becoming ‘traditionally’ known as the *soldaderas* uniform. A small brimmed hat, twin bandoliers wrapped around her torso and two more belts of possible weapons and ammunition cover her west.

and it is within this space of reality and myth that Magnón's *The Rebel* reminds us that they were not the only roles that were available to women during this period. Magnón's text deftly reframes the story of revolution and national-belonging in between these two extreme figures. The women of *La Cruz Blanca* were nurses, but their character and understanding of the world revealed not just the same proto-feminist consciousness but the sense that these women were flesh and blood. Even further, she claims an emotional and ideological territory that explodes the concept of fixed borders, and invites readers to expand and pluralize their notion of national belonging.

The Rebel gives an account of Magnón's birth and follows her life up until the mid-1910's, with a specific focus on her involvement with the Mexican Revolution. Within this text Magnón sought to give her account of the revolution as she experienced it in both the borderlands and as a member of the nursing unit, *La Cruz Blanca*. This research uses Magnón's text not as a means of validating concerning the events of the revolution but the opposite. *The Rebel* provides an insight into Magnón's discussion of gender and the construction of women's community during this period and a complex, subversive perspective on revolution. It is interesting to note that Magnón writes this text from as a third person perspective, refraining from the personal "I" and instead preferring, "Leonor" or "The Rebel" to relate this story. This move suggests that multiple perspectives are required to grasp the fluidity of the border and the many stakes raised in revolution.

The Rebel begins with Magnón's own birth during what she describes as happening during a devastating storm and the overthrow of Empete French for Maximilian I, which signaled the end of French rule over Mexico. While not happening directly on the day of the

overthrow, the coincidence of the of these two events is significant.²² Magnón is essentially creating for herself a mythic past which is meant to allude to her later involvement within the revolution as being prophetic or simply following a “natural” course.

In this same scene the reader learns immediately that the nickname “The Rebel” was bestowed onto her by her father upon her birth after their home was first invaded by bandits and later Mexican Federal Troops looking to arrest said bandits. Upon entering the household both groups were immediately drawn by the sound of a newborn crying leading them to demand to know the source of the sound. Leonor describes the men as being overcome with this sense of respect and reverence towards the scene of a woman and her newborn.²³ This moment of pride in the feminine is later reaffirmed by her father, when upon the Federal troops referring to Leonor as a “manchild”, he responds back with, “No, señor,”... He drew himself up in pride. “My rebel is a girl.”²⁴ It is significant in this section that Magnón has chosen to speak through her father, the head of her family and maintainer of its machismo, to affirm the importance of the feminine and establish a legitimacy to that of a “rebellious” woman. The respect given to that of Mexican women, and as will become later clear female communities, speaks to the larger impact that Magnón was attempting with her work. She recognized that women and the work of women

²² Leonor Villegas de Magnón, *The Rebel*. Edited and Introduced by Clara Lomas, (Houston: Arte Público Press, 1994). Magnón was born in 1876 and Maximilian was overthrown in 1867, 1876 was actually the year that Porfirio Diaz ran for Presidency.

²³ Ibid. While minute this scene, is indicative of a larger pattern of respect given to the women who were present throughout Magnón’s life and later formed the foundation for her feminism.

²⁴ *ibid*: 6. Of course there are no sources to truly corroborate this moment of time, but the validity of these events are not significant rather it is Magnón’s interpretation.

were undervalued within the machismo culture of Mexico and sought to combat the erasure of women's work.

Setting aside this mythic past for a moment however, let us quickly establish the reality of who Magnón is and what shaped her worldview. It is known that Magnón was born to a wealthy hacienda family on June 12, 1876 in Nuevo Laredo, Mexico. Her father, Don Joaquin Villegas-- not in fact a native-Mexican--had migrated to Cuba from Spain and then later made his way into the United States all the way down to Mexico through the Texas-Mexico border. While in Mexico he married Valiarianna Rubio the daughter of a wealthy Matamoro family whose dowry helped Villegas establish his ranching business.²⁵ He had come to amass his own fortune which until the end of his life was successful in doing so. In accordance to this Magnón recalls in her text that since birth, she had spent her much of her life travelling between the United States and Mexico. She had siblings born equally on both sides of the border, and in articulating her nationalism often erased the borderline. It was an arbitrary line that during the early twentieth century had a selective importance.²⁶ Referring to the epigraph in the beginning of this section, Magnón's family in terms of heritage, belonging, and culture was cross-cut, pluralistic, blended, and resistant to a simple binary of identification.

²⁵Ibid: 11 Valerianna according to Magnón was fourteen years old when she married Joaquin then twenty-one or twenty-two, and. she brought with her a dowry of forty thousand Mexican gold pesos.

²⁶ When this work refers to "selective" recall the aforementioned article published in the *El Paso Herald*. During this period migration across the border, for labor or travel purposes was in comparison to contemporary border control, extremely unregulated.

Her idyllic and romantic childhood however was shattered with her mother's death, and her father's subsequent remarriage to Eloise, the daughter of a Spanish Presbyterian minister and a Swiss woman. Eloise convinced Don Joaquín to move his base of business from Mexico to that of the U.S. Upon settling in their new home she dedicated her time to raising Magnón's younger siblings.²⁷ As a consequence of this Magnón and her older brother were sent off to separate boarding schools in Texas. Magnón attended the Academy of the Holy Cross in Austin, Texas and then later the Academy of Mount St. Ursula in Bronx, New York where she received her teaching degree in 1895. In 1901 She married Adolpho Magnón and moved to Mexico City where she began her teaching career.

It was in Mexico City that Magnón became aware of the extreme dissatisfaction of the Diaz administration as well as deepening class divide that was prevalent throughout the entire nation. She recalls that even as early as 1906, there were riots and demonstrations happening within Mexico City to protest Diaz. It was amongst these demonstrations that Magnón became

²⁷Ibid. Eloise was aware that her marriage with Don Joaquin was strictly in name, as opposed to the grand love story that Magnón saw her parents marriage. Despite this she tried to make the best that she could with her circumstances. In fact the marriage is indicated to be just merely Don Joaquin following cultural tradition of providing a "female" figure to his children. Instead of hating Eloise or holding her up as a moral saint Magnónints a consistent image of this flawed women trying her best. Although Magnón spent little time with her father's second wife, there is a hint of understanding and compassion towards Eloise and her position within the family. Perhaps this is ia commentary on strict gender roles and marital norms that were unquestioned within Mexican borderland communities?

involved with the early Francisco Madero revolutionaries, a decision which would set her on the path towards founding *La Cruz Blanca*.

