SOLDADERAS AND MILICIANAS:
SIMILARITIES AND CONTRASTING VIEWS IN THEIR EVOLUTION AND
REPRESENTATION

by

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ABSTRACT

Two iconic figures emerged from within the Mexican Revolution (1910-1920) and the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939): the soldaderas (Mexican female soldiers) and the milicianas (Spanish female combatants). They played an important role in history, and their various representations have evolved in ways shaped mainly by gender prejudice and historical events. The evolution of their images purports both parallels and contrasts when portrayed in different venues such as corridos (folk ballads in the romancero tradition), photography, film, plays, literature and the national symbolism that, by and large, has contributed to the political identity of their respective countries, Mexico and Spain.

Perhaps the main distinction that separates the overall evolution of the iconic soldaderas from the iconic milicianas addressed in this thesis lies in how Mexico and Spain treated their historical memories or historical past. The spread of the soldadera figure was prominent in popular culture soon after and even during the Mexican revolution, and continued to receive considerable attention in recent times by depicting her as a strong fighter. In terms of international identity or acclaim, la soldadera was introduced to United States audiences as early as 1914 in John Reed’s Insurgent Mexico, and in the form of corridos in 1919 and 1929. Moreover, in 1936, la soldadera contributed to the construction of Mexican-American identity when presented in a theatrical performance in the United States directed by Josephina Niggli. The soldadera’s
image and representation have evolved in a more continuous fashion and her iconic presence continues to be felt today. This, however, has not been the case with the milicianas. Even though, in many respects, milicianas are a force to be reckoned with and have a direct tie to the historical and national identity of Spain, they have not yet reached national prominence. The recent 2007 Law of Historical Memory opens up the possibility that the miliciana might become a symbol of national identity in Spain similar to La Adelita in Mexico.

The form and content of this abstract are approved. I recommend its publication.

Approved: Michael Abeyta.
DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my beloved and supportive husband, Thomas Vossen, along with my two beautiful toddler treasures, Alexander and Anna Vossen-Vela, who have inspired me to be a better human being. I also would like to thank my lovely mother, Dr. Elizabeth Robles-Municha for supporting me in every possible way. I also thank my sweet mother-in law, Mrs. Annie Vossen-Michiels, for her caring and support despite the long distance that separates us. Finally, I thank my sister Elizabeth Vela-Robles and my friend Tania Carter for their unconditional support and friendship. There are simply no words to express all the love and gratitude I feel and have to you all, my blessed family.
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LIST OF POLITICAL ORGANIZATIONS AND THEIR ABBREVIATIONS

CNT Confederación Nacional del Trabajo, (National Worker’s Confederacy).

CSO Círculo Socialista del Oeste, (West Socialist Circle).

JSU Juventudes Socialistas Unificadas, (United Socialist Youth).

ML Mujeres Libres, (Free Women).

PCE Partido Comunista de España, (Communist Party of Spain).

POUM Partido Obrero de Unificación Marxista, (Worker’s Party of the Marxist Unification).

PSOE Partido Socialista Obrero Español, (Spanish Socialist Worker’s Party).

UGT Unión General de Trabajadores, (General Workers’ Union).

UMA Unión de Mujeres Antifascistas, (Antifascist Women’s Union).
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Two iconic figures emerged from within the Mexican Revolution (1910-1920) and the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939): the soldaderas (Mexican female soldiers) and the milicianas (Spanish female combatants). They played an important role in history, and their various representations have evolved in ways shaped mainly by gender prejudice and historical events.

With the exception of the bourgeoisie, tremendous economic hardship was felt at every corner of Spain and Mexico in the early twentieth century, when both countries were enduring oppressive dictatorships led by Porfirio Díaz in México and by Primo de Rivera in Spain under the monarchy of Alfonso XIII. Porfirio Díaz’ dictatorship (commonly known as the Porfiriato era) lasted thirty-five consecutive years, during which he ruled with an iron fist. The Mexican Revolution was a major struggle that started with an uprising led by Francisco I. Madero in 1910, and lasted until 1920. What initially started as a revolt based on demands for land reform, water and a more sympathetic national government led by the peasant leader Emiliano Zapata, escalated into an acute factional civil war. Ultimately, Francisco I Madero, a very important figure in the Mexican struggle and an advocate for democracy and social reform, was able to overthrow Diaz’ dictatorship and in its place established a democratic government.

The Spanish Civil War was a major armed struggle between the Republicans and the Nationalists forces that began on July 17 1936 and ended on April 1, 1939. The Republicans were supporters of the progressive Republican government, known as The Second Republic, and vehemently opposed the conservative Nationalists led by General
Francisco Franco. In the end, the horrendous bloody war ended with the victory of the Nationalists or La Falange (“The Phalanx”) and Spain lived under a brutal dictatorship that lasted thirty-six years, from 1939 to 1975. Prior to the establishment of the Second Republic in 1931, General Primo de Rivera had risen into power in 1923 via the direct orders of King Alfonso XIII by means of a Pronunciamiento, that is, a military coup (Ben-Ami 65). General Primo de Rivera ruled a military dictatorship that lasted seven years until his forced resignation in 1930. As Primo de Rivera was overthrown, various political factions gathered and saw the opportunity to elect a democratic government on April 11, 1931, that successfully led to the establishment of the Spanish Second Republic. The Second Republic expanded the rights of all Spanish citizens, including women, at an incredible pace via the drafting of the 1931 Constitution. With no support, King Alfonso XIII abdicated his throne and went into exile, thus ending the monarchial period in Spain. However, this period of tremendous progressive social change proved to be short lived, as Nationalist forces led by General Franco staged a coup that initiated a civil war. In a way, Primo de Rivera’s earlier conservative regime had paved the way for the Nationalists to strengthen and unify during the Spanish Civil War years, which ultimately helped them to attain their final victory.

Both the Mexican Revolution and the Spanish Civil War broke out in an attempt to end the social injustices and unbearable lives of poor rural people primarily. Mexican and Spanish women took the unique opportunities of revolutionary war to leave behind their family responsibilities and to escape the expectations of a deeply male dominated society and of the Catholic Church (Fernández 53). Spanish women sought to achieve, just as men did, freedom from an oppressive government and restoration of the Second
Republic. In the case of the milicianas, the women who joined the armed forces were not only fighting against fascism, they also fought in a revolutionary war that focused on their political emancipation. In the case of the soldaderas in Mexico, some joined factions voluntarily (such as the Zapatistas) to fight shoulder to shoulder with men against the oppressive government. Others, nonetheless, were dragged into the conflict involuntarily as they were kidnapped and forced to follow the male soldiers to their base camps as servants.

It is difficult to distinguish clearly between soldaderas that functioned as female combatants and soldaderas that were camp followers. Soldaderas who followed their men to encampments to have refreshments ready, to nurse them when wounded or sick, and to comfort the dying were categorized as camp followers. The milicianas have similarly been categorized as those who were combatants in the front lines and those who were in the rearguard. Those who fought on the front lines were part of the mixed battalions, which included men and women. Milicianas on the rearguard lived in their homes and performed auxiliary tasks, but also carried arms to defend their cities and towns from every attack (Lines, “Female Combatants” 168-69). In contrast, the soldadera camp followers were always on the move. It did not matter whether they were pregnant or exhausted, and they usually did their long distance trips by foot. Their newborns and toddlers risked death by dehydration and diarrhea (Poniatowska, *Here is to you Jesusa!* xvi-xvii). Another contrast between the soldaderas and the milicianas is that, at least initially, the women’s new role as combatants was much more acknowledged and recognized for milicianas than it was for soldaderas. This is due to the fact that, during
the early stages of the Spanish Civil War and the Republican Revolution, many left-wing associations were formed which advocated respect and equality of women.

Nevertheless, both the soldaderas and milicianas faced gender discrimination one way or other. As mentioned above, milicianas who fought on the front lines did initially receive some recognition by men. Such open acknowledgement and recognition on the part of men, however, was much more difficult to achieve for soldaderas who fought as combatants. This is why the view of the soldadera evolved from a combatant to “La Adelita,” a term used to alleviate the threat posed to a strictly male dominated society. As a result, “La Adelita” constitutes the first evolution of the soldadera’s image. She was first portrayed as a beautiful, soft, submissive and sexual woman in corridos (folk ballads in the romancero tradition) and photographs, often wearing traditional women’s clothes such as skirts and rebozos (traditional Mexican shawls). The milicianas were also portrayed in feminine ways; nonetheless, the fact that they were generally shown wearing el mono azul (the blue overall), which were male uniforms downplayed their femininity to an extent.

The “Adelita” image of soldaderas becomes more nuanced when she is introduced in film and theatre. La Soldadera (The Mexican Female Soldier; 1966) and La Negra Angustias (The Mulatta Angustias; 1949) are two films in which the soldadera was the main protagonist and was acknowledged cinematically both as a female combatant and as a camp follower. The milicianas also received recognition via cinema with the film Libertarias or Juegos de Guerra (Libertarians or War Games; 1996), though it took much longer for the milicianas’ history to emerge in the public eye due to Franco’s dictatorship. In literature and narrative, milicianas and soldaderas have been represented
in a positive light as brave individuals in semi-autobiographical works. For the soldadera, two novels that stand out are *Hasta no verte Jesús mío* (*Here is to you Jesusa!*; 1967) and *Cartucho* (*Cartridge*; 1931). Because of historical circumstances, it took longer for similar works and testimonies to appear for the miliciana. In 2002, the remarkable novel *La voz dormida* (*The Sleeping Voice*) by Dulce Chacón was published, portraying in detail the postwar harsh circumstances under which women had to live.

Over time, the soldadera’s image has evolved from the sensual and beautiful “La Adelita” image to representations of strong and brave women in arms in recent political events. As such, “La Adelita” has become a solid Mexican female icon of resistance and paradoxical sensuality, and has emerged as a national symbol of idealized femininity unlike the miliciana. In terms of international influence, the soldadera image crossed the United States border as early as 1914 in John Reed’s *Insurgent Mexico*, and in the form of corridos in 1919 and 1929. Furthermore, she was introduced as an icon for the first time in a 1936 play, *Soldadera: A Play of the Mexican Revolution*, which portrays the soldadera as a female fighter.

The milicianas’ image emerged during the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War and became an early iconic symbol of heroines in various press photographs. Nonetheless, propaganda also played a crucial key in deterring their prestige subsequently. They were humiliated, and in press accounts it was often stated that milicianas lacked the necessary preparation in the battlefield. Perhaps worst of all, they were linked to whores (Palomar Baró 5) and at some point the Socialist press even accused them of being conspirators with the Nationalists (Lines, *Milicianas* 163).
The “memory boom” in post Franco Spain at the end of the twentieth century created a venue for film directors and novelists, among others, to recuperate the historical memory of the Second Republic and the Spanish Civil War. Previously, the government did not really take into account the historical memory of the defeated Republicans and instead focused on commemorations of the death of Francisco Franco. Today, an ongoing debate persists amongst conservative and left wing factions. The main battle is between those who do not want to open the wounds of the past and concentrate on a democratic present and those defeated Republicans who want official recognition and acknowledgement. As such, the passage of the Law of Historical Memory in 2007 has not yet done justice to the iconic miliciana, and she has not reached the official national standing she deserves.

The central theme of this thesis is a comparative study of the soldadera and the miliciana as popular cultural phenomena, which emphasizes the evolution and representation of their iconographic images in Mexico and Spain. In this study, I have chosen to use a somewhat non-traditional and interdisciplinary approach that includes historical background and covers specific years when works were published during and after both the Mexican Revolution and the Spanish Civil War. The evolution of the soldadera’s image and the miliciana’s image purports both parallels and contrasts when portrayed in different venues. This is the reason why I have also chosen to incorporate venues other than historical and literary works to address the cultural roles of the soldaderas and milicianas. Examples of this are corridos (folk ballads in the *romancero* tradition), photography, film, plays and, generally, the national symbolism and influence of the soldadera and miliciana that, by and large, have contributed to the political identity
of their respective countries, Mexico and Spain. As a result, the focus of this thesis is not a detailed analysis for each of the literary works presented here; instead, my goal is to evaluate and emphasize their impact on the way soldaderas and milicianas have come to be viewed over time.

I have chosen to organize this thesis using a clear structure for the reader that includes two chapters that present the evolution of the soldaderas and the milicianas separately. The first of these discusses only the soldadera’s evolution as represented in corridos, photography, film, literary works, history and some political aspects. A separate chapter considers only the milicianas, by looking into her evolution and representation in a similar manner. In the conclusion, however, I include and discuss the parallels and contrasting tropes amongst these two icons. Finally, to support my analysis of the evolution of both the miliciana and the soldadera icons, I have compiled as much evidence as I could from Spanish and English articles, books, writers, media, cinema, photography and other sources. I am cognizant, however, of the fact that other valuable works were left aside due to the constraints of time and circumstances. It is my hope that others with the same interest in this subject matter could potentially expand on the works already included here and further incorporate those which were not.
CHAPTER II

SOLDADERAS

A gun is strapped to her back and bandoliers are draped across her chest. She wears a long skirt, a low cut blouse, and has a jovial and beautiful expression on her face as shown in figure 1. Similar images of the soldadera (female soldier or fighter) have not only often been reproduced on calendars but also in placards, t-shirts, books, and address books, and appear in various media through film, photography, songs, art and plays.


The soldadera image appears to be reminiscent of the portrayal of the Goddess of Liberty, “Marianne,” an icon of French Republicanism that encompasses freedom and democracy. “Marianne,” as shown in figure 2, is one of the most prominent national symbols of the French Republic and made her appearance in Eugène Delacroix's
painting: *La Liberté guidant le peuple* (Liberty Leading the People), which was painted on July 1830 to commemorate the French Revolution.

![Image of Liberty Leading the People](image)


Like the French Revolution, the Mexican Revolution encouraged large numbers of women to take part in the battlefield along with men in the years between 1911 and 1920 (Salas 11-33). Becoming a soldadera allowed some women to leave behind their family responsibilities and the expectations from society and the Catholic Church to gain a more equitable role amongst men (Fernández 53). Over the years, however, the image of the soldadera has been subjected to misrepresentations that originate from a paternalistic view of popular culture. The brave and strong soldadera, who fought shoulder to shoulder with men for freedom and equality, has evolved into a sensual and romanticized object of desire that is often referred to as “La Adelita.” These romanticized depictions of La Adelita are a direct result of men’s framing of these
women soldiers in the way they recorded history. Unlike the true soldadera or woman soldier, La Adelita hardly seems capable of fighting in a war. Men downplayed the soldaderas’ legacy as strong and assertive, with various characteristics often associated with men, and instead emphasized their sensuality, beauty and loyalty to the men in their lives (Fernández 54).

From the 1930s to the 1960s, talented Mexican artists produced numerous paintings for calendars depicting the popular images of Mexican culture and history, including the iconic soldadera romantically depicted as La Adelita, that are still found in today’s popular calendars (Villalba 13). Two paintings by Angela Villalba portraying the soldaderas from the Golden Age of Calendar Art, 1930-1960, stand out: Amor Guerrillero (Wartime Love), shown in figure 3, and Adelita, a soldier woman of the Mexican Revolution, shown in figure 4.

La Adelita portrayed in figure 3 in Amor Guerrillero portrays precisely the romantic version of a soldadera of the base camp: She is young and beautiful, wears a neat outfit and hair style, red colored high heel shoes and poses for the painting with a candid smile. The painting encompasses male characteristics representing wartime and emancipation from the previous societal roles of women: bandoliers are draped across her chest and a rifle rests on her lap while she simultaneously smokes a cigarette with confidence. A Charro, a typical cowboy, sings with great excitement while playing his guitar, at the same time he smiles and leans toward his beloved soldadera.

Figure 4, on the other hand, portrays a soldadera presented as La Adelita dressed as a *Charra* ‘a Mexican cowgirl.’ She is also portrayed as young and beautiful, smiling graciously while at the same time her skills with horses and rifles are emphasized. The background of the painting shows that she is surrounded by seven *Charros*, Mexican cowboys, and one of them appears to be singing a *corrido* song as he also holds a guitar. These calendar portrayals are examples of popular cultural representations of the “soldadera” or “La Adelita.”
“La Adelita” and “soldadera” are used interchangeably to depict and refer to the same woman that has become the popular female Mexican icon she is today. In recent years, her image has been used to promote more overtly political ends, such as the protection of indigenous rights in the Zapatista movement of 1993, protests against the privatization of the oil industry that took place in 2007, and a 2010 government organized parade commemorating the Bicentennial of Mexico’s independence.

In the United States, corridos were sung and recorded as early as 1919. Nonetheless, the iconic image of La Adelita was first introduced in a theatrical play in 1936. This play, *Soldadera: A Play of the Mexican Revolution* by Josephina Niggli, used La Adelita to help “construct the emerging Mexican-American identity” of the time (Arrizón 107). This identity struggle was a call for the acknowledgement and acceptance of the “otherness” of Mexican-Americans from Anglo-Americans -- a call for a more
inclusive multicultural America. Thus, this Mexican icon did not only influence Mexican domestic history but also helped to construct a Mexican-American political identity. For these reasons, it is important to understand how and why the image of the soldadera has evolved to that of La Adelita, and how she has been employed to fit specific purposes in recent years. This thesis approaches her evolution through the early period production of corridos and photography, literature, followed by film and theater and, ultimately, her influence on the formation of Mexican-American identity in the United States.

**Soldaderas in the Mexican Revolution**

The Mexican Revolution allowed women to liberate from the constraints that the Catholic Church and Mexican society imposed upon them. In fact, the idea that a woman could take up a non-traditional profession as a soldier was a radical concept. In this regard, the Mexican Revolution functioned as a major catharsis that helped women to step out from their domesticity by becoming active soldaderas, both as camp followers that provided domestic services and as active combatants. During the early stages of this revolutionary movement, women made their first appearance by helping with supportive services. Throughout the conflict, the opposing armies needed a medical corps, and “they depended on women to forage for and prepare the soldier’s food, wash their clothes, and care for their wounds” (King 183). Later on, however, women began to serve in other roles, ranging from soldiers, warriors, and camp followers, to smugglers, spies and even prostitutes.

For this reason, the term “soldadera” holds a plurality of meanings and it has become difficult to clearly distinguish their roles during the revolution. In times of war,
women became extremely resourceful and could fit into different roles at the same. A woman could start as a camp follower that catered to the needs of her man, only to become a colonel such as the case of *La Negra Angustias* that is discussed further in this thesis. In fact, the word “soldadera” is not to be found in standard dictionaries of the Spanish language, thus, leaving it exposed to the subjective interpretations of consumers of Mexican popular culture.

**Soldaderas: Women Soldiers and Camp Followers (1910-1920)**

The women who marched with the armies fighting in the revolutionary war were generally known as “soldaderas”; they voluntarily chose to risk their lives and often left their families to take part in the revolution according to Arrizón (96). However, there are many cases of women who were kidnapped to serve the different factional armies as is shown in the film *La Soldadera* by José Bolaños. In the film, the woman’s new husband is conscripted to fight, so she chooses to follow him. Later on, however, she finds him dead on the battlefield and is herself captured. She is captured by a revolutionary who forces her to be his servant and sexual partner.

Whether voluntarily or not, some of these women went into combat while pregnant or while carrying their infants on their backs. Most of the soldaderas who joined the front lines of the revolution belonged to the rural and urban lower-classes; those who belonged to the upper and middle classes were usually able to avoid being drafted. As a result, many of these women were mestizas or Indian women from various ethnicities (96). Fighting on behalf of the Villistas, according to Thord Gray, were Apaches, Tarahumaras and Tepehunaes; on the other hand, those fighting on behalf of
Carranza included Yaquis, Mayos, Pimas, Tarahumaras and Tepehuanes (Reséndez 538). All in all, these women performed a variety of tasks: “they fought, searched and cooked food, cared for the wounded and did other essential services” (Soto 43-45). Many of the women who became soldaderas were illiterate or poorly educated; however, amongst them were also teachers “who left the classroom to join or support the troops” for more intellectual reasons (Arrizón 96). This illustrates how diverse the corps of soldaderas was.

There is ample evidence that these women participated in the battlefields during the revolution. As stated before, however, it is not always clear what roles they performed or who performed them. What, then, was the main role of the soldadera? Was it as camp follower? Or was it to join the armed forces as a soldier? According to authors who have written on behalf of these women, soldaderas had distinctive features or roles. For Rosa E. King and Julio Guerrero, these women bore arms they could potentially use should it be necessary; however, for the most part their role was to follow the camp and stand by their men. In other words, their descriptions of soldaderas mostly fit the portrayal of camp followers. The following is an excerpt from Mrs. King’s personal chronicle titled *Tempest over Mexico*, where she refers to the “soldadera” as “the Mexican soldier’s woman” (183) bowing to her phenomenal courage and resourceful expertise:

The wonderful soldiers’ women—none like them in the world for patience and bravery at such times combed the town [Cuernavaca] for food, and when they could not get it any other way they stole, whatever and wherever they could, to nourish their men. These were the type of women
who one day, in the north, when their men ran short of ammunition, tied their rebozos [traditional Mexican shawls] to the ammunition cart and hauled it to them. I bow in respect to the Mexican women of this class…. The Mexican woman who marched with the Mexican soldier, who went before him to the camping place to have refreshments ready, who nursed him when sick and comforted him when dying, were helpers and constructionists, doing their part in laying the foundation of this liberal government of today. (183)

Similarly, Julio Guerrero, as quoted in Anna Macias’ article on Women and the Mexican Revolution, wrote a vivid description of soldaderas in La génesis del crimen en México, also portraying them as camp followers:

[These women] who accompany the husband or lover on his military marches, carrying a child, a basket filled with clothing, and working utensils. In the abandoned battlefield they carry water to their wounded masters, and despoil the dead of their clothing… They are jealous and courageous…and their moral code has two precepts… absolute fidelity and unconditional abnegation for the husband or lover, and respect for the officers of the battalion or regiment. (Macias 72)

Andrés Reséndez Fuentes bases his distinction between combatants and camp followers on the work of Jane Holden Kelly and Anna Macias, and further categorizes them as “female soldiers” and “soldaderas.” He refers to “soldaderas” as those who were mainly camp followers, such as the ones described above. He uses “female soldiers” to
describe those who actually fought in battle and who bore other salient characteristics. According to Reséndez, these women served different purposes. Female soldiers were usually registered in the army rosters, and could climb up in the ranks if they proved themselves in battle. In contrast, “soldaderas” were not officially recognized and had little hope of advancement. Thus, they served different purposes in the army. For Reséndez, “soldaderas” carried arms only in exceptional circumstances; in other words, they were camp followers. On the other hand, the female soldiers’ main purpose was to fight (546). Despite the fact that Reséndez’ distinction is confusing in terms of semantics, it is still of great value. It is confusing because he uses the term “soldadera,” which translates directly as “female soldier” in English, to refer to women as camp followers, and the term “female soldier,” to refer to female fighters. It is easier to use the general term “soldaderas,” to refer to women who participated in the revolution as either camp followers or female soldiers.

Both groups of women were strong in their own right, ready to fight for their men, for the revolution, or for mere survival. However, it is next to impossible to establish how many women participated as soldaderas in the revolution, or to define the lines between women who were passive camp followers and those who were active female fighters. Nevertheless, their contribution has been immortalized in all kinds of artistic venues. The soldaderas as such, have become well established icons of the Mexican Revolution that appear in a variety of literary works, corridos and visual: photography and film.
Corridos, Photography, and Painting: The Birth of La Adelita

In some sense, this romantic misrepresentation of La Adelita reflects a paternalistic view in popular culture. Instead of constructing the soldaderas’ legacy as strong, brave and assertive, as does Rosa E. King, thus conveying traits more traditionally associated with men, their beauty, sex appeal and loyalty to the men in their lives was highlighted instead (Fernández 54). To summarize, La Adelita’s main function was to awaken erotic pleasure and idealistic love in all male soldiers fighting in the revolution.

“La Adelita,” was the title of one of the most popular songs about the Mexican Revolution. The ballad was inspired by a woman from Durango who joined the Maderista movement early on. The song became a popular emblem of the Revolution itself (Arrizón 90), while at the same time honoring the women who participated in it. Over time, La Adelita’s name was used to refer to any female soldier who participated in the Mexican Revolution. In this way, the term “Adelita” gradually became equated with “soldadera” (Arrizón 90-91). Her influence was so great that in music the song “La Adelita” crossed the United States border and was recorded by Trío González in New York in early December of 1919. The song “Marijuana, La Soldadera” was also recorded and released by the Hermanos Bañuelos in January 1929 in Los Angeles, California.

One can infer implicitly that most of the corridos depicting women during the Mexican Revolution or “the soldadera,” treated the Adelita as a mere product of consumerism and sexualized objectification, more so than the intellectual and reserved type of woman. For some men she resembled a loving faithful angel whose love for him was unconditional. For others, she was a mere object of desire and pure femininity.
(Arrizón 108). For better or worse, the corridos constitute the early production of songs that gave birth to the Mexican icon La Adelita.

Soldiers who actively participated in the Mexican Revolution talked and sang about going to dance with a soldadera named Adelita in the camp (Salas 82). After the revolution, they continued singing songs about soldaderas. The soldaderas, as mentioned before, became well established characters that appear in a variety of literary works, art, corridos, and films. Even though the soldaderas comprised a wide range of women with unique stories of war to tell, they were usually depicted in rather conventional love stories. In other words, they became the “Adelitas.” But there are many types of soldaderas. As quoted by Elizabeth Salas in her book Soldaderas, Juan González A. Alpuche wrote, “There were many types of soldaderas in the Revolution: ‘La Valentina,’ modest and home-loving; ‘La Cucaracha,’ a carefree woman who gave her liquor and love with open hands to all; ‘Juana Gallo,’ the woman with fighting in her heart; but the most faithful and the most respected of the troop was ‘La Adelita,’… the adorable sweetheart of the ranks” (Salas 82).

During the revolution the corridos were disseminated and became famous through the military choirs, which were a common feature in most Mexican regiments during the Civil War. The choirs sang corridos and regional music (Salas 93). There is no doubt that the corrido “La Adelita,” with its soldadera with a “heart of gold” and “sweetheart of the troops” dominates in Mexican culture. The most famous verses are those that describe Adelita as the soldier’s beloved. This was the type of woman worth fighting for and worth following:
Si Adelita se fuera con otro
la seguiría por tierra y por mar.
si por mar en un buque de guerra
si por tierra en un tren militar
Adelita, por Dios te lo ruego,
calma el fuego de esta mi pasión,
porque te amo y te quiero rendido
y por ti sufre mi fiel corazón. (Arrizón 92)

If Adelita should go with another
I would follow her over land and sea
if by sea in a warship
if by land on a military train.

Adelita, for God’s sake I beg you,
calm the fire of my passion,
because I love you and I cannot resist you
and my faithful heart suffers for you. (92)

As portrayed in the above corrido, it is easy to see why the soldaderas are so popular: “No matter how hard things get, each man will always have his little soldadera ready at his summons, to take care of him, to love him, and to give him a gift once in a while” (Poniatowska 38). “La Adelita” has a plurality of meanings. First, it is a song of hope that is mostly based in the virility of men at war. It also is a name that becomes the symbol for love in times for war. Finally, “La Adelita” is subject to passion and desire.
Sadly though, “Adelita’s bravery and revolutionary spirit are lost to the fatalism and insecurities of male soldiers who are focused on passions, love and desire as they face combat” (91). The following corrido contains the full verses of the song and exemplifies the various idealized connotations that La Adelita represented for the Mexican male soldier in combat:

En lo alto de una abrupta serranía
acampado se encontraba un regimiento
y una moza que valiente los seguía
locamente enamorada del sargento.

Popular entre la tropa era la Adelita
la mujer que el sargento idolatraba,
que además de ser valiente era bonita,
que hasta el mismo coronel la respetaba.

Y se oía, que decía, aquél que tanto la quería:
y si Adelita se fuera con otro la seguiría por tierra y por mar,
si por mar en un buque de guerra,
si por tierra en un tren militar.

Y si Adelita quisiera ser mi esposa
y si Adelita fuera mi mujer,
le compraría un vestido de seda
para llevarla a bailar al cuartel. (“La Adelita”)
On the heights of a steep mountain range
a regiment was encamped,
and a young woman bravely follows them,
madly in love with the sergeant.
Popular among the troops was Adelita,
the woman that the sergeant idolized,
and besides being brave she was pretty,
so that even the colonel respected her.
And it was heard that the one who loved her so much said:
if Adelita were to leave with another man,
I’d follow her by land and see
if by sea, in a warship;
if by land, in a military train.
If Adelita wanted to be my wife,
if Adelita were my wife,
I’d buy her a silk dress
to take her to the barrack’s dance. (“La Adelita”)

Soldaderas or Adelitas were also immortalized in various ways other than corridos. In a painting of soldaderas for the magazine, *Los de Abajo (The Underdogs)*, for example, José Clemente Orozco portrays two soldaderas accompanying their men, carrying a child each on their backs as well as a bag of food and other ammunitions as shown in figure 5.
Similarly, in figure 6, the artist José Guadalupe Posada portrays a soldadera riding a horse with fierce determination and skill chasing down smaller figures fleeing in terror.

**Figure 5.** Clemente Orozco, José. Universidad de las Artes, Imágenes del Arte Mexicano; Colección INBA Acervo Museo de Arte Moderno, *Las soldaderas*, 1926; Web; 4 February, 2014. <www.aguascalientes.gob.mx/>.
Figure 6. Posada, José Guadalupe, *Calavera de la Adelita (soldadera)* 1900-1913; Escuela Nacional Ernesto Sábato, Buenos Aires; Web; 4 February, 2014. <http:www.oni.esuelas.edu.ar>.

The documentary photographs of the Casasola Collection, on the other hand, also communicate the sense of having been there, as the images are humane and depict everyday dimensions of life during wartime. This archive contains hundreds of images of displayed love and affection amongst soldaderas and male soldiers. This is the kind of strong love and loyalty depicted in most corridos about women at the time. For instance, in figure 7, an indigenous looking woman (soldadera) kisses the cheek of her lover in uniform with a chest full of ammunition. In the picture, the couple seems to be happy and sharing a special moment.
Similarly, another picture as shown in figure 8, shows a woman wearing a *rebozo* (traditional Mexican shawl) looking at her man with great pride while placing her hands on his shoulders with affection. The soldier, on the other hand, remains still, looking straight into the camera with an almost defiant look. Perhaps the look we associate with a real macho man, strong and convincing if only for the purpose of the image.
The Casasola Collection has been used by many authors interested in the Mexican Revolution or more specifically in soldaderas. Elena Poniatowska is a distinguished writer who published a commentary titled *Las Soldaderas: Women of the Mexican Revolution* in 1999. She included fifty images reproduced from this vast collection. On page 49 of Poniatowska’s commentary, there is one image; in particular, number 5670 that gave birth to the popular Adelita. The picture is provided in figure 9. This black and white image shows six women in long dresses; some with *rebozos* carrying baskets.
In this same photograph, there is one woman, however, who stands out from the others; she is standing on the stairs of the passenger car wagon while looking to her left side searching for something. In an article in the *Alquimia* magazine directed by José Antonio Rodríguez, Miguel Angel Morales confirmed the person behind one of the most emblematic photographs of the Mexican Revolution: La Adelita. He was referring to this woman standing on the stairs of the passenger car wagon.

In the newspaper *El Positivo: Periódico Cultural y de cosas buenas*, an article reveals that Jerónimo Hernández is the one who took this photograph, which was published for the first time on Monday, April 8, 1912 in the Maderista newspaper called *Nueva Era*. The article in the newspaper stated that on Saturday, April 6, the troops on orders from General Victoriano Huerta departed from Buena Vista station to Chihuahua. Huerta’s troops were on their way to fight General Pascual Orozco who had revolted against President Francisco I. Madero ("La Adelita, han identificado quién tomó la
fotografía"). The editor of the newspaper, however, inadvertently wrote underneath one of the three photos published in the article: Defenderé a mi Juan, (“I will defend my Juan”). Thus, he wrongly portrayed her as a female soldier without knowing that the woman photographed belonged to the kitchen-car wagon; that is, she was a cook and not a soldier.

The image was not widely disseminated until 1960, forty-eight years later, when it began to be reproduced in publications such as the Enciclopedia Gráfica de la Revolución Mexicana, Historia Gráfica de México del siglo XX, and in the commentary Las Soldaderas: Women of the Mexican Revolution by Poniatowska. This story of this photograph illustrates, unwittingly or not, how the image of “La Adelita” has evolved, by being manipulated to fit specific purposes, such as presenting a female cook as a soldier in some instances, or a female object of desire in others. That being said, these photographs of revolutionary women are of immeasurable historical importance: “If it was not for the photography of Agustín Casasola and Jorge Guerra, and countless rolls of celluloid by Salvador Toscano, we would know nothing about the soldaderas because history has not treated them kindly – in fact it has denigrated them” (Poniatwoska 27). The corridos in this sense tried to make up for the lack of recognition. Through songs, photography and art, La Adelita came to symbolize both a myth and the reality of women in the revolutionary war.

The appearance of La Adelita in corridos and simultaneously in documentary photographs constitutes the first stage in the evolution of the “soldadera” as a Mexican icon. In photography and corridos La Adelita has been portrayed not as the masculine female soldier but as an idealized and sexual icon to award men with an inspirational and
attractive companion who follows him wherever he goes and comforts him while he is in combat.

**Literature and Narrative: Nacha Ceniceros and Jesús Palancares**

The few women who did dare to write in these years (1920’s and 30’s) tended to stay away from the battlefields of the revolution, with the exception of Nellie Campobello, who witnessed first-hand the events of the revolution in the North of Mexico. *Cartucho (Cartridge)*, a collection of tales published in 1931, is considered a classic literary work of the Mexican Revolution, showing the Villistas in a favorable light at a time when most of the literature was criminalizing them.

In *Cartucho*, Campobello writes about a soldadera named Nacha Ceniceros. In this short story, she addresses her life, love, death and partisanship. To start, Nacha Ceniceros was “a *coronela* who carried a pistol and wore braids…and had an incredible skill, she could do anything a man could with his masculine strength” (21). Further, death is introduced in the story when Ceniceros accidentally killed colonel Gallardo, a man she was in love with. When the revolutionary leader Pancho Villa was notified that Gallardo was killed, he was shocked and replied: “Execute the man who did it,” not knowing he had been shot by a woman. This did not matter, Nacha Ceniceros “was executed subsequently by the firing squad’s volley” (21).

In the end, Nacha Ceniceros did not die, but this was “the version that was told for many years in the North of Mexico” (21) writes Campobello. Campobello ends the story on “Nacha Ceniceros” by praising her strength and determination. She also supports the Villistas’ faction by saying: “The curtain of lies against Villa, spread by organized groups
of slanderers and propagators of the black legend, will fall, just as will the bronze statues that have been erected with their contributions. Now I say –and I say it with the voice of someone who has known how to unravel lies, ¡Viva Nacha Ceniceros, Coronela de la revolución!” (22). These statements, as well as many others included in Cartuchito, express Campobello’s critical consciousness of the manner in which historical events are mythologized and distorted. The reason behind this is that she witnessed these war events that took place in Northern Mexico when she was only four years of age. Even though Campobello was one of the few women involved in the center of Mexico's intellectual groups of the time, her work was not really considered a novel, but rather a collection of intimate anecdotes and childhood memories (Linhard 83). To this day, she is considered the only female Mexican writer to have published narrations (semi-autobiographical) during the Mexican Revolution of 1910-1920.

According to Jorge Fornet, novels such as Cartuchito by Campobello, or any other women’s writing on the revolution faced tremendous obstacles in the 1920’s and 1930’s due to the “crisis of virility” of Mexican literature (qtd. in Linhard 83). Elena Poniatowska attributes these obstacles to machismo – discrimination, and further, points out that, Nelly Campobello continues to be the unknown author of two remarkable texts, Cartuchito and Las manos de mamá (My mother’s Hands), which never received their deserved recognition (Poniatowska, Las Soldaderas 36). The novel of the Mexican Revolution by Mariano Azuela published in serial form in 1915, Los de abajo (The Underdogs), on the other hand, “appeared to satisfy the necessary prerequisites for a national virile literature” (qtd. in Linhard 83) at the time.
*Hasta no verte Jesús mío* is a biographic novel by author Elena Poniatowska published in 1967, a year before the Tlatelolco Massacre of October 2, 1968. After endless evenings of interviewing, documenting and gathering information from a former soldadera, Jesús Palancares, Poniatowska ended up befriending the protagonist of her novel and dedicated it to her postmortem. An indigenous woman from humble beginnings, Jesús Palancares, goes through a much suffered life experiencing profound poverty, cruelty from the various step-mothers she had when her mother died at age five, and physical abuse. At age fifteen she joined the armed forces and married her abusive husband, who beat her repeatedly and was an officer during the revolution. The expertise of novelist-writer Poniatowska lies in portraying the visual and literary descriptions of the lives of the more deprived citizens such as Jesús Palancares. Through her numerous interviews with Jesús Palancares, Poniatowska was confronted with real poverty; her work seeks to give voice to women like Jesúsa, “to those ostensibly vanquished” women (Schuessler 127, 177). Jesúsa, the wife of Captain Pedro Aguilar, was an incredible woman who lived through both glory and defeat. As Poniatowska points out, “she knew the rails, the steady gunfire, the arguments between the ‘troublemaker soldaderas;’ she also experienced the glories of battle, taking out the enemy with a single shot. The bullets in the blue air exploded like little white balls, clouds of deafening smoke covered the sky and enlivened Jesúsa” (*Hasta no verte Jesús mío* xvii).

Among the various chapters from *Hasta no verte Jesús mío* some aspects stand out, such as how the Mexican forces divided up the companies: cavalry and infantry, and her suffering and violent life as a wife and widow. Each general would take the people who suited them the most based on their height; “if they were tall, they were cavalry; if
they were short they were infantry” (Poniatowska 91). Jesúsá narrates how brutal life was in the battlefield, she says: “the little ones, the young ones, didn’t understand how it worked, so they went out in front and were shot, end of story. They caught them like piglets being taken off to slaughter” (90). On the other hand, she further comments how much she loved the sound of battles, “because they sound so nice. You hear the first shots, but once the fighting gets going you don’t hear them anymore, you just see the smoke coming from the different places. Just remembering it made me want to go back to the Revolution” (213).

Jesúsá also recalls the violent episodes with her husband Pedro Aguilar: “Pedro beat me for everything” (96). He hit her and split her “head open.” As a result, she lost her “long wavy hair because of all the sores and blood” (95). She describes how she could not bathe or change and how her husband rejected her in every sense; he did not speak to her, thus, neither would any of his friend soldiers. “Even when I was alone,” she said, “I wasn’t allowed to have my head uncovered, because he would come and order: Cover yourself. I was a martyr” (96). While Pedro was alive, the soldier’s assistants to Pedro took care of Jesúsá. They bought her groceries and water, or whatever else she needed. Once her husband died, she lost all the privileges that came with being a married woman (131).