The Mexican Revolution officially began in 1910 but the roots of the movement that precipitated this event can be traced as far back as the 1880's. The anti-Profirarian movement was an eclectic mix of intellectuals, lower middle-class dissidents and later dispossessed peasants. This movement was primarily concerned with the socioeconomic betterment of Mexico. They called for land reform, better living conditions (housing, food and health reform), worker protection, better treatment for indigenous and poor communities, the reduction of the Catholic church's power and finally mandatory schooling for all citizens.²⁸ Ideally all of these goals would be achieved with the overthrow of the Diaz administration. The anti-profirians claimed that his administration allowed the Catholic church to continue to amass major political and social power within the country; power which was largely in the hands of foreign born priests. In addition foreign businesses had gained too much control of Mexico's mineral resources, their railroads, oil and much of their land, a control which resulted in the depoliticization and dispossession of land for thousands of indigenous and peasant communities that consequently spiraled them into severe poverty.²⁹ This theme of expelling foreign influence from Mexico is

²⁸ William H. Beezley and Colin M. Maclachlan, *Mexicans in Revolution, 1910-1946* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2009): 14-20.

²⁹ Charles Cumberland, *Mexican Revolution: Genesis under Madero* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1974): 14-29

Michael Gonzales, *The Mexican Revolution 1910-1940* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2002), 19-22 and 38-44.

fascinating to consider in conjunction with Magnón's own text which highlights the revolution as being a people's revolution with her nurses and financial support coming from both sides of the border.³⁰

Diaz, despite his stronghold on the political structure of Mexico, could not stop the growing tide of discontent that was rising from both the peasant and middle class. William Beezley and Colin Maclachlan described Mexico during this period, as a "fractured society, a disgruntled, but silent elite, a desperate lower class..."³¹ A discontent which would culminate at the first opportunity for political and social change in 1908. It was in this year that Diaz gave an interview to U.S. journalist James Creelman for the *Pearson's Magazine*, in which he claimed that he would be willing to step aside and allow democratic elections. This was the opening that Diaz's opposition was looking for and in 1910 Francisco Madero, an upper-middle class anti-

Robert E. Quirk, *The Mexican Revolution and the Catholic Church, 1910-1929* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1973): 21-25.

³⁰ Box 1, Leonor Villegas de Magnón, *Villegas de Magnón Papers, 1906-1982*. Houston: University of Houston Libraries. Magnon kept several different documents, both personal and some which appears to have been published in some format? These documents detailed the names and amount of money that was donated to *La Cruz Blanca*. From as little as 62 cents to what appears to be \$1,000 *La Cruz Blanca* relied on the good will of the people and very wealthy select patrons to keep itself running.

³¹ William H. Beezley and Colin M. Maclachlan, *Mexicans in Revolution, 1910-1946* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2009): 9.

Porfirian put himself forward as a candidate.³² The election ran with Diaz gaining the majority support. Anti-Porfirians decried the election, and the articles published following the defeat subsequently became more virulent and accusatory. It was these articles that would led to Madero being subsequently imprisoned in San Luis Potosí. In response to this imprisonment, upon his release he wrote out the Plan of San Luis de Potosí. This plan mirrored the earlier mentioned anti-Porfirian goals of reform while also plainly decrying the election as a fraud and declaring Madero the rightful president of Mexico. As the legal president, Madero saw it within his right to declare war against the Diaz administration calling for revolt on November 20, 1910. Madero supporters were able to rally insurgent armies and revolt successfully broke out forcing Diaz into exile in 1911.³³

When the revolution broke out in 1910, Magnón herself was across the border in Laredo, Texas attending her father's funeral. As a result of the conflict, Magnón found that she was unable to return to Mexico. Not one to remain idle however Magnón threw herself into coordinating support for the revolutionaries from the American side of the border. She bought a home in Laredo where she settled with her children and used it to open the town's first kindergarten as a means to support herself. In addition to running this school, Magnon also earnestly continued to publish politically radical articles in the Spanish language newspapers *La Crónica* and *El Progreso*. Of these two newspapers, *La Crónica*, a Spanish language newspaper that reported on the local events and interests of Mexicans or Tejanos in Texas is of special interest. This newspaper as of 1910, was owned by the Idar family and of particular interest to

³² Charles Cumberland, *Mexican Revolution: Genesis under Madero* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1974): 47-48.

³³ *Ibid.*

Magnón, much of her correspondence was between Nicasio Idar, and his daughter Jovita Idar who herself was a member of *La Cruz Blanca*. While the validity of authorship for some of these articles cannot be published one can surmise that given the closeness of the Idar family, along with Magnón's involvement that the political stance of *La Crónica* resonated with Magnón. This newspaper advocated for a collective organization of the Mexican community in Texas with the concept of *La Raza* being the centerpiece. *La Raza* emphasized a transborder Mexican identity, that affirmed the presence and experience of both Mexican and Mexican-American community. While concept this ethnic unity was unique to the American side of the border, the newspaper still resonated with its Mexican contemporaries by condemning the Catholic Church as being an obstruction to the progress of the Mexican people.³⁴

As a result of her political interest, and most likely the increasing ethnic pride, Magnón also opened up her Laredo home as a kind of way station for political exiles to congregate in.³⁵ Much of her support for the revolution during this period was purely intellectual as Magnón was still primarily concerned with her teaching day job. It was only after the first phase of the revolution came to an end with Diaz's exile, that we see Magnón become actively involved. Following the election of Madero in 1912, Magnón a staunch Madero supporter, watched in

³⁴ Clara Lomas, "Transborder Discourse: The Articulation of gender in the Borderlands in the Early Twentieth Century", *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 24, no. 2 & 3, (2003):63-65.

³⁵ Ibid: 63-65. See also Leonor Villegas de Magnón, *The Rebel*. (Houston: Arte Público Press. 1994) :80-82.

La Cronica actually published a consistent section within it's periodical which decried the crimes of the church. By crimes it meant more specifically the pushback that was being given to progress. Or rather women's rights, secular education, workers rights etc.

horror as in 1913--a year into Madero's presidential term--- a military coup was staged by General Victoriano Huerta and Madero was assassinated on Feb. 21, 1913. Following this assassination, there was a breakdown in the already terse relations between the many revolutionary factions. Fighting officially broke out again between Victoriano Huerta and the armies of Venustiano Carranza Garza, Francisco "Pancho" Villa, and Emiliano Zapata during 1913-1918, and from this violence *La Cruz Blanca* was founded.³⁶

When describing *La Cruz Blanca*'s founding moment within her text, Magnón relates it as being irrelevant in the face of its later importance to women's participation within the revolutionary scene. She strips it of the mysticism that she had bestowed on her own rebel origins, as a means of establishing that this organization was no legend to be brushed aside. In her recounting, Magnón was awoken quite suddenly by the noise of fighting and began immediately calling her friends to attempt to catch a ride across the border. Receiving no answer she hitched a ride to the *El Progreso* newspaper offices where she again attempted to contact her friends.³⁷ After finally establishing contact, she made plans with the women to meet across the border and deliver aid to the wounded. In all, the founding was succinct taking no more than half a page, and it has been distinctly stripped of the romantic grandeur that had up until that moment had permeated most of her text. Instead we see Magnón utilized romantic language in an earlier foreshadowing of *La Cruz Blanca* within her text,