Despite her tumultuous and violent life on the battlefield with her husband, Jesúsá also knew what was best for her and knew when to take the opportunity to break free. When Pedro was killed, Jesúsá led the twenty-five soldiers as well as corporals, sergeants, lieutenants and the major to General Espinosa y Córdoba at Villa González. When General Espinosa y Córdoba saw that “she was in charge,” he said to her, “you
stay in command” (130). Courageously and blatantly she replied, “No señor, I’m not a soldier and they can’t name me commander.” Besides, “up in the north they grabbed women and abused them. She continued: “listen, I’m not here because I’m a soldier. I was following my husband even though I didn’t want to. The general said to her that he will not pay her. To his surprise, she replied: “Then don’t pay me … It should be my inheritance from my husband…. you can take the money and shove it wherever it fits; after all, it’s only toilet paper anyway” (131). This excerpt encompasses who Jesúsa Palancares really was: a brave and defiant woman who depicts both the camp follower soldadera, as well as a strong leader and an outspoken and independent woman. Despite her acute deprivations, she lived with dignity while paying her dues the best way she could; in the final years of her life she worked as a laundry maid among the many humble jobs she performed to survive. The autobiography speaks to the national consciousness of Mexico about the remembrance of the dispossessed. Nacha Ceniceros as portrayed in Cartucho, on the other hand, was a clear soldadera combatant, who “joined the revolution because Porfirio Diaz’s henchmen had assassinated her father” (Campobello 21).

As pointed out in Carlos Fuentes’ *Foreword* in Elena Poniatowska: An Intimate Biography by Michael Schuessler, there is no doubt that “Elena Poniatowska has contributed greatly toward giving women a unique position amidst the deprivation, prejudice, and exclusion in a world, which is still male-dominated” (x). Poniatowska gave that opportunity to Jesúsa, the same way Campobello did with Nacha Ceniceros. An example of this is the romanticized Coronela depicted in the popular film: Como agua para chocolate (Like Water for Chocolate) based on the novel published in 1989 by
acclaimed Mexican novelist Laura Esquivel. It is because of these intellectuals’ work that soldaderas continue to have a voice in contemporary literature today.

**On Film and in the Theater: Reinforcement and Evolution of the Soldadera’s Image**

Film and theater in the 1930’s, 40’s and 60’s helped to reinforce the image of the soldadera. As such, this reinforcement also contributes to her gradual evolution by featuring and highlighting distinctive characteristics of the soldadera. La Adelita, as depicted in the corridos, presented a more simplistic picture of soldaderas, a platonic image, an object of desire, an image of femininity and softness. However, films such as *La Negra Angustias* by Landeta (1949) emphasized other attributes in her, such as assertiveness and stoicism. The film *La Soldadera* by Bolaños (1966) emphasizes her characteristics as a camp follower. Hence, film brings a more multifaceted depiction of the soldadera. Josefina’s Niggli, in her 1936’s play titled *Soldadera: A Play of the Mexican Revolution* emphasized how different these women appear to be from one another (Niggli 157-192). It is important to note, however, that Niggli’s play is one of the first times that the image of the soldadera was used to reconstruct Mexican-American identity: the Mexican soldadera was taken outside of Mexico as represented by the courageous and virtuous soldaderas in the play. Not to mention that songs as “La Adelita,” were recorded as earlier as 1919 in New York followed by “Marijuana, La Soldadera” in 1929 in Los Angeles, CA, as stated before in the corridos and photography section. I will now turn the discussion to the films, *La Soldadera* and *La Negra Angustias*, followed by Niggli’s play.
La Soldadera (1966): A Camp Follower

This is a film by José Antonio Bolaños, who based his depiction on John Reed’s Elizabetta and Sergei Mikhailovich Eisenstein’s ideas about the soldaderas (Salas 100). Bolaños wanted to diversify the representation of soldadera, if only phenotypically speaking. The main character in the film is Lázara, who is portrayed by actress Silvia Pinal Hidalgo. Unlike the other indigenous looking soldaderas, Lázara is white and blonde. Lázara does not come from the lowest class but rather from a town and is expected to marry well and live in a nice house. She does not appear to be a full blooded Mexican Indian, but rather a mestizo (a person of mixed blood) or even a criollo (creole) (La Soldadera). As such, Bolaños’s intention is to accentuate the diversity that existed amongst soldaderas in terms of class as well as ethnicity.

In the film, Lázara’s new beloved husband is conscripted by government troops at the time of the Mexican Revolution, so she follows him. After the Federalist troops are defeated, she finds him dead on the battlefield. Alone now, she is captured by a revolutionary soldier who forces her to serve him and to be his concubine. As stated earlier, many women were kidnapped to serve the different factional armies and Lázara depicts one of those women taken by force. After this rebel dies, she joins yet another soldier who cares for her and her infant. In the film, Lázara “seems only to be going through the motions of living a very difficult life” while resisting hunger, turmoil, sadness and abuse (Salas 99-101).

As pointed out earlier and in accordance with the distinction Andrés Reséndez Fuentes makes based on Kelley and Macias, in this context, Lázara fits in the category of
the camp follower, which he calls “soldadera,” but not of the female soldier, who bears arms and often engages in combat (Kelley and Macias 142, 41). Lázara clearly depicts the camp follower in this film -- the woman who follows his man in tempestuous and dangerous realities, cooks, cares for him and gives him physical pleasure and company.

**La Negra Angustias (1949): A Female Soldier**

*La Negra Angustias*, from the novel of the same title by Francisco Rojas González (1944, 1999) and in the film directed by Matilde Landeta in 1949 depicts the Zapatista uprising in Southern Mexico during the revolution (Macias 73-75). The film centers on a female rebel combatant named Angustias, whose name significantly translates to “anguish,” and her struggles to overcome the sexual and racial barriers to her full participation in the fight for social justice. In the course of the film, Angustias becomes a well-respected revolutionary leader. It is important to note, however, that her tough demeanor did not develop overnight; rather it came from her difficult motherless upbringing, racial distinction, as she was a *mulata* or ‘creole’ and her gender.

During the revolution, it was customary for men to rob women and force them to serve them sexually. When a man tried to rape Angustias, in an attempt to defend herself she stabbed him to death without hesitation. This rape episode highlights one of the gender weaknesses that women in general confronted on a regular basis (*La Negra Angustias*). In the case of Angustias, her murderous action is particularly relevant, for her character not only confronts gender prejudice and abusive behavior from her opposite gender, but does so bravely and without hesitation by killing that man.
Angustias’s dual representation in the film is crucial for she not only depicts a true soldadera combatant, or rather a revolutionary serving as a colonel under Emiliano Zapata during the revolution, but is the epitome of feminist revenge. Both characterizations come directly from the climate the Mexican Revolution itself created. Angustias breaks with the status quo of what is expected from women’s role in society, such as marriage and subordination. In regards to women’s role in society, Simon de Beauvoir contends in *The Second Sex* that “reared by women within a feminine world, their normal destiny is marriage, which still means practically subordination to man” (xxxvi), an expectation that in the film Angustias utterly rejected with serious consequences: she was harassed by the villagers.

Once inspired by her revolutionary and vigorous ideals, Angustias understands that there are no limitations when compared with her fellow male revolutionaries. In fact, she proves herself to be tougher than men and smarter. According to Sheila Ruth in *Issues in Feminism*, sexism promotes the idea that women alone are beings that cannot think for themselves, they need a man, but men, on the other hand, are able to think of themselves without a woman. This is what famous feminist Simone De Beauvoir refers to as “the other sex” when referring to women because she “appears essentially to the male as a sexual being” only with no intellectual capabilities of her own (Ruth116). A woman then becomes “simply what man decrees, because man defines woman as relative to him” (116). According to De Beauvoir, “one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman. No biological, psychological, or economic fate determines the figure that the human female presents in society; it is civilization as a whole that produces this creature” (267). The civilization or whole humanity is male in De Beauvoir’s analysis.
Angustias in this sense, “was born a woman,” but instead of conforming to male societal rules in direct relation to her sex, the character chooses “to become a woman,” a highly, independent and strong woman shaped by the opportunities the Mexican Revolution brought to the country and to women like Angustias. As such, in this feminist light, Angustias reinvents herself and refuses to occupy a secondary place in the world in relation to men. A self-asserted Angustias also begins to comprehend the importance of education and hires a private tutor to learn how to read and write. She represents a genuine exception to the rule, particularly for the period, early twentieth century Mexico.

As stated earlier, according to Andrés Reséndez Fuentes, some of these soldaderas were camp followers and did not bear arms except in unusual circumstances and they very seldom engaged in combat, while others were female soldiers who set out to fight, such as Angustias (545 – 546). Although a fictional character, Angustias reflects historical reality: among the Mexican troops, some of these women soldiers were officers. One of these women might have been “Coronela María de la Luz Espinosa Barrera of Yautepec, Morelos, whose service record shows that she was on active duty as a Zapatista from 1910 to 1920” (Macias 72-73). She rose from soldado raso ‘private’ to colonel in Zapata’s army. This woman bears some resemblance to the character Angustias. Based on Andrés Reséndez Fuentes’s distinction between soldaderas and female soldiers, the main character of the film Angustias (María Elena Marqués) was indeed a female soldier.

There are interesting parallels between the real and the fictional characters. La Negra Angustias was a mulatto motherless child who grew up in poverty just as María de la Luz Espinosa Barrera, although the latter was not mulatto. In both cases, their
mothers died at their births. In both cases the father never remarried, and both women felt acutely the pain and loneliness of having to grow up without the nurturing of a mother. Both took care of goats in their childhood. In return, the goats would provide them the nurturing and companionship so desperately needed. They both rose to the rank of colonel during the revolution and both killed. Angustias killed a man to avoid being raped while María de la Luz Espinosa Barrera killed the woman who was having an affair with her husband (Macias 74).

**La Soldadera Crosses the United States Border: Josefina Niggli’s Play (1936)**

Josefina Niggli was a Southwestern artist born during the outbreak of the Mexican Revolution, July 13, 1910 in Hidalgo, Nuevo León, México. After the assassination of Mexican president Francisco y Madero in 1913, Niggli was sent to San Antonio, Texas to escape the violence of the revolution. In 1920, after living in San Antonio Texas for seven years, Niggli and her family returned to México. In 1925 she is sent again to San Antonio, this time to begin her high school and subsequent university education which led to her early creative writing publications and graduate studies (Niggli ix). She managed to attain great popularity in the 1930’s; despite the Great Depression that was taking place in the United States. In fact, she was the first dramatist of Mexican or Mexican-American descent to have published previously produced material (Arrizón 107). An example of these publications was *Lo mexicano* (Mexicanness), which provided colorful and vivid material regarding her own exile, that was subsequently used in plays. Among her various works is her play *Soldadera: A Play of the Mexican Revolution* (1936), which represents the struggle of women and their active participation in the Revolution (Niggli 160).
Just as the film director José Antonio Bolaños wanted to diversify the representation of the soldadera in his film bearing the same name, *La Soldadera*, Josefina Niggli also showed how different the soldaderas were from another in her play *Soldadera: A Play of the Mexican Revolution*. In this play she introduces seven female characters and only one male character. The female followers of Venustiano Carranza include: Concha, the leader, María, the guard; Cricket, the coquette; two older women named Tomasa, Adelita, the youngest and the blond, an ammunition guard (Niggli 157-192). As such, we see a depiction of soldadera that encompasses relevant opposing roles, giving the image of the revolutionary woman a more multifaceted interpretation. Even though the blonde in Niggli’s play is an ammunition guard and the blonde in Bolaños’s film is mainly portrayed as a camp follower, both wanted to accentuate the diversity that existed amongst soldaderas in terms of class as well as ethnicity.

It is interesting to note that Niggli’s work on her play represents a crucial moment in transnational identity politics: through Niggli’s play Mexico was taken outside of Mexico. In other words, throughout Niggli’s work, Mexico’s domestic history crosses the United States border with the presentation and further dissemination of the role played by Mexican female soldiers known as “soldaderas” to American audiences. Her play provided a contextual and political frame that contributed to the construction of Mexican-American identity.

During and after the Great Depression in the United States, a shift in population was experienced. Many Mexicans had been born on the United States soil and enjoyed American citizenship. These Mexicans living in the United States were, for the most part, rejected by the Anglos based on racial and cultural grounds. As a result, new ways
to combat discrimination and to attain social and economic mobility were sought via assimilation and Americanization. Various organizations emerged promoting assimilation into the Anglo-Saxon culture; one of them was the establishment of The League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) (Bernal and Martinelli 50-51). Middle class educated Mexican-Americans, such as Josefina Niggli might have found this constant discrimination humiliating and tried ways to proactively alleviate and further advance this political identity struggle.

To illustrate this search for political identity, Arrizón points out that Niggli “stages herself as one of these women [soldaderas]” (107). There is no doubt that the production of the play and the work as a whole was a way to demand her rights as a Mexican-American. In other words, it was a venue she found for “making herself heard by the Anglo majority, of making herself known and visible as an ethnic other” (Arrizón 99). Her eclectic aptitude and folkloric creativity colors her construction of Mexican-American identity.

The two films La Soldadera and La Negra Angustias reinforced the already existing image of the soldadera. The films used opposing points of view and brought in more nuances into their portrayal: one is black, while the other is blonde, one becomes a female soldier, the other a camp follower, one comes from the upper class, the other from the bottom and one is strong and savvy, while the other is passively going through the motions to survive a very difficult life. The play is very relevant for “it was the first theatrical representation, north or south of the border in the United States, of the participation of female soldiers in the Mexican Revolution” (Arrizón 98).
Modern Depictions of the Soldadera

In recent times, the soldadera has received more and more of an iconic status in México. While her image has been used for a variety of purposes that feature different aspects of her Mexican history, nowadays she is predominantly portrayed as the strong and courageous female soldier. Appropriations of images of soldaderas portrayed as female soldiers for political and/or cultural purposes are apparent in the Zapatista National Liberation Army (EZLN) poster of year 1993 on indigenous women’s rights, followed by the portrayal of soldaderas in a protest against the privatization of the oil industry in Mexico City led and organized by political leader Andrés Manuel López Obrador in the Spring of 2007. Last, another depiction with political purposes from 2010 is the Soldadera Unit, a part of the Mexican Army, which marched in a parade organized by the Mexican government.

Recovering the Historical Memory of the Soldaderas: Zapatista Revolutionary Law for Women Poster (1993)

The soldaderas have not only been the subject of study in popular culture and folklore but have also been used as political icons calling for indigenous women’s civil rights, as represented in the Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (EZLN, Zapatista National Liberation Army) poster in 1993, Chiapas, Mexico. The Zapatista Revolutionary Law for Women bilingual poster provided in figure 10 advocates for the rights of indigenous women. The laws for women are presented in both languages, English and Spanish, to create social consciousness amongst Hispanic and Anglo communities as well as to encourage participation.
The EZLN, a revolutionary leftist group most often referred to as the “Zapatistas,” is based in Chiapas, a southern state in Mexico. Their main spokesperson is “Sub-comandante Marcos” (Sub-commander Marcos). In his writings and speeches he relied on the legacy of Emiliano Zapata, a peasant hero from the Mexican Revolution, to do justice for the marginalized indigenous people. The roots of the struggle spring from a history of marginalization and racism to which the Mayan Indians have been subjected to. However, their “Declaration of War” and other statements and “communiques” encompassed the poor of all ethnic groups across the length and breadth of greater Mexico ("Revolt of the Rural Poor"). The following is a passage from the Zapatista National Liberation Army (EZLN) “Declaration from the Lacandón Jungle,” 1993:
We have nothing to lose, absolutely nothing, no decent roof over our heads, no land, no work, poor health, no food, no education, no right to freely and democratically choose our leaders, no independence from foreign interests, and no justice for ourselves or our children. But we say enough is enough! We are the descendants of those who truly built this nation, we are the millions of dispossessed, and we call upon all of our brethren to join our crusade, the only option to avoid dying of starvation! ("Revolt of the Rural Poor")

This declaration represents a crusade for the advancement of all those who live in complete marginalization and poverty. The declaration itself is, without a doubt, an ongoing call for survival and indigenous rights. Human rights are rights that a person or a group of people have, claim or exercise. Human rights are not privileges, and for this reason they must be asserted in most cases by force, such as the case of the indigenous Mayan peoples in Chiapas, Mexico. Micheline R. Ishay, states in her book, The History of Human Rights, that human rights “are rights held by individuals simply because they are part of the human species. They are rights shared equally by everyone regardless of sex, race, nationality, and economic background” (3). The question one must ask is, are human rights universal or culturally bound? “The invocation of cultural rights tends to occur when a specific group feels deprived of political, social and economic rights (Ishay 11).

In the case, of the poster Zapatista Revolutionary Law for Women, the photograph of the indigenous women with faces masked and armed with sticks depicts a community of militant women prepared to engage in armed struggle for their human and civil rights
precisely because they feel deprived. Even though their status is “regulated wholly or partially by their own [Mayan] customs or traditions,” they still lack the “full and effective enjoyment of … universal fundamental freedoms” (Ishay 312-313). To further extrapolate, this photograph of indigenous women as depicted as female soldiers (soldaderas) juxtaposed with the declaration of laws protecting women’s rights in the poster, encompasses three important considerations in terms of political representation and realism: 1) cultural rights: indigenous (Mayan) rights, 2) human rights: universal, and 3) women’s rights.

The declared rights together with the photograph convey a unified visual iconic message in the poster: soldaderas are ready to fight for their universal human rights and the rights of women including the right to participate in the [Zapatista] revolutionary struggle, to work, to receive a just salary, to decide the number of children they have, to access to primary health care for themselves and children, to education, to choose their partner with no obligation to marry, to be free of violence, the right to occupy positions of leadership in the organization, and finally, to hold military ranks in the revolutionary armed forces.

In comparison with the photographs of soldaderas from the Casasola Collection, the Zapatista poster shows some interesting similarities and differences in the way women are depicted. The poster measures 18 inches by 2 feet, incorporates political representations of Comandante Ramona along with approximately forty other female indigenous fighters armed with sticks, dressed in skirts, sandals, and some wearing tennis shoes. Their mouths are covered with handkerchiefs. In various pictures from the Casasola archive women are also armed, though it appears they carry fire arms.
(Poniatoska 65). Some of them are dressed in skirts, others wear pants. Soldaderas in the Casasola Archive wear sandals and boots mostly, and not the tennis shoes that the poster of EZLN portrays. Even though the photographs from the Casasola archive and the photograph used for the EZLN poster are about eighty three years apart from each other, the message is clear in both of them: “determination, unity and bravery” (La Botz).

**Recovering the Historical Memory of Las Soldaderas: Oil Protest of 2007**

It was April 27, 2007, when in Mexico City tens of thousands of demonstrators marched protesting the Pemex privatization in Paseo de la Reforma as shown in figure 11. A group of female fighters dressed as soldaderas took to the streets on this day with “their long skirts, broad sombreros, bandoleers strung across their chests, and toting .22 carbines” (Ross). According to press articles of the time, the women representing the Adelitas sang “we have arrived to defend our oil. Whoever wants to give it to the foreigners, will get the shit kicked out of him!” (Ross).

The Adelitas squad in this protest were supporters of the leftwing populist leader Andrés Manuel López Obrador (AMLO), who came together “after the stolen 2006 election in a seven-week sit-in that shut down the capital’s main thoroughfares” (Ross). Along with other Mexican nationals, the emblematic Adelitas’ main purpose was to paralyze legislative activities and to demand a national debate on president Calderon's plans to open up the nationalized petroleum corporation Pemex to transnational investment (Ross). Unlike previous sexually objectified representations of soldaderas, this time their depiction was that of politicized, outspoken, and self-defiant women.