The little boys wanted to play soldiers. Pancho pulled out flags. He gave the American flag to Leopold, and Julia gave the Mexican flag to Lorenzo... The Rebel,

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.: 85-86. The ride she had hitched was apparently a long Chevy limousine. The driver however upon learning that he would be taking her across the border, refused and Magnón took a wine bottle to the back of his neck, in imitation of a gun, and ordered him to drive her across.

who thought she had a prior right to that flag, argued and fought to get it. Dona Valerianna, hearing so much discussion and noise, finally leaned out the window and called their attention by waving a white towel. “Here, Leonor you carry this, and march between your two brothers. Women also go to war. They carry a white flag and take care of the soldiers.” They were all happy then. Each had a flag to fight for.³⁸

As in the opening epigraph, Magnón uses the flag imagery to capture both the necessity of belonging and the struggle of women to articulate their right to participation. The description of Magnón walking between her two brothers is an allegory both Magnón’s own transborder identity but of the revolution itself. In this context, she imparts that women will not idly stand by while ‘brothers’ wage war. Even further, this text indicates an articulation of women’s participation within combat that does not challenge the traditional structure of gender like the *soldadera*.³⁹ Yet the nurses of *La Cruz Blanca* are not the mythical and youthful *adelita*, whose role was frequently sexualized. In fact the *adelita* appears as a separate figure, a young girl of fourteen who had run away to join the revolution and of whom Magnon expresses concern for. This girl is just that, a girl, and potentially vulnerable. The nurses of *La Cruz Blanca* however are complex individuals who are doing their best to assist those fighting in the revolution. It is these women, for whom, *The Rebel* is striving to reestablish the narrative of *La Cruz Blanca* thereby saving from historical erasure.

³⁸ Ibid : 31-32

³⁹ Ibid. The articulation of nurses being a means of engagement that is still within the bounds of traditional Mexican gender norms provides an interesting comparison to that of the *adelita* and *soldadera*. They weren’t as outspoken as the *soldadera* but they were also not girlish waifs who could be sexualized or appropriated within later folklore.

La Cruz Blanca was an all-volunteer nursing core which attended to wounded soldiers from the revolution that had crossed the border into the U.S. This organization began as with a small core of women crossing the U.S.-Mexico border in 1914 to administer aid to both Federal and Constitutionalist soldiers. These women, although self-identified as Carrancistas, perceived a need for neutral aid to be administered. According to Magnón, the Red Cross had been unfairly assisting the Federal soldiers via spying and unfairly administering aid. This was a violation of wartime rules and as a result *La Cruz Blanca* remained an active corps that would later expand into multiple chapters throughout Mexico.⁴⁰ Magnón held a great pride for the volunteers of her organization which according to her,

...received no salary, expected no reward. Living quarters and living expenses were provided them through paymaster Valdez while on hospital duty. After that, it was up to the Rebel to provide for them. The Rebel dared to make the statement that all of the Chief's co-workers worked and gave service alike. She never heard of anyone of them getting a salary or receiving remuneration. It was a Revolution of the people.⁴¹

This concept of the people was not restricted to those on the Mexican side of the border, as the core of her nursing brigade was composed of both American and Mexican people. Rather when she means the people, it is an all-encompassing notion that transcended gender, class and citizenship. The people were the nurses leaving their homes to enter a conflict zone, to assist with surgeries and at one point engage in subterfuge for the sake of the revolution, they were also the peasant disposed and long ago downtrodden, the soldier and yes the fervent intellectual.

Yet while *La Cruz Blanca* as well as this concept of the people was comprised of both women and men, we cannot forget why there exists a special emphasis on the participation of

⁴⁰ Box 6, folder 2a-b, Leonor Villegas de Magnón, *Villegas de Magnón Papers*, 1906-1982.

Houston: University of Houston Libraries.

⁴¹ Leonor Villegas de Magnón, *The Rebel*. (Houston: Arte Público Press. 1994): 124.

women. They were not simply characters in the grander narrative of the ‘mythic’ revolution. Rather they were flesh and blood, with real problems and issues that were being navigated on the borderlands. Magnón takes the care to name almost every woman who appears within her text, Ofelia, Clotilde and Emilia Martínez, Catarina and Kuz Ibarra, Margarita and Catarina de León and so many others have been named even if only for a page and are not lost to the simple moniker of volunteer.⁴²

The act of naming these women’s immortalizes their participation within the revolution but also reveals an interesting revelation. Which is that many of these volunteers that came to *La Cruz Blanca* were in fact family units, mothers and daughters, sisters and even cousins. Their nursing experience often coming from caring for their own infirm family members these women often left the comfort of their homes to help care for the wounded soldier. These women were able to repurpose their domestic skills in a manner which allowed them to participate in the revolution just as their male relatives would have. Even further the demographic of women within this organization showed that the all women --- from the depths of poverty to even the most elite-- were persuaded to participate in *La Cruz Blanca*.⁴³ One woman Lily Honeycutt

⁴² Ibid: 105-106.

⁴³Box 6, folder 2a-b, Leonor Villegas de Magnón, Villegas de Magnón Papers, 1906-1982. Houston: University of Houston Libraries. The Rebel depicts the participation of these women as being honorable and a way for women to express national pride. Realistically however, a look into the financial documents of *La Cruz Blanca* revealed an organization that was reliant entirely on public donations and Magnón’s own personal funds. The inclusion of elite women, who were often elected the leaders or presidents of local *La Cruz Blanca* chapters throughout Mexico, were the result of financial difficulties.

Long--wife of a doctor-- became Magnón's companion and personal assistant throughout the rest of the text. She travelled with her to and from either border, helping her to navigate treacherous territory and her interactions with male revolutionaries, all the while not having any understanding of the Spanish language.⁴⁴ The comfort of female companionship was irreplaceable for Magnón, who despite her dedication to the revolutionary cause was still restrained by the gender divisions being upheld by her male contemporaries. In understanding more succinctly how Magnón, and thereby the rest of the women within *La Cruz Blanca* were navigating this male-dominated space there is a key interaction recounted in the novel:

Señor Múzquiz told the Rebel the next day she must send one of the corps with a card to the First Chief [Carranza] saying the constitutional White Cross was at his orders. "Señor Múzquiz," she said... "You don't know me. I am a sensible rebel. No one, as yet, has ordered me to do anything. My father, my husband and my brother always let me do anything."... "[Y]ou know I love the soldiers. We have come to serve them. All I want is to be assigned to my post." "I am fully aware of what you say, but this is serious undertaking," said Múzquiz. "You must be disciplined. You must learn to obey orders. He shook his fork at the smiling, self-assured Rebel."⁴⁵

The very presence of women in this scenario is challenging to the social norms of the period and Múzquiz response to this challenge is to re-establish an imbalance of power. He wants Magnón to be obedient to him and by extension resume her place within the gender hierarchy. This is made even more apparent, if one were to refer to Figures 2 and 3 below.