The determination of the Adelita squad was witnessed and reported by a foreign journalist. It was very hot the day the protest took place, and when a U.S. reporter asked one of the Adelitas protesters if she was tired, the woman with the megaphone turned to her *compañeras* and asked them, "and Berta [one of them] came to her feet with a loud "No!" and said: "Sure the sun is hot but so what? The sun can't stop us, the rain can't stop us, the cold can't stop us and you know why? Because we are right! We are fighting for our oil and for our country. This is the resistance. We don't get tired" (Ross). These women representing the soldaderas in this protest seemed to integrate the spirit of the soldadera combatant of the revolution. Their dress and presence, along with Berta’s declarations, demonstrate that La Adelita, although in many instances she is shown as soft and sexually objectified, can also fit the brave and outspoken soldadera.

According to Tabea Alexa Linhard, the portrayal of La Adelita as a figure in Mexican popular culture by and large minimizes the challenges experienced by women in
the battlefield (44-45). Years later, however, La Adelita’s image has been appropriated to portray potential sites of resistance, not in the battlefield per se, but in public discourse and protest as is shown in the protest against the nationalization of Pemex. Today, the Adelita continues to be an icon of resistance in Mexican folklore, music, and culture.

**Recovering the Historical Memory of Las Soldaderas: Bicentenario (2010)**

There are times when it is worthwhile to celebrate victories, particularly the independence of a nation. This is an occasion to congregate, unite and parade as part of “the [common] beliefs, attitudes and predispositions that conform a [Mexican] political culture” (Robert A. Dahl 262-63). The Mexican people share a common birthplace, thus belonging to the same nation. As such, they also share the idea of the nation-state, “a sovereign, self-governing political unit that binds together and expresses the feelings and needs of a single nation” and its people (Ball and Dagger 14-15). In 2010, the nation of Mexico and its citizens proudly commemorated 200 years of independence from Spanish rule and 100 years of its revolution that began in 1910 with the overthrow of the Dictator Porfirio Díaz.

As part of the Mexican Bicentennial celebration that attracted foreign delegations from thirteen countries, the federal police also participated for the first time ever. As figure 12 shows, women dressed as soldaderas marched in the emblematic parade representing the nation-state. It is important to note that it has been customary for only the armed forces to parade during these festivities. Nevertheless, on this occasion various historical units and flags also participated (“Las fotos del Bicentenario”).
In regards to the parade including the soldaderas, it is probable that government money was invested in the actual elaboration of costumes, dressing and overall representation of these soldaderas. They uniformly wore beautiful and well ironed red, green and yellow skirts with white long sleeve shirts. The three alternating colors of their skirts were representative of the Mexican flag. They also carried high-velocity magazine rifles and wore the crossed bandoliers typically used by those who fought in one of the most brutal struggles of the early 20th Century (“Las fotos del Bicentenario”). This parade is the latest embodiment of soldaderas as publicly portrayed and representing the Mexican government.

Surely, there will be other forms of appropriation of soldaderas’ images in the years to come. Whether they are portrayed as strong and brave female soldiers used for political ends, or as beautiful and sensual objects of desire as portrayed by Mexican
popular culture, there is no doubt that the soldadera has become the stoic Mexican female icon of resistance and paradoxical sensuality.

To conclude, the image of the soldadera has its origins in the Mexican Revolution and it has evolved as a national icon of Mexican women in mainstream popular culture. Some of the original soldaderas joined the Mexican Revolution as a way to emancipate themselves from the constrained societal and moral regulations dictated by the Catholic Church. Whether voluntarily or not, many of these women joined and completely committed themselves to the cause, bravely risking their lives and the lives of their children. What is meant by a “soldadera,” however, is not always clear, as we have seen. For some intellectuals, who have explored and written on the topic of “soldaderas,” making a clear distinction can be challenging as they served as either female fighters, camp followers or both (Linhard 44).

The birth of La Adelita constitutes the first stage in the evolution of the soldadera’s image. The soldadera portrayed as La Adelita mainly emphasized feminine characteristics of beauty, self-sacrifice and pronounced objectification of desire. For instance, in the popular calendars produced annually in Mexico by Angel Martin, La Adelita’s image as paralleled with Mexican nationalism is shown with her voluptuous breasts supported by two cartridge belts; long lose hair accompanied by a beautiful face holding the Mexican flag in one hand, and a bugle in the other (Arrizón 108).

The image of the soldadera, also known as La Adelita, further solidifies when she is introduced to the media: film and play. In the films La Soldadera and La Negra Angustias, the directors use opposing points of view (soldier vs. camp follower), to bring
more nuances into their portrayal, thus her iconic status begins to emerge in a more multifaceted way, and not as simplistic as the romantic and sensual Adelita of the corridos and calendars. Although La Adelita is depicted as a sensual and beautiful Mexican icon such as the popular calendars produced annually in Mexico, in recent times, the evolution of the soldadera as a female icon of the Mexican Revolution acquires more and more a variety of political purposes that highlight different aspects of her history. Most significantly, in recent political discourse and events she is predominantly portrayed as the strong soldier woman. Surely, there will be other forms of appropriations of soldaderas’ images in the years to come. However, whereas they are portrayed in a range from the brave female fighter to the beautiful and sensual objects of desire, there is no doubt that she has become a solid national Mexican female icon of resistance and sensuality.

The play by Josefina Niggli is the first time the soldadera reaches even higher iconic status and is used to serve another purpose. In this case, the soldadera is used to strengthen and solidify the Mexican-American identity in the United States. As such, “with the birth of the Chicano movement in the 1960s, the name of La Adelita began to represent more of who the soldaderas really were,”--- brave female soldiers (Fernández 62). For better or worse, surely the Mexican iconic soldadera has made an impression in Mexico’s history. So great was her impression perhaps that her sensual yet emblematic image was introduced into Anglo audiences in the form of a theatrical play. In this way the soldadera served as a bridge of political culture that helped to “construct the emerging Mexican-American identity” of the time (Arrizón 107), calling perhaps for the inclusion and final recognition of Mexican American ‘otherness’ in the United States.
CHAPTER III
MILICIANAS

During the 1920s, discontent was spreading all throughout Spain. Indeed, the people were tired of the tyranny of the bourgeoisie, and the oppression of Primo de Rivera’s military dictatorship. He was in charge of launching *La Falange Española* (“Spanish Phalanx”), which was a Nationalist party inspired by fascism. Eventually, Primo de Rivera’s power started to fade and he resigned. King Alfonso XIII continued to govern under a monarchial regime; nonetheless, he lost popular support in the major cities in Spain. With no support, he did not have any other choice but to abdicate from his throne. Political instability and tremendous economic hardship were felt at every corner. Women, for their part, were invisible as they lived in utter marginalization in the domestic sphere they were “genetically” suited for. Women were considered to be *El Ángel del Hogar* (“The Angel of the Home”), an uncontested reality so engrained in the collective mind, particularly among men, which effectively perpetuated the inferiority of gender myths amongst women (Nash, “Uncontested” 28).

The arrival of the Second Republic in 1931 changed all that, and brought about the granting of fundamental rights to women, such as the right to vote and hold public office. Women took advantage of these changes and affiliated with groups that held radical philosophies “that called for the creation of a society that was organized along egalitarian principles” (Lines, *Milicianas* 39). Elections were called on January 7, 1936 and the popular front was elected. Opposing these republicanos (Republicans) were the so-called nacionalistas or falangistas (Nationalists, Phalangists), who were secretly planning a military coup d’etat. Civil war broke out and after four bloody years of
fighting (1935-1939), the revolutionary Republican forces were defeated, along with all the social and political advancements granted to women during the Second Republic. The resulting dictatorship of Francisco Franco dominated Spanish life from 1939 to 1975.

It was during the outbreak of the Civil War and the intense anachic-social revolution that the icon of the miliciana (Spanish woman combatant) emerged. Whether a myth or a reality, the miliciana was a woman who felt she could fight side by side with men and could endure the same harshness men experienced on the battlefields. They fought not only against fascism, but also against gender prejudice. This iconic miliciana, as represented in some of the images and initial propaganda that was used to recruit women to fight in the front lines, wore *el mono azul* (the blue overall) and carried a rifle (Lines 154-55). In some instances, she also wore a military cap. *El mono azul* was quite significant, as it was a blue overall that was essentially a military uniform. It signified workers’ pride and freedom, and linked them to Communist and Anarchist ideologies.

In photographs, however, they were often misrepresented. For instance, they were photographed “wearing shirts, skirts and high heels” and shown without weapons (Lines 154). Even though they appeared to be in combat action, the truth was that they were only posing for the camera. Interestingly enough, while these photographs emphasized their beauty and youth, these women were not necessarily glamourized since they were also shown performing domestic chores. Milicianas were also known as, *republicanas, rojas, libertarias, comunistas ó anarquistas* (Republicans, Reds, Libertarians, Communists or Anarchists), depending on the organization they were affiliated with. They played an important role in Spanish history, a role that remained repressed for about forty years.
Franco’s death in 1975 presaged the end of his dictatorial regime, and presented an opportunity to break with its oppression. Representatives of the political spectrum of all sides, however, agreed that in order for the country to have a future and to establish a true democracy, it was necessary to break completely with the past. This meant a complete eradication of all ties with the past, and the agreement was to adhere to a pact of silence and forgetting. For this reason, collective efforts to confront this violent heritage were followed by the appearance in the mid-1980s of various novels and films that represented the Civil War. Furthermore, in the 1990’s, the increase in interest about the Civil War era and the fate of the Republicans also helped to create a “memory boom.” This “memory boom” in Spain has resulted in the publication of a large number of testimonies and also led to the passage of the Law of Historical Memory in 2007 (Boyd 144). Consequently, depictions of milicianas made their late entrance in the 1990’s, in films like Libertarias, also known as Juegos de Guerra (Libertarians or War Games; 1996), and in literary narratives such as the La voz dormida (The Sleeping Voice) by Dulce Chacón published in 2002, whose main function was to engage in the transmission of historical memory of women and milicianas. As the memory boom in Spain and the ongoing debate is relatively recent, it has mainly dealt with the vindication of Los vencidos (“The defeated Republicans”) and the victims of the Republican left in the Civil War. As of yet, it has been difficult for the miliciana to become a national symbol of Spanish women.

This chapter will examine how and why the image of the miliciana has evolved in past and contemporary representations, and to explain why she was not able to fit specific political, governmental or other purposes in recent years as did the soldaderas in Mexico.
This chapter approaches her evolution and contributions mainly through her early appearance in the Spanish Civil War and social revolution in *romanceros* (a collection of Spanish poems also sang as ballads), photography, film, literature and, ultimately, the influence this image had on the formation of the national identity in Spain.

**Milicianas in the Spanish Civil War: Historical Background (1930 – 1936)**

In order to understand what brought the emergence of the iconic miliciana and her role during the bloody Spanish Civil War, one must have an understanding of the complex historical background that surrounded her. In 1930, six years before the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War in July 1936, Spain had experienced tremendous political unrest. The overall climate for women was harsh, and Spain was considered “one of Europe’s most backwards societies and polities” (Graham 101).

Only a small number of women were active in the workforce. According to Eduardo Palomar Baró in his article “Las milicianas en la Guerra Civil Española,” women who worked constituted only 24% of the total population, and 80% of them were single and widows (1). Women worker’s rights were seemingly non-existent. Besides, women’s minimum salaries were well below men’s. The climate they lived in prior to the arrival of the Second Republic was highly patriarchal. This is why women had no voice and often needed their husbands’ authorization to work. In the case of the woman who worked, her husband was entitled to her partial or complete paid salary, even when they were legally separated. Thus, women lived practically disenfranchised.
The Second Republic, Spanish Civil War and Social Revolution

On February 1936 a progressive popular front government was elected. Later that month, the opposition planned a military coup d'état to overthrow the progressive government already elected. The “pronunciamiento,” Franco’s military coup as it is known in Spanish, came from the Unión Militar Española (Military Union of Spain, UMA). The coup d’état began in Morocco on July 17 of the same year and the next day in Spain. The planners of the well-coordinated “pronunciamiento” expected it to be quick and successful. To their surprise, however, the people took arms up to defend their progressive Republican government. Because of their resistance, the Nationalists were not able to occupy Madrid and Barcelona. Since the Republican government controlled most of the navy forces, the best troops from North Africa were not able to be transported and reach Spanish soil.

After the Nationalists’ pleas for help, Adolf Hitler “sent twenty Junker Ju-52 planes to transport [Francisco] Franco’s troops across the Straits of Gibraltar” (Jackson 50). After much blood spilled, in the end, the revolutionary Republican forces were defeated, and along with the demise of the Second Republic, all the political and social advancements that women were granted disappeared. The defeat was due in part to the conflicting ideologies from the various left-wing Anarchist, Communist and Socialist organizations. What would follow after the defeat in 1939, were thirty-six long years of brutal dictatorship; Francoist Spain forced women to return to the domestic sphere (Martín Moruno 6).
It is important to note, however, that before the Civil War (1936-1939) and the planned military coup d'état to overthrow the progressive government, Spain experienced tremendous positive changes upon the arrival of the Second Republic in 1931. This progressive government granted far reaching rights to women via constitutional and legislative reform. This was an ambitious call coming from the Republican ideology and the Spanish Socialist party, whose main objective was to modernize Spain as a whole, addressing political, economic, social, and cultural issues all at once (Graham 100). This far-reaching platform served to spur the creation of an innovative Constitution (December 1931) which granted fundamental rights to women, such as the right to vote and hold public positions.

In 1932, liberal legislation was passed pertaining to marriage and divorce laws, which constituted Europe’s most progressive laws at the time. With this new legislation, mutual consent of both parties, men and women, was required for divorce to take place; moreover, women were granted sole parental custody of children (Palomar Baró 1). The right to abortion was granted four years later in 1936. Unimaginable changes were coming forward in a country that had lived under a clerical military dictatorship up until 1930 and where women were practically invisible in every single aspect. As Helen Graham points out, “in astonishingly short time, in one of Europe’s most backwards societies and polities women became the legal equals of men” (101).

The right to vote, in fact, boosted the confidence and increased the participation of the Spanish women in the political arena. Women’s affiliations prior to the Second Republic were limited to Catholic labor unions only (Palomar Baró 1); however, women’s division of labor unions were also created which, by and large, held principles
of anarchism and anarcho-syndicalism (Lines 39). These philosophies were deeply revolutionary and very much present in the Republican zone in Spain. Among some of the organizations that women joined were *Mujeres Libres* (Free Women, ML), inspired by libertarian ideas but organizationally independent of the *Confederación Nacional del Trabajo* (National Worker’s Confederacy, CNT), *Partido Obrero de Unificación Marxista* (Worker’s Party of the Marxist Unification, POUM), *Unión de Mujeres Antifascistas* (Antifascist Women’s Union, UMA), which were against war and fascism, also known later as *Pro Infancia Obrera* or UMA, *Juventudes Socialistas Unificadas* (United Socialist Youth, JSU), *Partido Comunista de España* (Communist Party of Spain, PCE), *Partido Socialista Obrero Español* (Spanish Socialist Worker’s Party, PSOE), *Círculo Socialista del Oeste* (West Socialist Circle, CSO) and *Unión General de Trabajadores* (General Workers’ Union, UGT) (Palomar Baró and Lines 2, 171-177).

According to Lisa Lines on her book, *Milicianas: Women in Combat in the Spanish Civil War*, the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War in July 1936 was the apex of many years of political turmoil and intolerable religious conformity in Spain. Besides, at the same time the Civil War was taking place, a profound social revolution emerged within “the countryside of Republican Spain” (38). The abuse suffered at the hands of employees and the oppression of the Church were no longer bearable (38). As a result, the oppressed took arms and revolted against the economic and social systems and demanded change. The revolt was extensive: “churches were burned and used for other purposes, people stopped wearing business shirts, hats, ties or any other forms of dress that were identified as bourgeois” (Orwell 70). The social revolution that took place in “the Republican zone,” in conjunction with the Spanish Civil War, created a favorable
situation for women that brought with it the emergence of the iconic miliciana (39). The process of change was quite dynamic and allowed women to develop the confidence and motivation to work and to join the militia forces, thus fitting into new roles that previously were inaccessible to them (Palomar Baró and Lines, 3, 42-43).

**Milicianas: Front Line Combatants and Non-Combatants**

As stated earlier, “the combat role played by militia women” purported a shift in feminine gender roles that was transpiring in the Republican zone as a result of both the Spanish Civil War and the social revolution of 1936 (Lines, 168). During those years, Spain was divided roughly in two, those who supported and wanted to restore or preserve the Second Republic (left wing), the Republicans, and those who favored fascism, *nacionalistas*, ‘the Nationalist’ (right wing). Women’s decisions to aid the war effort were mainly to defend the progressive political and social rights acquired during the Second Republic and to fight against fascism (Encarna11-14). Milicianas took roles as either “front liners” or “rearguarders” and were also referred to as *republicanas, rojas or libertarias* (Republicans, Reds or Libertarians). There are distinctions between the milicianas who fought on the front lines and the milicianas who were assigned to the rearguard. Lisa Lines, in her article “Female Combatants in the Spanish Civil War: Milicianas on the Front Lines and in the Rearguard,” provides a clear distinction:

Front line milicianas were with few exceptions integrated into the Republican fighting force as members of mixed-gender battalions. In contrast, the milicianas in the rearguard were largely organized into women-only battalions. A further difference is that front line combatants
moved around Spain depending on the needs of the conflict, whereas
milicianas of the rearguard remained living in their homes. Women’s
battalions in the rearguard played a defensive role and participated in
combat only when the battle came to their cities and towns. There is little
evidence of movement of women between the front lines and rearguard.

(168-69)

One of the first waves of women who joined as combatants within the first days
of the war was the Anarchists from the UGT and POUM (Palomar Baró 3). Many of
these women simply saw taking up arms as an immediate response to fascist oppression,
just as men did (Nash, “Women in War” 273). According to the following interview
there was no division of labor. An interview with Anarchist milicana Concha Pérez
Collado by Lisa Lines sheds light on this:

Look, exactly what the men did, well that’s what we women did. At any
rate, look, because we were women we always took on some extra work,
like cleaning more or cooking something. But then we stood guard
equally with the men. When there was the attack at Belchite, we went into
the attack equally with the men. We did what we humanly could; some of
us [women] were stronger than others, same as the men. (Marín 356)

An article published in one of the POUM’s columns further reiterates Pérez
Collado’s testimony. According to the column based on an account of Captain Mika
Etchebéhére, there was no gender division of labor; that is, both men and women
participated in combat equally (Lines 171). Captain Mika Etchebéhére was another
miliciana, a young Argentinian married to Hippolyte Etchebéhére who died soon after taking charge of the militia troops. As a result, brave and young Mika took charge of the militia troops and led them with certainty and determination. The following is a phrase that embodies the commitment she had towards her fellow male comrades as well as her astonishing war endurance: “Los protejo y me protegen. Son mis hijos y al mismo tiempo son mi padre. Les preocupa lo poco que como y lo poco que duermo y, a la vez, encuentran milagroso que resista tanto o más que ellos los rigores de la guerra” (“I protect them and they protect me. They are my children and at the same time they all are my father. They are worried for how little I eat or sleep, yet, at the same time they find miraculous the fact that I am able to resist the harshness of war as much or even more than they do”; Portela).