⁴⁴ Leonor Villegas de Magnón, *The Rebel*. (Houston: Arte Público Press. 1994):105-109.

⁴⁵ *Ibid*: 107-108



Figure 2. Photo clipping from news article in Magnón's personal documents. Depicting Magnón and Jovita Idar in *La Cruz Blanca* uniform. Courtesy of University of Houston.



Figure 3. Additionally photo clipping of La Cruz Blanca. Courtesy of University of Houston.

These photos clearly show Magnón in the uniform of *La Cruz Blanca*. In a stark white bonnet and long sleeved blouse, her arm band with the white cross on it along with her skirt are the only dark clothing she has on her person. Magnón did not don a masculine identity as did the *soldaderas*, she represented *La Cruz Blanca* with her clearly feminine uniform and self-assured of her place within the revolution. It is a tenuous negotiation to make, between remaining within traditional gender bounds and representing something as overtly feminine as a nurse that its mere presence within a masculine space is radical. This tension speaks to not just the presence of

women within the revolution but also to the later issues that Magnón would encounter in her attempts to publish her text.

The Rebel stands as a tangible reflection of her experience in the revolution as well as her efforts to preserve the history of *La Cruz Blanca*. It was certainly not a well-received text, as Magnón fought against a tide of men rejecting her narrative, telling her that no one wanted to hear about women in the revolution. Or rather perhaps that is not entirely accurate, men delighted in hearing about women in the revolution, as evident by the *adelita* corrido. They just preferred to control how these women were depicted. *The Rebel* circumvented the male gaze as well as their grip on the Mexican war story. It revealed that women articulated their own nationalism differently, it was not bound by borderlines or citizenship. How could it be? With family and friends on either side of the border, a transnational understanding of community and patriotism was how they understood their world. They could not advocate the same revolutionary ideals as their male contemporaries, for those incapable or unwilling to join in combat used nursing-- whose skills they already possessed-- to partake in the Mexican Revolution. These women embraced the feminine, with their stark white skirts and nursing capes, and repurposed their domestic skills to serve their own brand of patriotism. In line with this *The Rebel* reflects Magnón's refusal to neuter her gender. The navigation on the borderlands of both her race and gender are inherent to her character. Her destruction of the border informed a larger understanding of solidarity among women during the early twentieth century. The very penning of this text not only reinstates *La Cruz Blanca* within the historical record but it reintroduces the participation of women in the Mexican Revolution.

Family, Religion and activism in Our Lady of Guadalupe; Petra Guillen

“Do you know that our neighborhood is a forgotten neighborhood?” --Petra Guillen

On March 3rd, 1989 in her family home, Petra Guillen was interviewed on the subject her life within Houston’s Second Ward, the first of what would later become three oral interviews to preserve her life story.⁴⁶ While the Second Ward may not have necessarily bore the weight the of the mass immigration of Mexicans, as other more populous cities such as Los Angeles or San Antonio, the experiences of the Mexican community are no less important. The growing Mexican community of *Segundo Barrio* experienced just the same rate of prejudice during 1910-1920, subsequent Great Depression as well as the americanization efforts of all those outside of it. Born in Mexico and raised in Texas, Guillen’s life reflected a type of community which can be seen amongst the broader demographic of Mexicans who had immigrated to the U.S. During the early twentieth century the borderlands of Texas and Mexico was undergoing a multiplicity of events. The primary event being the Mexican Revolution, which marked a cycle of violence,

⁴⁶ OH 348 Petra Ruiz Guillen, Houston Metropolitan Research Center, interviewed on March 3, 1989. See also, Guillen, Petra. Oral History. Houston Community College. Digital Collection..In Ethnic Studies “Segundo Barrio”. 2014, and Guillen, Petra. Interviewed by Natalie Garza in Oral Histories: Houston History Project. Oral Histories. 1996. Series 14: Mexican American Studies right.Box 15.Item 00832: 00832. It should be noted that while this interview is one of three interviews that Guillen has given and were subsequently digitally archived. Each interview takes place in a different decade and were given by a different interviewee. This information is vital to know because throughout every interview Guillen will after add or subtract information from her narrative.

political and economic instability as well as social change within Mexico and even further the borderlands of the United States. As a result of this revolution, an increase of Mexican immigration to the U.S. for both stability and work can be observed between the mid-1910's to late 1920's, reducing only with the economic crisis of the 1930's.⁴⁷

⁴⁷ United States. Congress. House. Committee on Immigration and Naturalization. Temporary Admission of Illiterate Mexican Laborers: Hearings Before the Committee On Immigration And Naturalization, House of Representatives, Sixty-sixth Congress, Second Session, On H.J. Res. 271, Relating to the Temporary Admission of Illiterate Mexican Laborers, January 26, 27, 28, 30, And February 2, 1920. Washington: G.P.O., 1920, At the same time the revolution cannot accurately bare the sole burden of this increase and consideration must be given to the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 and the legal precedent it set for subsequent immigration and exclusion laws that the United States would establish from 1882 to the 1930's. This act barred Chinese laborers from entering the United States, which consequently increased the demand for unskilled laborers who could be paid less than Anglo-American workers and provide a competitive workforce to that of the African American workers. This created the concept of the "temporary" Mexican worker which gained traction in the early twentieth century and led to southwestern agricultural leaders to lobby for exemptions to be made in favor of Mexican immigration. The U.S. department of Labor, has provided a somewhat dubious consent in regards to the immigration rate. According to their documents, the department estimate that the immigration rate rose from 5,682 in 1908 to 22,001 in 1912. Although agricultural business lobbyists were pushing for exemptions to be made towards migrant labor, these states which often received migrant labor or immigrant communities were actively prejudice against Mexicans.

A condition of life in the early twentieth century for Mexicans living in cities, especially in the Southwest, was that of extreme poverty, inadequate housing, public resources and a segregated educational system. When confronted with these realities these Mexicans who had immigrated into the U.S. sought to use church as a resource. It was hoped that the church would be utilized as a means of stability, community and cultural maintenance. Jeanne Petit and Mary Odem however suggest that while this may have been the intention of the immigrant community, the reality was far different. Many of these immigrants and established Mexican-Americans found themselves in constant conflict with the Catholic Church.⁴⁸ The church was aggravated at their inability to adhere strictly to church dogma and traditions or directed their resources and clergy to strictly Anglo-American parishes despite their necessity in the Mexican American parishes.⁴⁹ Throughout the Mexican-American Catholic experience outright racism to americanization remained a constant theme.

⁴⁸ See also *El Paso Herald*, “Employers Cite Difficulties for Minimum Wage in El Paso”, November 20, 1919, from Library of Congress (Accessed May 25, 2018)

<https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn88084272/1919-11-20/ed-1/seq-10/> This article cites a ruling by the Texas Industrial Welfare Commission Which provides an insight into both the tensions between

⁴⁹ *The Indian advocate*, May 01, 1903, Page 135, From the Library of Congress, (Accessed May 25, 2018) <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/45043535/1903-05-01/ed-1/seq-3/>

A curious comparison in this newspaper is made on the difference between American and Mexican Catholic traditions. They write that Mexicans prefer the festivities of the church over the actual dogma.

The church saw Mexicans as a “Problem,” one in which could be solved by segregation or the missionary work of Anglo-American Catholic women.⁵⁰ This was not yet there community, yes they were Catholic but they were Mexican Catholic. Yet despite this, there were a great deal of Mexicans, particularly women, who found solace in the church assisting in relief societies and event organization. In fact it was during this period in which a variety of outside forces were concerned with the state of the “Mexican Problem,” that we see Guillen in fact thriving within the Catholic Church. It is in fact nigh impossible to locate material in which Guillen was not intrinsically linked with that of Houston’s Church of Our Lady Guadalupe. Her life was shaped by the Catholic Church and the ever present intense anti-Mexican prejudices.

Guillen, was born in Matehuala, San Luis Potosí, on October 19, 1919. San Luis Potosí is considered the birthplace of the Mexican Revolution. As the city in which Francisco Madero had both been exiled and inspired to write the Constitution of San Potosí, its history cannot be separated from the revolution. It was in fact due to the increasing tide of liberalism and the Mexican Revolution which converged with declining clerical authority and economic stress that we see a wave of migration enter the United States.

One of many refugees--even more importantly a Catholic--- fleeing to the United State as a result of the Mexican revolution, during a period in which being Catholic was seen as antithetical to Mexican nationalism. In reaction to growing liberal policies Mexico saw the

⁵⁰ Mary Odem “Our Lady of Guadalupe in the New South: Latino Immigrants and the Politics of Integration in the Catholic Church, *Journal of American Ethnic History* (2004):27 and Jeanne Petit, “Working for God, Country and “Our Poor Mexicans”: Catholic Women and Americanization at the San Antonio National Catholic Community House 1919-1924”, *Journal of American Ethnic History* (2015): 11-12.

creation of the 1917 Constitution which further restricted the power and activities of the Church.⁵¹ These restrictions weren't exactly new but it was the enforcement of them that infuriated Catholics and ecclesiastical authorities. The Church claimed the state had no right to govern them and the state claimed the submission was a basic requirement in any sovereign country. With this dissention between state and church building, each side began a resistance campaign which would ultimately result in the Cristero Rebellion (1926-1929). This rebellion is thus seen as the last attempt by the Church and parishioners to fight against the secularization of Mexico.

While avoiding this rebellion by five years, the increasing anti-Catholic sentiments would contribute to the immigration of the Guillen's family. In 1921, At just under two years old her family-- her mother, grandmother and sister-- would immigrate to Texas to avoid what her mother had termed, "the persecutions and things going on over there," in Mexico.⁵² Note that the description of 'persecution' in this context is interesting, because in a later interview Guillen, herself also describes the revolution as a "civil war." She notes very specifically that when in San Luis Potosí, her family had lived across from their chosen church. This church during the

⁵¹ Charles Cumberland, *Mexican Revolution: Genesis under Madero* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1974).

Acuna, Rodolfo. *Occupied America: A History of Chicanos*, (New York: Harper and Row Publishings. 1988) : 143. To be specific the restrictions forbid the clergy from wearing robes, administering mass, and providing education.

⁵² OH 348 Petra Ruiz Guillen, Houston Metropolitan Research Center, interviewed on March 3, 1989.

later half of the revolution however had become both a literal and metaphorical battlefield.⁵³ Federal troops quarreled with the clergy, as a constant reminder of the increasingly anti-Catholic sentiment that Alvaro Obregón and his later successor Plutarco Elias Calles would employ. Violence was not a threat but a lived reality. In the cradle of the revolution these women looked around them and saw only violence and persecution towards Catholics. As a result, they along with numerous other families, migrated from San Luis Potosí to Texas in 1921.⁵⁴ These women however had no intention of returning to Mexico, instead they like others came with the intention to building a new life in the U.S.⁵⁵

Upon arriving in Texas, they had settled in Baytown with the assistance of Guillen's uncle, Almado Ruíz, who at the time was working to build the Humble oil refinery, which first opened in 1911, just to the south of Houston. Guillen's mother was also able to secure work

⁵³ San Potosi, was as aforementioned the tangible beginning of the revolution; a revolution which as shown by *La Cronica* relied heavily on liberal policies that were anticlerical.

⁵⁴ OH 348 Petra Ruiz Guillen, Houston Metropolitan Research Center, interviewed on March 3, 1989. And Guillen, Petra. Interviewed by Natalie Garza in Oral Histories: Houston History Project. Oral Histories. 1996. Series 14: Mexican American Studies right. Box 15.Item 00832: 00832.. Guillen's immigration story is interesting to consider. As in the first 1989 interview Guillen insisted she didn't remember much, only that they had migrated to the US under her mother's maiden name while her father remained in Mexico. In the later 2010 interview however, Guillen notes that the previous interviewee had been child of one of the families that hers had immigrated to the Us with. In this interview she indicates that her father remained in Mexico due to the illness of his mother but preferred to stay in Mexico and did not want to move to the U.S.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

doing a variety of menial labor jobs and help her brother to support the family.⁵⁶ This consequently left Guillen and her sister in the care of her grandmother for most of her childhood. Their time in Baytown would be short however, as her family felt the absence of the church keenly in Baytown which had no established Catholic church, or rather no church which would accept Mexican parishioners. The closest church, the Our Lady Guadalupe church in Houston, accepted Mexican parishioners-- it was in fact built to house them specifically-- however the journey or rather the presence of a journey signified Guillen's family's removal from what their community. This is not to of course, discount the logistical issue with constantly to take the ferry, and only on Sundays, to visit the church. For these women who had lived in Mexico right across the street from their church, anything other than a walk signified that they had not truly made a home, Baytown to them was a placeholder. The church was their community and they needed to be capable of readily accessing it.

The Catholic church ---- at its core a patriarchal structure which enforced strict gender division ---- was supported in Mexican culture by a unique set of traditions and practices which encouraged religiosity among women. Within Mexican culture, religiosity was a space that was heavily occupied by women who operated as the central supporting pillar for both the family unit and its spirituality. Mexican Catholicism which is very much a cultural cornerstone for Mexican women, was constructed as blend of Indigenous religions and world-view with that of pre-

⁵⁶Petra Ruiz Guillen, OH 348 Houston Metropolitan Research Center, interviewed on March 3, 1989. On the subject of her mother's work Guillen has listed multiple jobs from working in an olive packing company, a nut factory, burlap sap factory, hair salon, as well as strawberry and cotton picking work.