There were many other remarkable miliciana combatants like Mika Etchebéhére, who also became famous and endured war side by side with their male comrades. Examples include Lina Odena, Rosario Sánchez Mora, Dolores Ibárruri, the Basque Casilda Méndez, María Martínez Sorroche, Libertad Ródenas, Julia Manzanal Pérez, Comandante Chico ‘Small Commander’ and Margarita Fuente (Palomar Baró 3). In figure 13 below, a photo from Etchebéhére is provided. The woman in the picture strikes a pose that is both serious and determined. She stares directly into the camera and does not smile; her look is almost defiant. Her attire is not particularly feminine, but is military. Though the belt is military, it emphasizes her small waist denoting her femininity. The pistol might suggest that she is an officer. She clearly appears to be a young female, yet displays a tough and masculine attitude.
Milicianas who were in the front lines also performed many auxiliary tasks, including but not limited to cooking, cleaning, doing laundry, sanitary services, caring for the wounded and political work. In some cases these tasks were carried out by both men and women equally, according to Concha Pérez Collado’s testimony. In other instances, however, women tended to do more in the domestic role. Overall, women “suffered [a] double burden” as it was “expected from them to complete [domestic] chores as well as fulfilling the same combat duties as the men” (Lines, “Female Combatants” 180). As a result, these women were constantly exhausted as they were serving as combatants, on the one hand, and as auxiliary support forces on the other. To clearly make a distinction and determine exactly which women were strictly combatants and which were strictly auxiliaries can be difficult. Gender prejudice was also prevalent for all milicianas involved, of course in some columns more than others. For instance, in the *Pasionaria* Column, two milicianas complained that men would restrain their combat appearances in
the battlefield by not providing them with guns because they were women and could aid with the domestic chores (181).

Milicianas in the Rearguard, as Lines points out in her article, “were armed, trained and prepared for combat although not all participated in some form of combat during the civil war” (183). These milicianas, and their contributions, are often overlooked in historiography. The women of the rearguard outnumbered those in the front lines. The milicianas in the rearguard were stationed in their homes and cities and were expected to defend them when deemed necessary. For instance, the “Lina Odena Battalion in Madrid was formed soon after the war began, with the purpose of providing military training for women in the rearguard” (184). Thus, it can be said that these milicianas in the rearguard demonstrated unequivocally that the participation of women in the military was not only openly accepted but also became part of the everyday life in the Republican zone (183).

Even though, as Lines points out, women in the military became somewhat part of the everyday life in the Republican zone, women were still subjected to the stigma of their gender. Despite the progressive rhetoric used by left-wing organizations all along, women were still considered to be inferior beings in contrast to men. In her article, “Uncontested Identities: Motherhood, Sex Reform and the Modernization of Gender Identity in Early Twentieth-Century Spain,” Mary Nash points out this aspect of domesticity in women. That is, “the notion that women were inferior to men, [which by and large] tended to prevail in the collective mentality of this period” (27). *El Ángel del Hogar* (“The Angel of the House”) a familiar trope in Western culture, became the common representation of Spanish women (28). With this mentality still engrained in the
collective mind of men, it was not surprising to see coercive policies implemented to persuade milicianas to leave the front lines. Mary Nash quotes Scanlon in her article, “Women in War: Milicianas and Armed Combat in Revolutionary Spain, 1936-1939” and gives credence on how Largo Caballero persuaded milicianas to leave the front lines: He, in fact, “ordered a military disposition ordering women to withdraw from the militia” (276). The Catalan Communist Party even used the slogan “Men to the War Fronts,” “Women to the Home Front;” a strong message to encourage women to abandon the front lines because their skills, they said, would be more useful at home (277). Following is an excerpt from a speech made by a Communist spokesman that gives light to this gender discrimination:

We must acknowledge the merit of those brave girls, who in the flower of youth offered their lives in defense of freedom; but we must not forget that in order to assist an operator who is trying to save life in serious danger, a certain degree of knowledge and preparation is necessary, which unfortunately, not all women possess. And that is the reason why, despite the enthusiasm these beautiful milicianas have, they are of little use on many occasions in the barracks or at the hospitals. (qtd. In Nash 277. “A les dones de Catalunya: Organitzem els Groups de Reraguarda! ” Treball, 12 Sept. 1936)

As expected, various milicianas abandoned the front as instructed because they truly thought that their skills were going to be more useful at home; others continued to participate as rearguards and only provided domestic services to the Column, but others did not. To the contrary, some milicianas adamantly requested to stay in their role as
combatants. Milicianas Manuela and Nati can attest to this. In the following excerpt, Manuela asked the Etchehébere’s column to accept them, as they were not satisfied with work in the unit they belonged to, the Pasionaria’s Column. Manuela started her speech by introducing herself and saying: “My name is Manuela …I’m from the Pasionaria Column, but I rather stay here with you all. They never wanted to give guns to the girls. We were only good for washing dishes and clothes. Our quarter is empty. Most of the militia fights elsewhere. The others are helping Martínez de Aragón to defend the cathedral, they say. The captain wants all the girls to leave Sigüenza.” To which, one of the Etchehébere’s militia men responded: “Then why haven’t you left?” Manuela responded: “Because we want to help.” “My friend whose name is Nati, also wants to stay with you” (Etchehébere 73). However, initially, they were rejected on claims that they did not know how to use a gun. To this, Nati responded: “Yes we do [know how to use a gun], we can even dismantle it, grease it, everything …We can also fill the cartridges with dynamite… but if you won’t give us a gun, let us at least stay to cook and clean; this floor is very dirty.” After hearing this, Manuela interjected immediately and said: “That, we won’t do. I have heard it said that in your column the milicianas have the same rights as the men, and they don’t [just] wash clothes or dishes.” Manuela proceeded by saying: “I did not come to the front to die for the revolution with a dish cloth in my hand” (Etchehébere 74). The Etchehébere militia column applauded after hearing this and both women were allowed to join the column.

Milicianas in the front lines and milicianas in the rearguard played a pivotal role in the revolution and the Civil War as a whole. Their sole feminine presence in the barricades was already considered revolutionary. Most of these women joined to defend
political and social rights acquired during the Second Republic, and to defeat fascism. The role played by miliciana combatants in the front lines has great significance as it purported a change in gender roles that occurred in the Republican zone, and that had never been seen before. Both men and women were mingled to fight against fascism on equal terms and were armed, trained and prepared for combat even though not all of them participated as combatants (Lines 168, 183). They also became iconic visual symbols of heroines depicting strength and liberty, as the propaganda showed initially. Nevertheless, much propaganda was dedicated to deterring their acquired prestige. They were humiliated by stating that they lacked the necessary preparation in the battlefield and, worst of all, they were linked to whores (Palomar Baró 5).

Polarized images have some truth in them and, naturally, they can also be misleading. This was the case of the miliciana’s image as she struggled to fit into the contradictory versions of her own gender: on one side was tradition, and “a revolutionary new woman” on the other (Lannon 218). The representation of the miliciana in photography and other propaganda venues is worth examining. Thus, the next section will address gender imagery and romanceros.

**Romanceros, Photography, and Poster Art: Representation of the Heroines of the Republican Left**

The appearance of milicianas in romanceros and photography wearing their emblematic *mono azul* uniform (blue overall) constitutes the first stage in the evolution of the miliciana’s image as a Spanish icon. One of the salient characteristics during the Second Republic was the intensity and urgent call embedded in its political platform. In
the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War, the combination of new ideals along with the enormous emotional effect caused primarily by the Republican resistance created “una atmósfera de exaltación épica que tuvo, como era inevitable, sus reflejos sobre la poesía” (“an elated epic climate that inevitably was reflected in poetry”; Mayone Dias, 433). Artists would write poems on the trenches, during combat recess, or even in cities that were bombarded on a regular basis. Poetry was created under great tension and pressure, whether on the front lines or in the rearguard. In other words, these poems were considered works of the moment and thus began their publication in pamphlets which were later disseminated on the radio, in theater and film, and also sung by the blind on the streets and plazas of Madrid (Mayone Dias 433-34).

The wartime publications and ballads created in the spirit of the Republican resistance are known as romanceros. Romancero is a Spanish term that encompasses a collection of Spanish romances (poems) also sang as ballads that gave voice to the struggles presented in the Spanish Civil War. Various milicianas reached the status of heroines during the war; poems were written and ballads were sung on their behalf describing their bravery and sacrifice in the front lines, among them were: Rosario Sánchez Mora, known as “Rosario Dinamitera” (“Rosario Dynamiter”), who lost a limb in a training exercise and Lina Odena, who died in combat.

María Teresa León and the famous poet Rafael Alberti, created a wartime political publication targeting the popular miliciana combatants called El Mono Azul (The Blue Overall) (León, Memoria 285-87). El Mono Azul was “a pamphlet that aim[ed] to bring to and from the front the clear and lively meaning of [the] antifascist struggle” (“una hoja volandera que quiere llevar a los frentes y traer de ellos el sentido claro, vivaz
y fuerte de nuestra lucha antifascista”; Linhard 77). *El Mono Azul* became one of the most famous publications and all Republican artists were encouraged to send their poems; nonetheless, most of the poems were signed by famous poets such as Miguel Hernández, Lorenzo Varela, Ramos Gascón, José Pla y Bertrán, Eugenio Sastre and others lesser known poets who remained anonymous.

The images of Rosario Sánchez Mora and Lina Odena are vivid examples of milicianas as combatants in the front lines. Their representation in poetry addressed the myth and romance of their existence and subsequent heroic sacrifice. Rosario Sánchez Mora was a young miliciana member of the JSU (United Socialist Youth, JSU), who decided to join the front lines. During a training exercise, she lost a limb. Miguel Hernández met her and was inspired to write a poem in 1937 titled, “Rosario, Dinamitera” (“Rosario, Dynamiter”). The poem exalts the Spanish women’s bravery and sacrifice displayed in war and was subsequently published in the *Romancero de la Resistencia española*, a collection of poetry and ballads from the Spanish resistance:

Rosario, dinamitera,

sobre tu mano bonita

celaba la dinamita

sus atributos de fiera.

Nadie al mirarla creyera

que había en su corazón

una desesperación,

de cristales, de metralla
ansiosa de una batalla,

sedienta de una explosión.

Era tu mano derecha,

capaz de fundir leones,

la flor de las municiones

y el anhelo de la mecha.

Rosario, buena cosecha,

alta como un campanario

sembrabas al adversario

de dinamita furiosa

y era tu mano una rosa

enfurecida, Rosario.

Buitrago ha sido testigo

de la condición de rayo

de las hazañas que callo

y de la mano que digo.

¡Bien conoció el enemigo

la mano de esta doncella,

que hoy no es mano porque de ella,

que ni un solo dedo agita,

se prendió la dinamita
y la convirtió en estrella!

Rosario, dinamitera,
puedes ser varón y eres
la nata de las mujeres,
la espuma de la trinchera.
Digna como una bandera
de triunfos y resplandores,
dinamiteros pastores,
vedla agitando su aliento
y dad las bombas al viento
del alma de los traidores. (Puccini 93-4).

Rosario, dynamiter,
above your beautiful hand
dynamite was concealed
and the furious attributes.
No one by seeing her would have ever believed
what remained in her heart
a desperation,
of crystals, grapeshot
anxious of a battle,
with thirst of an explosion.
It was your right hand side,
capable of melt lions,
the flower of the ammunitions
and the yearning wick.
Rosario, good harvest,
tall as the bell tower
strew the adversary
of furious dynamite
and was your hand a rose
enraged, Rosario.
Buitrago have been witness
of the lightning condition
of the great deed fallen
and the hand I say.
The enemy knew well
the hand of this maiden,
that is no longer a hand,
because without moving a single finger,
it ignited the dynamite
and made her a star!
Rosario, dynamiter,
you could be a man and you are
the cream of women,
the foam of the trench.
Dignified as a flag
of victory and radiance,
dynamite shepherds,
seeing her beating breath
and give the bombs to the wind
to the traitors’ souls.

There are many recitals and versions of songs based on this poem. Some of them are songs by José Luis García, while another version is a song by Vicente Monera (García and Monera). The poems and songs pay homage to Republican women fighters and their sacrifice.

Lina Odena, was yet another heroine celebrated in the romancero tradition, Odena was a young Communist miliciana leader between nineteen and twenty years of age, who died on the battlefields of Granada. She took her own life with the last remaining bullet she had in her weapon to avoid enemy capture. In the “Romance a Lina Odena” (“Ballad for Lina Odena”) Eugenio Sastre wrote: "Ella misma se mató, / no consintió que salvajes, / mancharan su honor en vida, / y su cuerpo apuñalasen" (“She killed herself, / she did not allow the savages to taint her honor while alive, / nor did she consent for her body to be stabbed”; Fuentes 18). Furthermore, Eugenio Sastre also emphasizes Odena’s honor: “Una mujer de coraje, / que supo morir de honra, / antes que
vivir cobarde” (“A courageous woman, / who knows how to die with honor, / before living like a coward”; Linhard 123). In the poem by Ramos Gascón, he emphasizes Odena’s feminine attributes but also her commander’s uniform:

Ojos del viento te ven
el correaje de nácar,
tu traje de comandante
y tu camisa bordada,
y lágrimas de rocío,
refrescaban tu garganta. (Fuentes 18)
The eyes of the wind,
straps of nacre,
your commander’s uniform,
your embroidered shirt,
and misty tears,
streamed down your neck.

In the romance written by Lorenzo Varela, Lina Odena becomes a protector of liberty, mothers, brides and a defender of the land:

Tú caíste, Lina Odena,
pero no tus libertades.
que de Málaga a Granada,
tierra, trigos y olivares,
y las novias y las madres
no temen ya a criminales (123).

You fell, Lina Odena,
but not your liberties.

from Málaga to Granada,
land, wheat and olive fields,
and the brides and the mothers
no longer fear the criminals (Linhard 123).

Romanceros constituted a thriving popular culture that mirrored the political
happenings in Spain. However, in addition to romanceros, the Spanish Civil War created
a new discourse relating to women that “took a dramatic international character.”
Consequently, this event was widely photographed by the international and Spanish press
(Lines, Milicianas 152).

The miliciana’s iconic role was a subject of discussion on the radio, newspapers
and magazines, in meetings of political and women’s groups and conferences (Lines 38).
International newspapers like the French Regards and the British The Daily Herald took
note of the milicianas provoking debates pertaining their role during war time and their
depictions (Martín Moruno 7). For instance, in Reynolds ’ News on July 26, 1936,
Spanish women were compared to the figure of the ‘Amazón,’ as the title read: “The
Spanish Amazons in the Thick of the Fight” (Brothers 83). The word ‘Amazón,’
according to Douglas Harper’s Online Etymological Dictionary, originates from the
Greek term that signifies “one of a race of female warrior in Scythia.” The word derived
from “*a, without + mazos, breasts,*” thus, ‘Amazon’ means “women without breasts,” a reference to women archers who would mutilate themselves to be better warriors. The milicianas or women in the military depicted as ‘Amazons,’ carried a unisex symbol in the British opinion, which broke with “gender roles because they refused their role as mothers in order to fight against a male enemy” (Martín Moruno 8).

The Spanish press also took notice of these revolutionary women who enlisted in the front lines and “appeared as an image most commonly identified with the figure of the miliciana” (Lines, *Milicianas* 152). Key newspapers from the left wing political and Independent press photographed them and were utterly similar in terms of dress code and pose; however, some distinctions became prevalent particularly in contrast to how *milicianos* (“male soldiers”) were depicted or photographed. For instance, in some images, milicianas were photographed when they engaged in combat and were firing their weapon (Lines 152). In others, however, they are posing for the camera. The similarities were that most of them wore *el mono azul* (the blue overall, sometimes they wore overalls as in figure 14), a uniform that was essentially military (and which signified the worker’s pride and freedom), and that they carried a rifle. In some instances, they also wore a military cap.

Despite the fact that the blue overall was in some sense a masculine outfit, Patricia Greene and Mary Nash have argued that these posters [and photographs] were, for the most part, presented to a male audience. For this reason, they had the tendency to highlight the milicianas’ attractiveness (Linhard 52) more than their skills. Figure 14 below shows a recruitment poster of a miliciana holding a rifle on her side wearing the blue overall. According to Linhard in her book *Fearless Women in the Mexican
Revolution and the Spanish Civil War, “this eroticized figure proclaims in Catalan: “Les milicies us necessiten” (The militias need you), yet, the militias, pictured in the background of the poster, consist only of male soldiers, sternly marching into battle” (52).


Images may be interpreted with various meanings and are able to tell powerful stories. The task of evaluating images or photographs, however, is challenging because it tends to be fairly subjective. Author Lisa Lines engaged precisely with the task of evaluating the representation of milicianas in various newspapers, magazines and articles from the first twelve months of the Spanish Civil War and did it with great detail and sophistication.

In her book *Milicianas: Women in Combat in the Spanish Civil War*, Lines examined the Communist, Anarchist, Socialist and Independent press to evaluate the
biased gender role for women as represented in photographs and propaganda of and about milicianas. After carefully observing, comparing and contrasting all of the photographs, illustrations, posters and articles included in their respective newspapers and magazines from each press, Lines draws interesting conclusions regarding the overall representation of the milicianas during the first year of the Spanish Civil War.

The Communist press for instance, featured twenty-eight photographs of milicianas in the daily newspaper *Mundo Obrero*. It appears that the intention of some of these photographs was to show women engaged in a military training (154). She points out that when a group of male soldiers is undertaking military training, which includes instruction on how to use a weapon, the image of men training includes the appropriate attire: militia uniforms and boots, appropriate weapons, but also arms, rifles and/or muskets and some sort of sobriety. Nonetheless, with the depictions of women in training, “in five of the seven photographs, these women are pictured wearing shirts, skirts and high heels” (154). Furthermore, in five other photographs the women are shown with no weapons. Is it possible to receive the appropriate training and learn how to use a weapon without having one? The answer is obvious. Just as a piano student needs a piano to learn how to play it, a soldier needs his weapon to learn how to use it at any given military training. Despite this fact, the intentions of the press might have been good in nature. One can only wonder what the viewers thought about those miliciana photographs in skirts and high heels with captions next to them reading “milicianas undertaking military training.” According to Lines, “the emphasis of these photographs is clearly not on the battle-readiness of these women. Rather, the traditional appearance of the women is emphasized, and these photographs represent women adhering to their
traditional gender role” (154). And, the traditional gender role in this case is to overly stress their feminine features to the point of ridicule. An example of this is shown below in figure 15: a widely popular photo that displays a miliciana posing for the camera wearing high heels and an attire slightly different than the blue overall or military uniform, and she wears no cap. In contrast, photographs of men aiming their guns during combat while wearing a suit and a tie as well as formal shoes are not shown in any of the aforementioned press (154).

![Miliciana posing for the camera.](https://www.facebook.com/pages/Lucha-por-la-Memoria-Hist.)

As shown in figure 15, another important feature found in these photographs is the posing. Pictures of Republican milicianas in Mundo Obrero “appeared to have been staged” (155), as such, they are standing still and directly facing the camera and smiling widely, with most of them showing their teeth” (155). One photograph in figure 16
displays a miliciana smiling with an angelical look as if she is almost incapable of shooting the rifle that rests on her left shoulder.


Photographs of male soldiers in Mundo Obrero for example, emphasized their activity, and tended to picture them in action or combat, firing their weapons rather than standing still. And these often do not appear to have been staged like the milicianas (155). Moreover, there are no photographs of male soldiers cooking, doing laundry, or doing any of those auxiliary tasks that in many military columns both men and women did as described earlier in Concha Pérez Collado’s testimony. Instead, the independent Republican newspaper La Voz published a great number of photographs, for instance as the one shown in figure 17, “depicting milicianas sewing, washing clothes and cooking (164) and never published a “single photo of a woman aiming a gun” (166).
Furthermore, the majority of the photos of milicianas appeared on their own without a supporting article. In the Communist press magazine *Mujeres*, the majority of the photographs of the milicianas “are all posed and picture them marching, or standing and smiling, with their rifles and arms at their side” (157). Only two photographs displayed the milicianas pointing at their guns but, again, these are not photographs of actual combat. In *Ahora*, however, milicianas were portrayed in a more positive light. In one of the photographs a miliciana is featured in combat as well as two milicianos or male soldiers “crouching behind a rock, and pointing their rifles at the unseen enemy” (158). However, the language used in captions and articles to describe the milicianas was usually to accredit their “beauty, youth, enthusiasm and courage rather than any specific military actions” (158). Overall, the representations of milicianas in the Communist press were gender biased.
In contrast to the Communist press, the Anarchist press did not portray large numbers of milicianas during the war. According to Lines’ analysis, the Anarchist press and propaganda did not publish any photographs of milicianas aiming or firing their weapons, or taking part in combat. Additionally, some representations in the Anarchist press seemed to struggle to find a common ground between femininity and belligerency. For instance, the newspaper *Confederación Nacional del Trabajo* (Worker’s National Confederacy, CNT) showed an image of a milicana, Rosita Sánchez, with a pistol around her hip while at the same time holding a baby with affection (160).

This milicana was also photographed by the magazine *Ahora* on August 26, 1936, she was serving in the front lines in Extremadura, Spain. In the picture she is smiling, overtly displaying her teeth while the baby seems happy to be with his mother as seen in figure 18 (“Imágenes de la Guerra Civil”). Even though there are photographs of male soldiers holding babies, it appears that women were more likely to be expected to show their motherly side in these types of pictures. Furthermore, the Anarchist newspaper *Tierra y Libertad* included illustrations or posters of milicianas that were printed next to articles that in no way related to them. The absence of empty captions and the lack of detail when referring to the illustrations were prevalent.
On the other hand, the Anarchist propaganda posters did a fair job portraying women in combat and having a leading role. For example, according to Lines, the CNT created a poster presenting the slogan “¡No Pasarán!” (“They Shall Not Pass!”) that “clearly represents milicianas in a positive light” (160). The poster shows “an anarchist militia in battle” and includes a miliciana firing at the enemy with her rifle. Furthermore, “the militiawoman is situated in a position higher than the militiamen who surround her, as she is standing with one knee up on the wall. The two men next to her are crouching and the rest of the militia are in the background, charging forward. A dead militiamen lies over the wall in the foreground” (160). Contrary to Lines, historians like Kelly Phipps contend that milicianas were portrayed not as real women fighters as discussed in the poster above, but rather as fiction ---a mere symbolic role.
Another feature that was emphasized was of course the milicana’s beauty. In an article titled “Mujeres Heroicas” (“Heroic Women”) printed in *Tierra y Libertad*, the author writes the following: “her beauty and agility impress me, and I question her. Yes, I was not mistaken. She is a woman [a milicana]. And she paces back and forth, with a rifle on her shoulder, and she carries herself upright and severely, with strict attention, eyes watching to prevent a possible enemy attack” (qtd. in Lines 160-161). First, the author’s reaction was of apparent surprise upon identifying the soldier’s gender. The author expressed his surprise in writing and perhaps wondered how it was possible to have a beautiful woman displaying such skillful masculine characteristics? Again, as Lines points out in her chapter, “the representations of milicianas in the Anarchist press highlight the dichotomy between femininity and militancy” (160).

The Socialist press and propaganda in the daily newspaper *Claridad*, the daily newspaper of the PSOE, in particular, presented even fewer photographs of the milicianas, and did not express clear support for the milicianas as is shown in the last published article where milicianas were portrayed in a very negative light (163). The independent Republican press and propaganda reinforced the “traditional gender stereotypes” of women. As such, attributes pertaining to their physical feminine appearance were taken into account and not their actual military abilities (163). It appears that the smaller independent newspapers such as *Crónica, Estampa* and *La Voz* followed the same model as *ABC* and portrayed the traditional gender’s role for women, while at the same time justifying their combatant role in the battlefield. The Independent press used more words like “young,” “pretty” and “beautiful” when referring to milicianas’ qualities. In contrast, the words “brave” and “valiant” were used less to
describe them. In accordance with Lines, there was a purpose behind this “constant referral to the youth, beauty and feminine qualities of the milicianas,” and the purpose was to make “fighting feminine” (166). In this regard, the miliciana’s beauty and youthful qualities are emphasized in an attempt for women not to lose their womanhood despite their role as combatants, thus making it more acceptable for society.

The portrayal of milicianas wearing their emblematic *mono azul* uniform in romanceros and photography constitutes the first stage in the evolution of the miliciana’s image as a Spanish icon. In photography the miliciana has been portrayed as a young and beautiful heroine of the Republican left. The romanceros of the Spanish Civil War portrayed her as a heroic miliciana combatant, such as Rosario Sánchez Mora and Lina Odena. Artists from all backgrounds and caliber found a venue to express the Republican resistance in writing and songs. As such, romanceros gave birth to a thriving but short-lived popular culture that mirrored the political happenings in Spain. Without a doubt, the Republican romanceros are an important element of the history of *Los vencidos* (“The defeated Republicans”) and of the milicianas in particular. In the representation of milicianas in photography, overall, the Communist press showed more interest in representing milicianas than the standard Anarchist press. However, both presses failed to present milicianas in real combat, it appears that the Anarchist press accentuated more the milicianas’ physical attributes than their belligerent activities. The same can be said for the Independent Republican press where youth and beauty were emphasized; nonetheless, the writers of all these captions wanted to portray the milicianas in a positive light (167). As for the Socialist press, it did support the milicianas initially, however, that changed overtime. In fact, the last article published pertaining to the milicianas was a
direct attack against them. It accused them of being prostitutes and of conspiring with the Nationalist enemy (163).

**Film: Libertarias by Vicente Aranda: Rise and Defeat of the Milicianas**

The film *Libertarias*, also released as *Juegos de Guerra* (1996) by film director and screen writer Vicente Aranda, has become a “must see” classic in studies of the Iberian Peninsula. The inception of films like *Libertarias* constitutes a second stage form of reinforcement that contributed to the evolution of the miliciana, mainly because very little was known about the exact role played by miliciana combatants and rearguard milicianas prior to the release of this film. For instance, the general public was unaware of the work of the Anarchist women’s organization *Mujeres Libres* (Free Women) that had formed a few months prior to the Spanish Civil War, in April 1936 (Fernández Martínez 255). The film clearly portrays *Los vencidos* (“The defeated Republicans”), that is, those who were in favor of liberty and who thought that utopia and revolution were possible. In other words, the film represents the Republican side through the eyes of Anarchist female combatants.

The film is based on the novel *Libertarias* (also known as *La monja libertaria, The Anarchist Nun*; 1985, 1995) by Antonio Rabinad Muniesa. For some critics Rabinad’s novel was not a clear reflection of the historical occurrences in Anarchist Catalonia in comparison to the film *Tierra y Libertad* (Land and Freedom; 1995) by Ken Loach. Stephen Schwartz, however, contends that *Tierra y Libertad*, aggravates the “error of analyzing the war through foreign, rather than Spanish eyes” (503). This is especially critical with Rabinad’s novel because he was considered to be one of the Spanish authors who give the best portrayal of Barcelona during the post-war years.
Rabinad was able to portray the Anarchist rebellious women in a crude, humiliating and positive light all at the same time, while keeping a Spanish perspective. Aranda took this material one step further to produce an epic story of six members of *Mujeres Libres* (Free Women, the Anarchist women’s organization), which gave light to the spirit of the revolutionary movement. According to Schwartz, the film *Libertarias,* “was also produced with the cooperation of the remaining CNT in Spain, and includes magnificent spectacle and crowd scenes in which Aranda brought to life the newsreels and stock images that had electrified the world in 1936” (504). Furthermore, the film is blunt, descriptive, and does not shy away from showing graphic erotic scenes of women and milicianas being humiliated or prostituted or from showing the cruelties of war. In this way the movie clearly highlights what was perhaps the major obstacle faced by these Anarchist revolutionary women: while in combat, they also had to fight male chauvinism.

As mentioned previously, during the bloody Spanish Civil War, the general and dictator Francisco Franco (1892-1975) rose to power and overthrew the democratically elected Second Republic. He did this with the help of Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy. Once Franco took complete power, he began to persecute his Republican political opponents, which are also known as *Los vencidos.* The Franco dictatorship also took other drastic measures: it repressed “the culture and language of Spain’s Basque and Catalan regions, censured the media and otherwise exerted absolute control over the country” (Solsten and Meditz). Consequently, all the films presented to the public during his dictatorial regime were “imbued with highly conservative forms of Catholic ethics. Indeed, even during the Republic, the authoritarian studio’s first film was the religious narrative *La hermana San Sulpicio*” released in 1931 (Evans 215). This is just
one example of the many approaches that were taken, all of them highlighting extremely conservative Catholic values. In 1975, Spain was able to transition to democracy beginning with the death of Francisco Franco, which allowed for other forms of women’s cultural and political expression.

In the film Libertarias, the rise and defeat of the Republican revolution and war is represented with harsh scenes of the obvious consequences of battle. Nonetheless, the film offers uplifting speeches from fervent Anarchist milicianas, who with great valor and utopian idealism fight until they are brutally killed by the National army. Amongst these Anarchist milicianas, members of the Mujeres Libres (Free Women) were three sewers, a nun, a spiritualist and also prostitutes. Despite their determination and commitment to the cause, they faced many obstacles, among the hardest being women and, although not all of them, prostitutes. Women were blamed for the spread of venereal diseases and unwanted pregnancies, and subsequently, were ordered to leave the front lines and to return to where they belonged, according to the stereotype, to the home as “they were of little use on many occasions in the barracks” (Nash, “Women in War” 277). However, they adamantly refused to do so. The following lines from Pilar’s speech in the film can attest to the high principles shared among them: “We want to fight with bullets so that we can claim our part in the struggle… It would be a mistake to keep us at home knitting! We want to die like men, not like servants!” And so they did. They died tragically in their last battle (Libertarias).

The film reflects the initial acknowledgment of the milicianas as combatants and to a lesser extent the milicianas in the rearguard. In the Independent and left wing political press was well publicized. During the war, the left wing press and the
Independent presses in the republic zone immediately took notice of the presence of women in combat and the images of the milicianas, which conveyed a visual message that was politically militant. The images were eye catching and demonstrated strength, bravery and purposefulness (Lines, Milicianas 151). This also reflects the sexist depictions of the Civil War Republican press. As shown in the film Libertarias, this representation, however, was short-lived as soon after milicianas in the front lines were discouraged from fighting at the front. Instead, they were expected to fulfill the so called domestic women’s role which included what they were trained for: cooking, cleaning and nurturing (Palomar Baró 3).

The film’s characters take on paradoxical roles as women. Their respective roles provide a rich view of how milicianas were a heterogeneous group just as male soldiers were. According to Martí Ibañez, three groups of women went to the front. He contends that the first group was formed by a very small minority of genuine milicianas who in his view were true revolutionaries. Following his differentiation, the film portrays this accurate representation via Pilar’s role, played by actress Ana Belén. Pilar is an Anarchist leader who belongs to the Mujeres Libres (Free Women). She is a pure feminist warrior, passionate and furious. The second group, according to Ibañez, was formed by romantic and idealistic women, those “who on an impulse left for the front [to serve] as nurses” and wore white and red uniforms (qtd. in Nash, “Women in War” 279). These women, according to Ibañez, were not real miliciana combatants, but rather a surreal heroic version of them. The film, however, does not show this characterization. The third group, he contends, were formed by prostitutes. The film portrays this characterization through Charo, a prostitute with a heart of gold, played by actress Loles
León. Mary Nash, in her article, “Women in War: Milicianas and Armed Combat in Revolutionary Spain, 1936-1939” poses a very intricate question regarding their role: Is a prostitute always a prostitute? Can she not take a genuine revolutionary anti-Fascist stance? The case of Charo in the film is very relevant for it relates to “sexist and political implication in the misrepresentation” of the presence of former prostitutes [now milicianas] at the front (Nash 279). One of the excuses, as portrayed in the film, was that many of them were not healthy for they had contracted venereal diseases and were carrying undesirable pregnancies. For this reason, according to the Communist and the Anarchist organizations, all women needed to be away from the front lines.

In the film a scene reveals just this when Pilar, depicting the genuine revolutionary miliciana, shouts: “Not all of us are the same! We are healthy!” The former priest, played by Miguel Bosé, is the one who informed the women that they will not be allowed to fight on the front lines. He says: “Great efforts are being made to coordinate the column. This is not easy. [However] the presence of women makes it even harder. The association of Mujeres Libres has organized a laundry service in Siétamo. You could be of use there; you needn’t go back to Barcelona. But you must leave the front.” To this, Pilar responded: “See? The same old story. Can’t men run the laundry?” (Libertarias). These lines are significant as they challenged the role of women as auxiliaries or rearguards.

Although not included in Ibañez’ categorization of women, I may add, there was a fourth group formed by women who ended up in the front lines by mere extraneous circumstances, as in the case of nun María in the film. The young nun María, played by actress Ariadna Gil, is forced to flee her convent and finds refuge in a brothel. In the
brothel, a group of milicianas led by the militant feminist Pilar began recruiting milicianas into the Anarchist militia. The young nun María was one of the recruited ones. Young and naive María is exposed to the brutalities of war and to the meaning behind the revolution. For this reason she started to question her former sheltered and highly Catholic religious life. It appears that in the end she not only understood but empathized with the revolutionary cause; however, as shown in the last scene, it was too late for the Nationalist forces had defeated the Republicans. María was the only survivor left from the milicianas group. The representation of María is the complete opposite of Pilar the leader of *Mujeres Libres*. María is feminine, fearful, extremely devoted and claims to be married to God and, according to her description of herself, she is just “a servant” (of God). The nun’s role is very distinctive because in the eyes of the Anarchist group, she represents exactly what they are fighting against: The fascist-nationalist ideology, which goes hand in hand with the oppressive subordination of women in Spanish Catholicism. The film makes this apparent in the scene when Floren, the spiritualist, played by actress Victoria Abril asks Pilar, what has happened to her? In the scene María is crying profusely while Pilar is giving her a bath. Pilar responds to Floren: “She saw the shooting of a bishop.” Floren replies: “Since he was a bishop God must be resting his soul now. God is a fascist” (*Libertarias*).

All in all, the general representation of the miliciana can be categorized into two phases. The first was her mystification and her concomitant prestige, in contrast to the second phase where she was portrayed with disregard and humiliation. As for the film, *Libertarias*, it appears that director Vicente Aranda wished to convey a balanced portrayal of milicianas in his film. Perhaps this is the reason why his depictions of
milicianas were so diverse and provided the viewer with clear-cut distinctions amongst them: we have the strong feminist Anarchist miliciana leader; the prostitute, who reawakens after being liberated from a life of sexual slavery; the spiritualist, who bashes and trashes God and further accuses him of being a fascist; and the nun, who unequivocally represents the Catholic Church as an ideological force against the Republican state. These women’s roles also fit into the aforementioned distinctions of milicianas in combat versus milicianas in the rearguard. Pilar, Charo and Floren, for instance, fit into the representation of front line combatants, in contrast to María, who fits into the miliciana in the rearguard category, performing auxiliary-domestic tasks only.

**Literature and Narrative: Milicianas and Underground Republican Women during the Franco years. Carmen Laforet, María Teresa León, Josefina Aldecoa and Dulce Chacón**

The Second Republic was defeated in 1939, and Francisco Franco ruled as the dictator of Spain from 1939 until his death in 1975. Francos’ regime was not only dictatorial but very oppressive: people lived under fear, particularly the defeated factions of Republicans and any other person who in any way or form aided or attempted to aid the republicanos (Republicans). The Franco regime, similar in ideology to Italian and German Fascism, also had the goal of eliminating women’s social independence. Women’s identity was to be solely based on the family principles dictated by Franco’s regime: she had to be passive, pious and of pure demeanor (Graham 184). Under these circumstances, it was nearly impossible to find publications of the Republican cause or the Civil War with a Republican point of view, let alone publications representing women, as in the case of the milicianas. The fate of the milicianas was tragic: they died
in combat, ended up in prison, went into exile as was the case of the prolific writer María Teresa León, or lived under the Franco’s brutal repression abiding by the Francoist “promoted ideal image of womanhood” (Evans 184; Linhard 190). Among the countries that admitted Republican exiles besides France, Russia, and South American nations was México. It is estimated that over 37 million refugees were taken in these countries (Pla Brugat 25).

Despite the harsh oppression and censorship during the post-war years, women intellectuals found ways to resist, although in a very subtle and inadvertent manner. Women no longer carried their rifles to represent the Republican cause as the milicianas; instead they used their pen and intellectual attributes and began to write novels. Women novelists wrote semi-autobiographical fictional narratives that resisted the censorship of the Franco era and afterwards. This is the case for Carmen Laforet: *Nada* (*Nothing*; 1944); María Teresa León who before and after her exile wrote: *Crónica de la guerra civil* (*Chronicle of the Civil War*; 1937), *You Will Dye Far Away* (1942), *Memoria de la melancolía* (*Melancholy of the Memory*; 1977); Josefina Aldecoa, whose novels are known as the Trilogy: *Historia de una maestra* (*Story of a Teacher*; 1990), *Mujeres de negro* (*Women in Black*; 1994), *La fuerza del destino* (*The Force of Destiny*; 1997); and Dulce Chacón: *La voz dormida* (*The Sleeping Voice*; 2002). Aldecoa and Chacón’s writings highlight the transmission of memory and are considered to be part of the “memory boom” in the post Franco era (I will discuss this concept further in this chapter and in the conclusion).

Laforet’s *Nada* contributed to the subtle resistance against the Franco regime, and after his death was followed by the inspirational Trilogy of novels by Aldecoa. Even
though this Trilogy was written during the post-Franco era, the first two novels’ narratives take place in 1923-1939, that is during the rise and fall of the Second Republic, followed by the third novel depicting the exile of the characters and their return to a semi-democratic Spain after the death of Franco in 1975. Finally, the novel by author Chacón published until 2002 was able to depict, this time in detail, the powerful, yet tragic life stories of women, one of them a miliciana, serving death row sentences for their involvement with the Republicans. These novels served as a counter-narrative to the official history of the Franco regime.

The historiography promoted by Franco’s government affirmed “the regime’s morally correct role within Spanish history” (Herzberger, “Narrating the Past” 35). To achieve this morally correct historical role, the Franco regime suppressed and censored all opposition, and produced the image of a past that asserted “continuity between the glories of an imperial Catholic Spain and the illustrious present of [the] Franco era” (35). In regards to women, the regime “promoted an ‘ideal’ image of womanhood as ‘eternal,’ passive, pious, pure, submissive woman-as-mother for whom self-denial was the only road to real fulfillment” (Graham 184). These ideas were well ingrained in Catholicism and women needed to aspire to the clean and immaculate image of the Virgin as role model.