Reformation Spanish Christianity.⁵⁷ This mixing of pre-existing Indigenous religions with that of Catholicism speaks to a larger history of colonialism, in which spirituality was repurposed as a means of cultural survival and resistance. Thus in Mexican Catholicism, it has been observed that parishioners rely heavily on alternative home and community based structures as opposed to actual Catholic dogma.

According to Houston historian Robert Treviño rejection by institutional religion has long fostered the more communal and familial based socioreligious traditions. These traditions, the *altarcito* (home altars), fundraisers, celebrations and others were very often the product of women's labor. In the case of *altarcitos*, a tradition that while being an intimate family space of worship, was a space that was constructed by women which reflected their personal religiosity.⁵⁸ This lack of reliance on traditional church structure, coupled with the strict gender division and structure that is so inherent to the Catholic Church, developed an environment for Mexican women to participate with Catholicism in a manner that was conducive to them. At the same time however centering the focus of these activities within the home has the unintended effect of placing women on a domestic pillar. They become paradigms of the virgin and the mother, effectively causing their work to be seen as inherently natural. This designation of pillarship however has allowed, both their complexity and activism both within the church structure and outside of it, to be hidden.

⁵⁷ Robert R. Treviño, *The Church in the Barrio: Mexican American Ethno Catholicism in Houston*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press. 2006): 5-10

⁵⁸ Ibid: 46-53. On the subject of *altarcitos*, Treviño was able to interview Guillena who affirmed that “during her years as a missionary catechist, [she] remembered that most had an *altarcito*. Other parishioners likewise revealed that altars were a “very normal” part of home life,” (p. 53).

In the pursuit of revealing the complex and sometimes contradictory relationship that women have with the church, what is unearthed was a community of women who were uniquely utilizing the church. The church among Mexican women has been defined as not just a religious space, but a community space which was being sustained on largely on their labor and commitment.⁵⁹ By and large Guillen's introduction to the church as facilitated by her grandmothers religiosity, however as Guillen became increasingly involved with the church it was a result of the community it provided for her and others. In fact when recounting her early childhood, it's clear that all social activities she participated in were undeniably connected with the church. An early memory Guillen's is in fact one where she would be watched by the older girls,

we were only four years old, and the older girls used to take care of us so that our mothers or grandmothers—if my mother was working, well, my grandmother could work around the church, and that way she didn't have to be bothering with—there were several ladies. Not only my mother, there were several of them.⁶⁰

One of Guillen's earliest recollections of women coming together both socially and as a means of providing resources to the community takes place within the church. Older girls, not yet ready to participate in women's activities watched the younger children to allow these women time to

⁵⁹ *The Irish standard*, 29 July 1916. From Library of Congress. (Accessed May 25, 2018)

<<http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn90059959/1916-07-29/ed-1/seq-9/>>

This article in particular highlights the upkeep of an abandoned church during the Mexican Revolution. It was being maintained and run entirely by its female parish who were also holding mass.

⁶⁰ Petra Ruiz Guillen, OH 348 Houston Metropolitan Research Center, interviewed on March 3, 1989.

socialize and organize events for the church. This served the purpose of both providing practical childcare to the younger children but also as a means of supervision for the older girls. As with religion, intense supervision of teenaged girls are a consistent factor within Mexican communities in the early twentieth century.⁶¹ Knowing that their children were in a safe environment and by extension removed from outside influences these women could relax. This promise of safety and familiarity, which was so violated in Mexico, was desperately needed by Magnón's family. It's clear why Guillen's family made the decision to resettle in Houston's Second Ward, an eclectic neighborhood with a steadily growing Mexican population.⁶²

⁶¹ Douglas Monroy, "Rebirth: Mexican Los Angeles from the Great Migration to the Great Depression." (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999): 168-183. Monroy brings an indepth look into the dissention that was building between the Mexican communities' generations, specifically between that of the family and the daughter. To be sure, young men who americanized established novel forms of behavior and some communities distanced themselves from both Mexican and American traditions, but it was primarily young girls and women who were the subject of disparagement. One such example was an excerpt from an eighteen year old girl Henrietta who in 1932 said. "I never had any fun since I was sixteen years old. As soon as I was sixteen my father began to watch me and would not let me go anywhere or have any friends come home. He was born in old Mexico but he has been here long enough to know how people do things. The way it is with the Mexicans, the bigger a girl is, the farther they pull her into the house." 168

⁶² Natalie Garza "The Mother Church" of Mexican Catholicism in Houston" in *Houston History Magazine* 9, no. 1 (2011).

Our Lady of Guadalupe church was built in 1912 to house the rapidly growing Mexican parishioners who were immigrating to Texas in unprecedented numbers.⁶³ The appeal to the Mexican community in this church is clear even in its name. Lady Guadalupe is considered the most influential Catholic symbol within Mexican Catholicism.⁶⁴ She is the mother of the people, the figure who adorns women's *altarcito* as both a model of femininity and cultural strength. Her duality in feminine conformance and inner strength reflect the struggle that women were having both within the church and within American society. This church is then not just a representation of the growing Mexican population but a symbol of their struggle to find a place within American society without sacrificing a piece of themselves.

We can see that while backed by clerical officials, the construction of this church was driven primarily by the enthusiasm and labor of its Mexican parishioners. As aforementioned, while Houston was home to multiple Catholic churches, these churches were open only to Anglo-Americans.⁶⁵ Mexicans were refused service in these churches, or in the case that they were allowed to enter they were forced to stand silently in the back. During a period in which the Catholic church was scrambling to preserve its parish which was under the mounting pressure of anti-Catholic politicians, organizations (such as the Ku Klux Klan) and steady conversion to

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Castañeda-Liles, Socorro, "Our Lady of Guadalupe and the Politics of Cultural Interpretation" in *Mexican American Religions: Spirituality, Activism and Culture* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008): 153

⁶⁵ Robert R. Treviño, *The Church in the Barrio: Mexican American Ethno Catholicism in Houston* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), and Petra Ruiz Guillen, OH 348, Houston Metropolitan Research Center, interviewed on March 3, 1989.