Under the dictatorship the Spanish people lived in utter terror caliente (extreme terror), especially during the first decade of the post-war period. Various mechanisms were in place to ensure the people’s compliance: “Los fusilamientos y las sacas fueron los mecanismos más extendidos, para implantar el terror con el fin no solo de mantener el orden público sino también de evitar posibles reacciones” (“the executions and removal
of prisoners were the most frequent tactics to instill terror with the purpose of maintaining public order and avoiding possible revolts”; Cenarro, “Muerte y subordinación” 14). Furthermore, “las brutalidades cometidas por algunos miembros de las milicias en las etapas del terror caliente,” quedaron impunes con algunas excepciones (“the brutalities, which were committed by militant groups during the periods of extreme terror” went, for the most part, unpunished; Cerrano, “Matar, vigilar y delatar” 83). The novel Nada, published by Carmen Laforet in 1944 at age twenty-three in spite of censorship, attests to this society terrorized and silenced by the regimes vigilance and the use of informants as “las autoridades franquistas fomentaban de manera oficial la denuncia del vecino de izquierdas” (“the Francoist authorities officially encouraged people to inform on their left-wing neighbors”; Cenarro 82). This was a practice that created an atmosphere reminiscent of the Inquistition. There was no room for government criticism or even worse, to be denounced as being a rojo (Red) by an informant led to deadly consequences. Although living in a highly controlled society under censorship Laforet still manages brilliantly and subtly to expose these nuances of oppression, violence and misery.

The novel follows, to an extent, an autobiographical format whose main character is Andrea, a young woman who starts her studies in Barcelona during the first academic year after the war in 1939. The novel gives reference to the effects inflicted upon Barcelona during the post-war era such as, poverty, widespread hunger, and oppression. Andrea recalls not only the poverty and hunger but also the sadness as she recalls, “aquella tristeza de recoser los guantes, de lavar mis blusas en el agua turbia y helada del lavadero con el mismo trozo de jabón que Antonia utilizaba para fregar sus cacerolas y
que por las mañanas raspaba mi cuerpo bajo la ducha fría” (“the sadness of remending gloves, to washing my blouses with the dirty and freezing water in the sink with the same piece of soap that Antonia would use to wash the saucepans, and that I would also use to bathe myself in the mornings”; Laforet 58).

The novel subtly describes a number of features of the oppression, such as the fact that it is prohibited to use the Catalán language outside the home because Catalunya lost its autonomous status (Ebels 620). Dictatorial Spain now celebrated “el triunfo de la ciudad de Dios y la resurrección de España” (“the triumph of the City of God and Spain’s resurrection”; Casanova y Andrés 248). Throughout the novel, the character’s aunt Angustias serves as the epitome of morality and decency displayed in all forms of religious manipulation. In one of the dialogues aunt Angustias lectures Andrea: “La ciudad, hija mía, es un infierno. Y en toda España no hay ciudad que se parezca más al infierno que Barcelona … Estoy preocupada de que anoche vinieras sola de la estación. Toda prudencia en la conducta es poca, pues el diablo reviste tentadoras formas” (The city, my daughter, is hell. In all Spain, there is no other city as hellish as Barcelona … I am worried when at night you come back alone from the train station. Good judgment is not enough, for the devil is everywhere and assumes many shapes and forms”; Laforet 25). Laforet’s novel exalts the importance of historical memory and gives political glimpses and hints of what life was like in a period of extreme difficulty for those who lost the war. Laforet paves the way for other women intellectual writers to pursue the recovery and vindication of memory from a woman’s perspective during the post-Franco era.
Another author worth studying is María Teresa León, who lived thirty-eight years of her life in exile, from 1939 to 1977. León was a Spanish “writer, activist, cultural ambassador, director of the itinerant group called Guerrillas del Teatro, and a crucial member of the Committee for Protection and Defense of the National Artistic Treasure” during the Civil War period (Linhard 190), and she was married to the famous poet Rafael Alberti. Despite her talent as a storyteller, she was overshadowed by her husband’s preeminent work. León’s work is not only extensive but also heterogeneous in scope; she addresses a number of subjects: the revolution, war, violence, the illiterate, the dispossessed and particularly women with no land, fortune or hope. Her subjects are presented in short stories such as, *Tales from Contemporary Spain* (1935) and *You Will Dye Far Away* (1942), and also in works of novels, drama and fictionalized biography, which include the celebrated, *Memoria de la melancolía (Melancholy of the Memory)* published in 1977, the year when her Alzheimer disease became apparent (193).

Upon her exile and departure in an airplane to Paris in 1939, shortly before the triumph of the Nationalist forces, León along with her husband Alberti and other high ranking Republican officers made a stop at the military airport in Oran, Algeria, to refuel the airplane. Once in foreign territory, they were questioned and León served as an interpreter. When she was introducing everyone, she identified herself as a plain “miliciana,” despite the fact that the image of the heroic miliciana had lost complete prestige at the time. Following is the interpretation that took place in 1939:

> Vivir para la libertad significa para un español condenarse a la incomprensión y al exilio. Dicen que los románticos españoles tenían siempre preparada una pistola y una onza de oro. Nosotros llevábamos
solamente la pistola. Al aterrizar en el aeródromo militar de Orán, me señalaron la cintura: “Señora, su pistola.” La entregué, con una pequeña melancolía, mordiéndome los labios. Serví de intérprete: “Ese señor es el general Antonio Cordón, ministro de la Guerra, y ese otro es el señor Núñez Mazas, ministro del Aire. Aquél, un poeta, y yo … una miliciana.

(León, Memoria 364)

For a Spaniard to live for liberty means to be condemned to live misunderstood and in perpetual exile. They say that romantic Spaniards always had a gun and an ounce of gold ready. We only had the gun. When we landed at the military airport in Oran, they pointed at my waist: “Madam, your gun.” I gave it to them, with a little melancholy, biting my lips. I served as an interpreter: That man is General Antonio Cordón, secretary of war, and the other one is Núñez Mazas, secretary of air. That one, a poet and me … a miliciana.

León chose to present herself just as a miliciana, “a woman who like so many others felt compelled to fight for what she believed was just and right” (Linhard 190). In her own way, however, León vindicated not only the rights of the milicianas, but also presented their histories throughout her works and subsequent publications. León did not exalt herself as a miliciana combatant. In excerpts from her volume Memoria de la melancolía, there are, nevertheless, many instances where she narrates her experiences at the front lines or in the rearguard but those not particularly emphasize her role in combat. In this regard, her battle becomes acutely political and ideological. This might be the reason why in 1939 at the military airport in Oran, Argelia, on her way to Paris she
identified herself as a miliciana, for she strongly believed that she had a crucial involvement in the Spanish Civil War, perhaps more politically than militarily. It did not matter that the term miliciana no longer enjoyed a positive reputation, she embraced the term the same way she embraced her mother country Spain when, on a different occasion, she stated: “I am Spain.” She further attests to this ideological or intellectual war in Memoria de la melancolía when León writes that the intellectuals of the world were obliged to answer the aggressions of war with words (109). It appears that León was not able to ever really overcome her years in exile. When she wrote her deepest memories in Memoria de la melancolía in the final years of her life, she interrupted the narration on many occasions to encourage other exiles to tell and recount their own stories and to not be ashamed of their experience. It is important to note, however, that narratives depicting or discussing the Republican side were non-existent during the post-war years in Spanish territory. The main reason why León was able to publish her Republican works was because she was no longer living in Spain.

Another important work from León depicting a miliciana combatant is found in the Crónica general de la guerra civil (General Chronicle of the Civil War; 1937). The Crónica compiles a remarkable collection of selected chronicles and journal articles from 1936 and 1937 that illustrate the Republican struggle with a military, political and social perspective. One of them is “La doncella guerrera,” in which León alludes to female combatants in the front lines, those performing auxiliary roles as nurses and those awaiting in their homes as rearguards: “varoniles doncellas guerreras, contenidas y valientes enfermeras en los hospitales, serenas y sencillas madres que aguardan” (“virile maiden warriors, reserved and courageous nurses in the hospitals, and calm and modest
mothers; León 80”). León also touches upon the female combatant’s plate armor that “La doncella guerrera” wears while standing still on the trench where other male soldiers fight. Again, throughout her writings it is palpable that León sees and positions herself as an intellectual warrior, or better said, as a miliciana on all fronts: on the trenches, on the rearguard, and as a miliciana “que tiene que terminar de escribir una página de nuestra Historia de España” (a miliciana “who has to finish writing a page in Spanish history”; León, Crónica general 81).

Laforet’s Nada, and Aldecoa’s Trilogy are narratives in the first person recounting fictionalized memories of the Civil War and post-war eras. These first person narratives had been very common amongst many European writers, and have offered a rich perspective that was directly influenced by the personal, social and historical surroundings of the narrator (Herzberger, “A Life Worth Living” 135). Josefina Aldecoa’s Trilogy lays out the twentieth century history of Spain filtered with memories from Gabriela López Pardo, the primary narrator and main character of the first and third novels, while the second novel is narrated by her daughter Juana (Leggott 87-88). The Trilogy recounts Gabriela’s life from her early years as a teacher in the 1920’s until her death in 1982. The three novels interconnect with one another and accumulate profound experiences and memories from the protagonist’s difficult life. The novels trace the periods before and after the arrival of the Second Republic, the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War, her involuntary exile from Spain to Mexico, and finally, her return to a democratic Spain.

The first narrative, Historia de una maestra, begins by introducing a passionate and committed young teacher, who thinks she could not have found a better profession –a
profession that was rare for a woman at the time. This novel starts in the year 1923. According to Mary Nash and her discussion of the divide between the public and the private domains, the consequences for any woman who transgressed the natural norms that surrounded her own gender were disastrous (30). As expected, the public domain belonged to men, for a woman’s natural place, genetically determined by her sex according to the sexist norms, was reduced to her domesticity (Nash, “Uncontested” 30). In the case of Gabriela, however, she challenges this naturalist ideology of domesticity indirectly via her profession as an elementary school teacher. She was deeply passionate about her profession and believed that she could bring about change. She was adventurous and wished to see the world with her own eyes and would say to herself: “no puede existir dedicación más hermosa que esta… compartir con los niños lo que yo sabía…” (“there is no other mission as beautiful than sharing my knowledge to the children”; Aldecoa, Historia 40). On the other hand, she also realized the higher purpose of the Second Republic linked to the transformation of Spain as a whole and the importance of democratic values: “the school was [the] ideological arm of the democratic revolution . . . carrying modern, civic values to the furthest corner of rural Spain” (Cobb 133). In Gabriela’s eyes, pedagogy was “la gran misión que salvará a España del aislamiento de la ignorancia… [Por ello] nuestra revolución está en la escuela…tú sabes muy bien [Ezequiel] que no se puede salvar a un pueblo ignorant” (“the great mission that will save Spain from isolation and ignorance…[this is why] our revolution is in the schools …you know well [Ezequiel], that one cannot save an ignorant nation”; Aldecoa, Historia 136 y 229).
The arrival of the Second Republic brought about change and unimaginable rights for women like Gabriela. Unfortunately, the Civil War breaks out and her impetuous character and career takes a new route. As her beloved nation struggles to find peace, she herself is broken in spirit: “1935 fue un año gris. De un gris pesado, cargado de amenazas…fue un año de tristeza y de miedo” (“1935 was a grey year. A heavy gray year, filled with threats…it was a year of sadness and fear”; Aldecoa, Historia 225).

After learning that her husband Ezequiel was killed during the war, safety becomes an issue and she departs with young Juana and her new husband Octavio to Mexico. Once in Mexico, Gabriela tries to forget, in its entirety, her memories of the past, and everything that relates to her acute suffering and truncated dreams, including cooking Spanish dishes as the cook tells Juana, “tu madre no quiere cocinar a la española porque no quiere recordar” (“your mother does not want to cook Spanish food style because she does not want to remember”; Aldecoa, Mujeres 116).

On the other hand, Juana expresses “miedo de perder el pasado” (“fear of losing her past”; Aldecoa, Mujeres 80) and wishes to return to her idealized version of Spain. Consequently, Juana simply does not want to and cannot understand her mother. She has no empathy for her, and does not understand why she does not want to return. According to Nuala Kenny, “Josefina Aldecoa’s portrayal of exile reveals the positive and negative aspects of transcultural encounters” (397). That is, Gabriela’s process of assimilation is positive (if only at the beginning) because of safety reasons and the willingness to start a new life, nevertheless, it is also overwhelmingly negative because her past memories keep haunting her. Many of Aldecoa’s actual friends suffered exile and were expelled and resettled as exiles in countries like Mexico and the United Kingdom. Regarding this,
the author said in an interview: “Eso es muy desgarrador, que a uno le echen de su propio país, y me parece un fenómeno muy importante que hay que tratar, el del exilio” (“This is heartbreaking, that one be expelled from her own country, and I believe that it is a very important subject to deal with, that is, the experience of exile”; Leggott 94-5).

In the third volume, *La fuerza del destino*, the narrative discusses her painful return to Spain. After three long decades of living in exile, Gabriela arrives to Madrid upon Franco’s death in 1975. She returned mainly for her daughter Juana, who desperately misses what she in her head had created of Spain, an idealized nation. Once in Madrid, Gabriela experiences a new form of imprisonment, not physical but emotional. The Spain she left thirty years before is not the Spain she finds in the 1970s, and she feels like a complete outcast as she expresses, “ni una sola de las experiencias que viví tiene que ver con lo que ahora vivo” (“None of the experiences I lived [in Spain or Mexico] have anything to do with my actual life”; Aldecoa, *La Fuerza* 113). Gabriela is confined to her own memories of the past, memories that come all at once to the point that they become unbearable. Living in complete desolation and depression, she dies in a hospital in Spain seven years after her arrival.

Aldecoa’s Trilogy, as well as the earlier novel *Nada* by Carmen Laforet, provides a rich background where memory, past history and fiction melt together. The case of Gabriela is significant because she portrays a generation of Spanish women who lived the rise and the fall of the Second Republic, lived under the oppression of dictatorship, but who, in some instances, broke with the status quo of the role that women should follow, and, finally, left their country involuntarily, as many others did in real life to live in exile.
Even though Gabriela was not a miliciana in the front line or rearguard, she was considered a roja (Red) or a Republican. Her fight is ideological and political and attempts to recover the memory of the past from a woman’s perspective. According to Shirley Mangini in her book *Memories of Resistance: Women’s Voices in the Spanish Civil War*, “la mayoría de las mujeres fueron encareladas por su asociación con otros, sobre todo con sus compañeros masculinos” (“The majority of the women were incarcerated mainly for the relationship they had with others, particularly with their male companions”; Mangini 111). If Gabriela would not have left Spain, she most likely would have faced incarceration for her relationship with her Republican husband Ezequiel. Some of the women being incarcerated at the time were innocent as their crimes consisted of having removed the crucifix from their classrooms, as instructed to all teachers when the Second Republic took power. This was the case for Gabriela too, as she says: “al quitar el crucifijo de la pared lo hice con sencillez, sin alarde alguno de solemnidad. Lo guardé en el cajón de la mesa y empecé las clases del día” (“I took the crucifix from the wall without ceremony, without any solemnity. I placed it in the table drawer and started my lecture of the day”; Aldecoa Historia 120). Gabriela takes the crucifix without solemnity because she agrees with the principle of separation of church and state held by the new progressive Republic.

In the case of *Nada*, the novel also gives glimpses of the role of informants during the post-war years via the character Román, who “tenía un cargo importante con los rojos y era un espía, una persona baja y ruin que vendía a los que le favorecieron” (“who had an important post with the reds, but who was an unscrupulous and despicable spy who would sell those who favored him”; Laforet 47). When *Nada* was published in 1944, it
was by no means considered a threat to the dictatorial government of a country where censorship utterly reigned, and it even received the prestigious Premio Nadal (Nadal Award) the following year. Laforet’s novel has prominent significance, for it was a novel published by a woman first and foremost, was published during the post-war era and at the time, it was even considered apolitical.

After almost forty years of enforced silence imposed by Franco’s regime, however, around the mid-1980s, the Spanish people felt comfortable and confident enough to finally write and speak openly about life during and after the war (Ebels 619). Thus, novels like the Trilogy from Josefina Aldecoa were published delineating milestones of Spanish history as lived through her two characters, Gabriela and her daughter Juana. In regards to Nada, contrary to the perception of the censors during the early Franco regime that it was a non-political novel, politics permeates throughout the novel, according to contemporary critics. For example, in her article published in 2009, Fenny Ebels contends that “there are hidden references to contemporary post-war political issues, manifesting themselves in the novel through its frame” (619).

There is no explicit mention of the word “milicianas” in these texts by Laforet and Aldecoa’s Trilogy or other literary works from Spain during that time; it was not until after Franco’s death that the actual miliciana character started to emerge as an iconic symbol. For instance, with the film Libertarias in 1996, milicianas were clearly portrayed as fierce and committed combatants. In this regard, the works of women like Laforet and Aldecoa have helped to pave the way for the Spanish milicianas to become more visible in the years that followed. The novel La voz dormida by Dulce Chacón, for example, was published in 2002. The case of Dulce Chacón is slightly different than that
of María Teresa León, who had to flee for her life and lived in exile in different countries. Chacón was the daughter of a Nationalist winner of the Spanish Civil War, a man who at some point even served as the mayor of Zafra (De Pablos 103). Nonetheless, Chacón was equally affected by the hardships of the war. Her historical novel has been acclaimed internationally, because she wrote and compiled this narrative in a scrupulous manner while always trying to give faith of that precise moment in history where the best citizens of Spain were absent: they had been killed, or had simply remained silent. The novel’s polished dialogues are vivid and portray the characters with such vitality as to produce credibility for the reader. The novel, based on actual events during the post-war period, details the horrendous experiences of women incarcerated in Madrid’s Ventas prison whose only recourse to endure humiliation, torture and death was their courage. The character named Hortensia was a pregnant miliciana incarcerated in Ventas for her direct association with the guerrilla armed forces. She was condemned to be executed, according to an official document provided in the novel: “Debemos condenar… a la procesada, como autora del delito de adhesión a la rebelión … debiendo ser ejecutada la procesada por fusilamiento” (“We must condemn the defendant for the crime of supporting the rebellion [Republicans] … the defendant must be executed by firing squad”; Chacón 245). Hortensia was executed on March 6, 1944, a month and a half after she gave birth to a baby girl. After much effort, her younger sister Pepita was finally able to recover the baby girl and raised her. Chacón interviewed and gathered an innumerable amount of first-hand testimonies, including the powerful testimony of Pepita herself. Some were willing to tell their stories, others preferred to live in anonymity—the pain was too great to remember. A film based on this novel with the same title was
directed by Benito Zambrano and released in 2011. Novels such as these highlight the significance of the transmission of memory, particularly coming from the left and with respect to brave women fighters, the milicianas.

**Milicianas and Spanish National Identity: The Memory Boom**

Spain’s transition from Francoist dictatorship to democracy has been considered a role model by many historians and political scientists in part because of its non-violent and consensual character. The expressions *Nunca más* ("Never again") and *Todos fuimos culpables* ("We were all guilty") were used to share equally the responsibilities among all Spaniards involved to guarantee a more palatable transition. Apparently, it seemed to work to a certain extent; as such, the “pact of silence” adopted during the transitional years and afterwards avoided confrontation with those who were linked to the dictatorship and denied public recognition of its victims (Boyd 135-39). The main reason behind the wish to perpetuate these years of “Francoist peace,” was fear of a recurrence of political violence (144), and it was more convenient to forget the past and continue on. Despite this mechanism of silence, the undercurrent of discontent from those who were direct or indirect victims of repression became evident as they demanded justice and public acknowledgement. In other words, there was a need for remembering; a need to recover the memories of the past.

Between the 1980’s and 1990’s novelists produced subjective work from fragmented memories that originated from the Second Republic, the war and post-war eras, and from the stories of the experiences of exiled Republicans. Josefina Aldeoca, for instance, was one of them. She initiated her writing career in the 1950’s and was part of
a generation that she called Los niños de la guerra (The Children of the War; 1983). She asserted in an interview the following: “my own life is not a matter of interest, but only the life that is interconnected to the life of an entire generation… we are our own memory. The loss of our memory is the loss of our identity (Aldecoa, Los niños de la guerra 10; Duplá 125). Aldecoa felt, as did many other Spanish civilians who experienced war, that her own life was representative of a wide sector of a generation of Spanish women and, as a result, had the moral responsibility to honor those memories as they became part of their identity.