Protestantism; it is interesting that Mexican parishes were isolated and discriminated against. Guillen herself notes throughout all of her interviews that while she was shielded by the sheer privilege of both not working for wages and interacting within only the Mexican community, that the prejudice was so overt there was no possible way to ignore it. The construction of this church was a way for Mexican communities to create a space for themselves when it became clear that Mexicans were not wanted in the white churches.⁶⁶

Despite this however there still remained a definite separation of the Mexican community and its clerical officials. The mass was conducted entirely in Latin and English with only the occasional English.⁶⁷ As a result of this it should be noted that the presence of the priest throughout all of Guillen's interviews is stark in its absence. While Our Lady of Guadalupe did have a priest who spoke Spanish, his overall importance pales in comparison to that of the nuns and more specifically Sister Benitia. Sister Benitia emerges throughout all of Guillen's interviews as this woman who was praised by the community for having this grand respect and love for the Mexican community which endeared her to them.⁶⁸ Sister Benitia while at Our Lady

⁶⁶ Petra Guillen, Interviewed by Natalie Garza in Oral Histories: Houston History Project. Oral Histories. 1996. Series 14: Mexican American Studies Box 15.Item 00832: 00832.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Petra Ruiz Guillen, OH 348, Houston Metropolitan Research Center, interviewed on March 3, 1989. On the subject Guillen had to say, "Well, she was the type of person that had a lot of faith, a lot of faith and love for the Mexican people. You couldn't say nothing against the Mexican people that she wouldn't be right there, and she was not a Mexican. She was a Belgian. She came from Belgium, but she was raised in Mexico, Incarnate Word Sisters. So, she loved the Mexican people a lot, and she would do anything for the Mexican people."

Guadalupe of Houston headed its educational sector. Offering the community the chance to gain up to an eighth-grade education, many students regardless of gender were drawn by Sister Benitia in to attend the school. Natalie Garza has found that thanks to Sister Benitia work with the community, Our Lady of Guadalupe saw its student body increase from 48 to 428 in 1935.⁶⁹

Despite the love that Sister Benitia had within the church one cannot ignore her complicity within the process of americanization for Mexicans and Mexican Americans which was steadily increasing during the early twentieth century. The Catholic church in effort to affirm its own nationalism and remove the label of being an immigrant church sought to americanize its parishioners. When recounting her time in the school of Our Lady of Guadalupe, Guillen recalls being punished for usage of Spanish within the classroom.⁷⁰ A common tactic along with the demand of stricter adherence to Anglo-Catholic tradition which were meant to bring Mexican parishioners into modern American society.

In comparison to other americanization efforts offered by the Protestant church, in which assistance usually came with the requirement of attending religious service or for the family to completely abandon their cultural traditions in favor of American practices, the work of Sister Benitia could be seen as rather mild and even accommodating. Especially considering the common was the paternalistic attitude that can be found in documents discussing aid programs to Mexican communities. These documents such as the American Red Cross a describe Mexicans

⁶⁹ Petra Guillen. Interviewed by Natalie Garza in Oral Histories: Houston History Project. Oral Histories. 1996. Series 14: Mexican American Studies right.Box 15.Item 00832: 00832.

⁷⁰ Natalie Garza “The Mother Church” of Mexican Catholicism in Houston” in Houston History Magazine 9, no. 1 (2011):15

as “pathetic” and “poor” people who were so thankful for their aid, as if they had no agency and were just subject to the whims of the more powerful.⁷¹

The resulting navigation of paternalistic and americanized attitudes of social and educational aid establishes the importance to Guillen’s catechist work. When she was around ten to eleven years old Guillen joined up with the Catechist’s group that had been formed by Sister Benitia teach religious education in the Mexican-American community in 1930. The Catechists were a socially radically religious group as they were organized primarily of Mexican-American girls teaching in Spanish during this intense period of americanization. Guillen herself recalls undergoing corporal punishment if she used Spanish in the educational classes at Our Lady Guadalupe. Guillen’s position as an educator within the church allowed her to circumvent americanization tactics that we see consistently being performed by the Catholic Church and other organizations.

The catechists were separated by their class age groups and identifiable by their uniforms. The younger girls wore white dresses with blue capes, older girls wore all black with a white collar. The dress of the older girls is significant because Sister Benitia would have them wear a head covering while out in public, thus imitating the visage of a nun.⁷² This allowed the girls to

⁷¹ American Red Cross. *The American Red Cross Pacific Division Activities*, (San Francisco Public Library: 1918): 163

⁷² Kristine Gunnel, “The Daughters of Charity as Cultural Intermediaries: Women, Religion, and Race in Early Twentieth-Century Los Angeles.” *U.S. Catholic Historian*, vol. 31, no. 2 (2013): .One such program, the Daughters of Charity in Los Angeles reflects this trend of trust that the Mexican community held towards nuns during the 1910’s and 1920’s. These women sponsored catechist classes and provided social programs meant to provide relief to the Mexican

travel unbothered and for free on the street cars. The significance of not paying fare meant that these girls had the opportunity to travel to out to homes to provide education to those who did not have ready access to a Catholic church. These bilingual girls served as an intermediary between English-speaking church officials and devout Spanish-speaking communities. There was no need to undertake a terse negotiation between accepting aid or education from Anglo-American organizations because these girls were from the community; they were safe and relatable.⁷³

Even more interesting, before the Great Depression really took its toll on the community, they were also able to provide charitable aid for those in need. Guillen recounts that the catechists would “give them clothes or give them food to take home or eat. They would feed them there also.”⁷⁴ These girls were not removed from the needs of the community as other organizations who could visit and leave. It was their community and the struggle to educate and provide aid was immensely personal. It could not be emphasized enough, how much these small churches relied on the labor and donations of the Mexican community to keep itself a float.⁷⁵ The public support that Mexican-only Catholic parishes had was the direct result of the labor of

community. As a result of their interpersonal relationship and religious similarity with the Mexican community, Kristine Gunnell notes that the sisters were able to gain both the access and trust of the community in a way other organizations could not.

⁷³ Petra Ruiz Guillen, OH 348 Houston Metropolitan Research Center, interviewed on March 3, 1989.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Petra Guillen. Interviewed by Natalie Garza in Oral Histories: Houston History Project. Oral Histories. 1996. Series 14: Mexican American Studies right.Box 15.Item 00832: 00832.

Mexican women. Even Guillen notes that it was the young girls and women of the community who,

[...the people or parents or aunts] .. used to make tamales to... raising money for the church...So, that's how we raised it and of course, we couldn't do nothing. We were very young so our parents, mothers, were the ones that made it, got together and make them and they would just—we had to cook them on fire, wood fire. They used to put like bricks that high, about three bricks and put something in there and then we used to be sticking the wood under so to keep the fire going to cook them 'cause we didn't have no gas. We didn't have no kerosene.

I: Where was this? Over at the church?

PG: Yes. We used to do it on the side and just yesterday I was talking to—remember when we used to put the wood under to keep the fire and we would—we wanted to go and play 'cause we were young. We were—well, you keep sticking that wood in there so the fire won't die and that's the way they helped to—you know—raise money for the parish 'cause the people, they couldn't afford to give too much if it was the Depression. So, they would buy things to eat, and it's only understandable that they would buy things to eat.⁷⁶

When Guillen refers to “they”, an oblique term which seems to be unconsciously using, I might presume to say that is referring to her neighbors in the Second Ward. As a Mexican church, which catered primarily to Mexican parishioners those who would be primarily invested in it's survival would then be this same community. When selling goods or holding fundraisers the money came from the Mexican community because there was a sense of security in knowing that this money would be utilized to directly benefit their need. These small churches relied on the labor and donations of the Mexican community, of which women were the primary organizers to keep itself a float. Yet there work is not readily seen within the historical records. There has been work done on the missionary work of Catholic nuns, and as we have seen the catechists of

⁷⁶ Petra Ruiz Guillen, OH 348 Houston Metropolitan Research Center, interviewed on March 3, 1989.

Houston, which exists because the church has maintained records of their involvement. The more common labor of mothers, grandmothers and aunts however has been hidden by sheer fact of it being domestic work.

Guillen's oral interviews offer a glimpse into this world which otherwise might have been lost. What is revealed is a rich history of not just the symbol of the church ---Lady Guadalupe--- being spiritually and culturally important to women. The space provided women the opportunity to meet with each other and to form social bonds that would last throughout their entire lives, especially across generations. By having the support of the church these women were provided with both the opportunity and the resources to better their community. The one consistency involvement from organizing fundraisers, cooking food and even the catechist work that Guillen participated in, was that they were headed by women. Perhaps by contemporary standards we might not see their work as radical but for the time, attaining basic food, clothing, education and other resources were incredibly difficult. Guillen's participation then in the catechists, which allowed her to administer aid and interact with the community in Spanish, is in fact considered a form of resistance to Americanization.

Conclusion

The figures of Magnón and Guillen are admittedly two women who occupy vastly separate social worlds but who nonetheless both bring forth this question of women in relation to “revolution” and nationalism. This thesis proposes that although these women may have had different occupations and interests, their concerns are much the same. Each of these women have had to navigate and to some extent, recreate structures in which they were presumptively silenced or sidelined. Both women dedicated their lives to the betterment of their communities. One provided medical aid during a civil war and the other helped to maintain a community space for families and resources and aid for the Mexican community without the pressure of americanization. Even further, these women and their histories have been subject to both erasure and shadowing of their importance by similar historical processes: lack of publication. They were gifted with words, but there was no “market” for them in the political or commercial sense, only in the “feminine” immediate-use sense, for the taking care of others as nurses, mothers, teachers. Fortunately, their words were rescued and preserved.

When referring to erasure of women in war time, Miriam Cooke pointedly sums up the importance of maintaining a woman's narratives.

Women are in contemporary wars -- whether by fiat of a governing body or because they find themselves in a place that has burst into violence. Women who have experienced this explosion of the normal and who have decided to talk and write about it draw attention to the reality of what women and those like them actually do and endure during war. It is by putting women into the war stories that we can bring to recognize the strangeness of the unchanging meta narrative that the War Story has always been.⁷⁷

Magnón’s desire to reinsert women into the revolution, not as props to men but as full people with their own desires that often clashed with that of their male contemporaries, was not a new or

⁷⁷Miriam Cooke, *Women and the War Story* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996): 43.

revolutionary one. It speaks to a larger struggle of women to maintain their own historical agency. The inclusion of the *soldadera* and *adelita* within her narrative was a nod to the multiplicity of women who were participating. Yet bearing witness to their own erasure, in which they were reduced into mere one dimensional legends, she struggled to prevent the same fate to that of *La Cruz Blanca*. Lomas argues that Magnón suffered rejection from both American and Mexican publishers, who were both so quick to condemn a woman's narrative and who sought to profit from more easily marketable stereotypes of revolution. Even more troubling in terms of silencing and appropriation, the documents available for Magnón represent only a portion of those that had existed before her death. Much of her work is lost due to a publisher picking over her work and then never returning them no following through with his promise of publication.⁷⁸ As a result of this treatment it is clear why Magnón's work remained inaccessible until the late twentieth century. Even more importantly, it sheds further light on why Magnón was so quick to include names and to correspond these women to the events of the revolution. This woman who dedicated the rest of her life to the women of the revolution, was desperate to strip the layers of intrigue and to reinsert *La Cruz Blanca* and all its details back into the war narrative.

In contrast to Magnón's active struggle to escape erasure, Guillen's is a more common one. Her work and the work of countless of other women have been hidden under the cover of domesticity and church negligence. The Catholic Church did not want a Mexican Parish, or rather they would only accept one under the condition that they became americanized. It was under this pressure of racism, economic stress, and religious negligence that we find a surprisingly rich narrative of women's agency. Despite the difficulties of life within Texas during

⁷⁸ Leonor Villegas de Magnón, *The Rebel*. (Houston: Arte Público Press. 1994):viii-ix.

the early twentieth century, the Mexican community of the 2nd Ward was slowly flourishing. They centered themselves around the Church of Our Lady of Guadalupe and constructed a space in which people did not just exist but lived fully. In the words of Guillen:

When I was growing up there was not a neighborhood. It was the family. We were all family. All the neighborhood was family because everybody knew everybody, you know, and, and if I was doing something wrong this person...would correct me I would take it.⁷⁹

Everyone in this community knew each other, and near all of them attended Our Lady of Guadalupe. In supporting this church families formed bonds with each other which would last a lifetime. Even more importantly we see that despite the patriarchal attitude of the church and the overwhelming call of americanization, that a women's community was both thriving and providing the church with the bulk of its support. Guillen from girlhood to an elderly woman was involved with the social and charitable aid programs of the church. Within her recollections, the curtain is pulled back to reveal an informal and later formalized community of women who were subverting americanization and patriarchal attitudes without explicitly challenging them. Religious involvement allowed women to pursue a degree of social freedom that ordinarily they would not be allowed, such as Guillen's own recollection of travelling out of town to administer catechist lessons. This freedom did not challenge the social order however as they were within the bounds of Mexican cultural traditions. Piety was a feminine aspect so why would be unusual for women to be so actively involved?

Guillen probably did not see her work as actively subverting americanization. Although she did acknowledge the freedom it gave her, Guillen's own framework for understanding the

⁷⁹ Petra Guillen. Interviewed by Natalie Garza in Oral Histories: Houston History Project. Oral Histories. 1996. Series 14: Mexican American Studies right.Box 15.Item 00832: 00832.

impact of the catechists does not possess the same sense of purpose that we find with Magnón. Guillen saw it as giving back to her neighborhood, so the sense of erasure and defeat does not consume her to the same degree it did as Magnón. For Magnón whose volunteers, she was actively aware of the gender hierarchy that provided within the borderlands and actively sought to undermine. Yet it was her dedicated efforts to preserve this narrative which repelled publishers from considering her work. Guillen was sidelined on account of women's domestic and religious work sidelined as unimportant and Magnón suffered on account of no one being interested in a women's autobiography.

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