For more than thirty years “only the Francoist war dead had been publicly memorialized,” and nothing was done to honor the fallen Republicans (Boyd 144). The need to officially vindicate the memories of the past, including denouncement of the dictatorship and to honor the fallen Republican victims resulted in an ongoing factional debate that culminated in the passage of “the so-called Law of Historical Memory in October 2007,” which was based on a bill proposed by the Socialist government of Prime Minister José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero (133). According to Carolyn Boyd, “historical memory may legitimate or challenge the status quo, teach a lesson, validate a claim, consolidate an identity, or inspire action—that is, it typically has a social or political purpose” (134). This is what the Law of Historical Memory attempted to do: to legitimize and consolidate a national identity and to validate a societal claim.

It was certainly not easy to craft an ideal law, for many of the government factions involved had different expectations, as such the debate of the bill itself was unsettling and disrupted the democratic coexistence between left and right because it was highly factional in nature. Nevertheless, The Historical Memory Law principally
recognizes the victims on both sides of the Spanish Civil War. The bill is laid out with the process whereby individuals could seek:

- Declaration of reparations and personal recognition; pensions of survivors of Republican soldiers and Franquist political prisoners; it condemned the Franquist regime; it stipulated the removal of partisan commemorative symbols and prohibited political acts at El Valle de los Caídos [The Valley of the Fallen, the Franquist monument to the regime’s war dead]; it guaranteed the right of each individual or group to remember the past in their own way, while asserting a governmental role in the search for historical knowledge and the promotion of democratic memory. (146)

This law was a direct consequence of the “memory boom” and the efforts to vindicate the Republican past. In an attempt to recover both individual and collective memory, the so-called “memory boom” in recent times, which started in the 1980’s in Spain, has spread in a number of ways. Some of these forms include: the publication of testimonies, historical investigations, grass roots public commemorations and the founding of associations concerned with the recuperation of historical memory. The cultural sphere, nonetheless, also became interested, thus a significant portion of the literary works and films produced from the 1990s to the present day have reflected the expansion of public interest in historical memory by focusing on themes and events central to the Civil War first and to a lesser extent to the milicianas. The modern or up-to-date depictions of milicianas are found in films such as Libertarias or Juegos de guerra and distinctive novels like La voz dormida (2002) and the 2011 film based on this novel of the same title.
Even though milicianas are in many respects a force to be reckoned with that tie in directly with the historical identity of Spain, they have not yet reached national prominence. The tensions between democratic principles, the pact of silence, and most recently, the Law of Historical Memory, which has opened past wounds, have created uncertainty with regards to the direction in which Spanish identity will develop. Despite the fact that there have been various grassroots commemorations and online organizations that honor the milicianas, their representation is limited to reproductions of old photographs that were taken during the Civil War, when they were still active and were serving on the battlefield and in the rearguard. Politicized imagery of milicianas used for specific national government affiliated purposes, honoring their prestige, bravery and determination, are simply not found. Perhaps as a result of the Law of Historical Memory, in the years to come the iconic miliciana will overcome the cloud of Franco’s legacy and become a symbol of national identity.
CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION

During the Mexican Revolution and the Spanish Civil War, Mexican soldaderas and Spanish milicianas played a pivotal role in history and in the representation of women as a whole. Becoming a miliciana or soldadera allowed women to pursue a shift in feminine gender roles; revolution and civil war provided a venue that allowed them to gain a more equitable role amongst men. As we have seen, it is not always clear what is meant by a soldadera or a miliciana. It can be challenging to make a clear distinction between soldaderas who engaged in combat and those who were camp followers.

Though the view of milicianas usually leans more toward that of a female combatant, this faces similar challenges as the majority of the milicianas participated in the rearguard (Lines, “Female Combatants” 183). Their respective images have evolved in ways shaped by gender prejudice, popular culture and crucial historical and political events.

There are both parallels and contrasts in the depiction of these two iconic figures. Up to this point, the evolution and reinforcement of the image of the soldadera and the miliciana has been considered separately. I will now highlight the parallels and contrasting views in the evolution of these national icons of women.

In the case of the Mexican soldadera, the corridos and photography that constitute the first stage in her evolution allowed the image of the brave and strong soldadera who fought shoulder to shoulder with men for freedom and equality to evolve into a sensual and romanticized object of desire that is often referred to as “La Adelita.”

Representations of the soldadera as “La Adelita” mainly emphasized feminine characteristics of beauty, softness, submission, self-sacrifice and pronounced
objectification of desire as shown in the popular calendars produced annually in Mexico. Other portrayals of soldaderas include beautiful models wearing impeccable, highly feminine attire and high heels, as seen in figures 3 and 4. These paintings are highly influenced by popular culture, media and fashion and provide a sharp contrast with the photographs from the Casasola Collection in figures 7 and 8. In these photographs, camp follower soldaderas are shown providing emotional and physical support to their male soldiers, and do not display the characteristics of fashion and beauty that are present in figures 3 and 4: these are clearly women who have been on the campaign trail. An interesting contrast between the soldadera’s depiction in the Casasola Collection and the miliciana photographs included in chapter three is the portrayal of the relationship between women and men. This romantic or love relationship is not present in the miliciana photographs: milicianas are generally photographed alone or with other milicianas, but never seen displaying emotional or physical support to their male soldiers. The implication is that the soldadera portrayed as “La Adelita” is most likely to fit the camp follower description of a strong and dependable supporter of their male soldiers. The miliciana, on the other hand, even in the posing photographs tend to fit more the combatant description.

Another important aspect in the milicianas’ photographs is that they indeed look radiant, that is, by no means do they appear tired. In most pictures, they knew they were being photographed, whereas in the case of La Adelita, for instance, the photograph of a woman standing on the stairs of the passenger car wagon was taken spontaneously (figure 9). In the case of milicianas, as portrayed in early press photography during the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War, her physical attributes tended to be accentuated more than her
belligerent activities. In contrast to “La Adelita,” la miliciana was not sexualized and objectified to the extent of “La Adelita.” La Adelita’s image has been extensively reproduced in numerous placards, t-shirts and calendars that portray her graciously in scenes of war time love or in army camp images (Villalba 102-03) and continues to be reproduced today. The prolific dispersion of the soldadera was also seen in paintings as early as 1913 and 1926 by acclaimed artists José Guadalupe Posada and José Clemente Orozco. Unlike the milicianas and their mono azul uniforms, (blue overalls), “La Adelita” wears a long skirt and an exposing blouse, and sometimes the traditional china poblana dress (country girl dress). As previously shown in figure 1, she is clearly posing for the camera and conveys a care free, sensual smile. The Republican press also took notice of the miliciana’s beauty and youth, yet as they were generally photographed with the blue overall, signs of sensuality were not as apparent as in the image of “La Adelita.” The blue overall was in some sense a masculine uniform exuding prestige, respect and leadership, as does the jacket Captain Mika Etchebéhére wore in figure 13. Nonetheless, some of the posters and photographs presenting milicianas with the blue overall also targeted male audiences, and for this reason it could be said that milicianas’ attractiveness was emphasized.

The corridos of the Mexican Revolution were an identical phenomenon to that of the romanceros of the Spanish Civil War (Mayone Dias 433). Both were popular genres that served political and revolutionary functions, and both derived from the heroic romantic and epic traditions. However, some distinctions are apparent when comparing the Adelita of corrido songs with “Rosario Dinamitera” (“Rosario Dynamiter”) and “Romance a Lina Odena” (“Ballad for Lina Odena”) in the romanceros. In the corrido,
the Adelita is romantically portrayed as the sweetheart of the troops with a heart of gold. Most importantly, corridos highly emphasize the Adelita’s love relationship with her male soldier. The male soldier is deeply in love with his soldadera (Adelita) and will follow her wherever she goes, as she is the type of woman worth fighting for and worth following. In contrast, the Spanish romanceros do not focus on her beauty or her romantic relationships to a man. Instead, the poem “Rosario Dinamitera” centers on her valor and sacrifice. Similarly, the “Romance a Lina Odena” exalts her courage and sense of honor as well as her uniform, the symbolical blue overall.

Films such as *La Soldadera* (1966) *La Negra Angustias* (1949) and *Libertarias* or *Juegos de Guerra* (1996) attempted to develop a more nuanced picture of the role played by these iconic women. The appearance of films depicting the iconography of soldaderas and milicianas constitutes the second stage in their evolution. The characters depicted in the three films seem to represent the multiple roles of soldaderas and milicianas as brave combatants, or as camp followers in the rearguard, most generally performing auxiliary tasks. In the case of the film *La Soldadera*, the main character Lázara is depicted as a camp follower. Similarly, the nun María in the film *Libertarias* depicts the rearguard miliciana (she travels with the troops which contradicts Line’s characterization). Although brave in her own right, she is incapable of engaging in combat due to her religious beliefs. *La Negra Angustias*, on the other hand, depicts the soldadera as the epitome of strength and bravery. Young Angustias climbs up the ranks to colonel and confronts gender prejudice and racial discrimination along the way, thus truly personifying the soldadera combatant. The film *Libertarias* provides a heterogeneous representation of the milicianas ranging from Anarchists women from the association.
Mujeres Libres to former prostitutes and nuns. The role of Angustias in La Negra Angustias is in many respects similar to the brave and fierce Anarchist leader Pilar, who fits the miliciana combatant role. A remarkable distinction between the Mexican films La Negra Angustias and La Soldadera and the Spanish film Libertarias lies in the way these three film directors chose deliberately to cinematically portray soldaderas and milicianas. The Mexican films are conservative in the way they approach brutal war scenes, language, and even sexual content. In contrast, the Spanish film is graphic, war scenes are brutal, the language is explicit, and the sexual assault scene is graphic and revealing in comparison to La Negra Angustias, that does not show the actual sexual assault. Despite the fact that some soldaderas were considered to be prostitutes or promiscuous, this promiscuity is shown to a much lesser extent in the Mexican film La Soldadera, where Lázara is taken by a rebel soldier involuntarily, after her husband is killed. In other words, she was forced to be a concubine, but the film treats the character delicately and retains her sense of innocence. The film Libertarias, on the other hand, includes scenes that attempt to discredit the milicianas’ bravery and sacrifice by linking them to prostitution and by depicting them as carriers of venereal diseases. Another important distinction between them lies in the fact that soldaderas were for the most part abducted, as was the case of Lázara in La Soldadera, rather than formally recruited as was generally the case with the milicianas. This in part explains the differences in the poster art: the milicianas are represented in recruitment posters, whereas the eroticized images of the soldaderas in the calendar art attempts to romanticize the soldadera, covering up the abduction and rape of these women.
As presented in both the soldadera and the miliciana chapters, there are important distinctions in the two countries’ historical and political backgrounds that affected the evolution of the soldadera and the miliciana icons. The Mexican Revolution attempted to end with the oppression and unbearable long-term dictatorial regime of Porfirio Díaz. In the end, the liberal revolutionaries were victorious and therefore pursued a democratic type of government where freedom of expression was protected. Consequently, Mexican writers such as Nelly Campobello were able to write without facing government censorship, although in general the machista culture did not allow for women writers to thrive. Other women critics, such as Elena Garro in Los recuerdos del porvenir (Recollections of Things to Come, 1969) and Rosario Castellanos in Balún Canán (Balun Canan, 1957) were also able to publish literary works about the Mexican Revolution. In Spain, on the other hand, Franco’s military coup against the newly proclaimed Second Republic was successful. As a result, the Spanish Republican government based on democratic principles vanished. Instead an oppressive government was put in place, and a thirty-six year-long dictatorship vigorously forbade any sort of publication coming from the defeated Republican side, let alone works depicting milicianas or rojas.

As pointed out before, in the aftermath of Franco’s death in Spain a pact of silence was followed in an attempt to promote democratic coexistence between left and right so that the country could move forward. Thus, the political tactic was to heal by forgetting the past. In the period immediately after Franco’s death in 1975, Spain continued to live a lugubrious and hermetic life. Attempts to deal with the brutal historical legacy of the Franco era, nonetheless, began to appear mainly in the mid-1980s and the beginning of the 1990s. As a result, a number of novels such as, Historia de una
maestra (1990) Mujeres de negro (1994), La fuerza del destino (1997), and La voz dormida (2002) and films such as Libertarias or Juegos de Guerra (1996) representing in one way or another the Spanish Civil War created “a memory boom” in an effort to recuperate the past.

Despite the fact that representations of milicianas during the Franco dictatorship were practically non-existent due to the oppression and high censorship, some women intellectuals found ways to resist by writing novels. A twenty-three-year-old, Carmen Laforet, wrote a powerful and polished in its style novel that was published in 1944 despite strict censorship. Laforet’s semiautobiographical novel, Nada, offers the perspective of an isolated female amongst the vast plethora of male novelists at the time and within the isolation of Franco’s Spain, a country obsessed by death and religious sufferance. Laforet’s narrative paints the life of an orphaned young woman, Andrea, who leaves her small town to attend university in war-ravaged Barcelona, giving subtle and indirect glimpses of how poverty, widespread hunger, and oppression were part of everyday life. Laforet’s work is remarkable as it paves the way for other women intellectuals to pursue memory recovery during the post-Franco years.

María Teresa León used her undesired exile experience in Paris and in Buenos Aires to her advantage to resist and criticize her country and to avoid the Francoist censorship. However, during the war years, she managed to publish various works depicting the Civil War era and the struggle of the miliciana combatants, (she was one of them) such as the Crónica general de la guerra civil, “La doncella guerrera” and the famous political and highly ideological pamphlet, El Mono Azul. During her stay in Spain, her narratives included stories of illiterate working class women who lived in
acute poverty along with their children and who were involuntarily “dragged along the revolutionary struggle” (Linhard 186). She also published Tales from Contemporary Spain (1935). Once in exile she wrote various novels, among them You Will Die Far Away (1942) and Memoria de la melancolía (1977). As talented as León was, she was overshadowed by her famous husband, the poet Rafael Alberti. As a result, her work did not reach the recognition her husband’s work did. It is interesting to note that Nelly Campobello, the Mexican author who also published a collection of tales based on childhood memories of pure violence and brutality in 1931, faced similar challenges as León did. The works of both authors contended with “the slow vanishing … in their respective canons” as well as the lack of acknowledgement due to being undervalued mainly by a canon dominated by patriarchal values (Linhard 188). Both women also died alone under deplorable conditions and their work largely forgotten, and only vindicated postmortem.

Both authors have been associated, in one way or another, with the soldaderas and milicianas. In Cartucho, Campobello narrates the story of a true and courageous soldadera called Nacha Ceniceros; nonetheless, historical events are mythologized and distorted by Campobello, who witnessed these horrendous war events at age four, thus affirming a subjective oral tradition. In 1939, as we have seen, León identifies herself as a miliciana when stopped in Algeria. Consequently, in this simple anecdote, León identifies herself as a miliciana, a woman that fought to “defend the heroism of the milicianas” (Linhard 190). In Hasta no verte Jesús mio, a novel published in 1969, we find yet another example of a Mexican soldadera such as Campobello’s Nacha Ceniceros. The novel recounts the real life and historical events lived by Jesús Palancares, an
Indian born in Oaxaca who lived an unbearable childhood. Elena Poniatowska based her novel on extensive interviews with this ex-soldadera, who recounts her struggles as an abducted camp follower and then as a combatant. She also recounts a lifetime of poverty and misery in the Mexican post-revolutionary war period.

In terms of international influence, la soldadera was introduced to United States audiences as early as 1914 in John Reed’s *Insurgent Mexico*, and in the form of corridos named “La Adelita” in 1919 recorded by Trío González, and “Marijuana, La Soldadera” in 1929 by Hermanos Bañuelos in Los Angeles. Her influence further expanded in 1936 in the theatrical performance, *Soldadera: A Play of the Mexican Revolution* directed by Josephina Niggli, which was “the first theatrical representation, north or south of the border, of the participation of female soldiers, soldaderas, in the Mexican Revolution” (Arrizón 98). The theatrical play further provided a contextual and political frame that contributed to the construction of Mexican-American identity in the 1930’s and 40’s. Cultural political identity is not a simple concept and Josefina Niggli’s theatrical folklore and plays broke, to an extent, with the existing barriers of xenophobia and Mexican-American segregation by exposing Anglo-American audiences to her picturesque Mexican plays at a time when Mexican-Americans were segregated and denied fundamental rights. She was more interested, in fact, in exposing the United States to other forms of art different than the usual, well accepted European works (Arrizón 100).

As early as 1929, The League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) was founded, which made it the oldest Hispanic civil rights organization in the United States. This organization was founded at a time when Mexican-Americans were denied basic civil and human rights. "No Mexicans Allowed" signs were everywhere in the United
States, creating extreme prejudice against Mexican-Americans. In an attempt to overcome with the obstacles to social and economic mobility, they strived for assimilation or Americanization (Bernal and Martinelli 50-51). Americanization or assimilation was sought upon by the new leadership through LULAC to break down discrimination and segregation amongst Latinos after the Mexican War, when many Mexicans became citizens of the United States but still acute prejudice was prevalent.

In terms of cinematography, even though La Adelita was represented as an object of sexual desire, at the same time she was sometimes represented as a strong fighter during Mexican cinema’s golden age (1930’s-1950s). In the 1960s, around the time of the birth of the Chicano movement, political leader and activist Cesar Estrada Chávez became a political force in the United States who fought for Mexican-American civil rights. He carefully studied and followed the tactics used by distinguished leaders who practiced the power of non-violence action, such as Martin Luther King and Mahatma Gandhi (152-167). But it is perhaps Dolores Huerta, the co-founder of the United Farm Workers’ Union and by extension the Chicano movement, who most represents a descendent of the soldadera and of the militancy among Mexican women of the revolutionary and post-revolutionary era. As a civil rights activist she has endured multiple beatings, arrests, repression, but she never allowed herself to be deterred from her militancy and dedication to Mexican-American and worker’s rights. She never backed down. With the birth of the Chicano movement in the 1960s, it appears that La Adelita’s image played a multifaceted role. In other words, La Adelita was not forced to fit the overtly sexual and objectified role exclusively, but rather her image evolved to
represent the more historically accurate soldadera, as brave combatant and support (Fernández 62).

The proliferation of the soldadera figure through the songs and imagery of La Adelita has received considerable attention in recent times in Mexico, with more emphasis in her portrayal as a strong combatant. For instance, the image of the soldadera was used for the protection of indigenous rights in 1993 by the EZLN; furthermore, her image was also utilized to represent the 2007 oil protest by the left-wing party PRD, and in a parade commemorating the Bicentennial of Mexico’s independence organized by the government in 2010. This evolution and vindication, however, is not parallel with the case of the milicianas.

The third stage of the evolution of the iconic soldaderas and milicianas provides perhaps the most crucial distinction between them, which lies in how Mexico and Spain treated their historical memories or historical past. The Mexican Revolution followed an immediate extensive dissemination and commercialization of the revolutionary events in the aftermath of the revolution. Furthermore, according to Carlos Monsiváis, no other revolution has been as ferociously commercialized as the Mexican Revolution (“Notas” 1510), and that includes the propaganda that uses the image of the soldadera, also known as La Adelita. The miliciana heroines from the Second Republic, on the other hand, did not enjoy such commercialization and it took much time and effort for all the Republicans to be publicly and officially acknowledged by the post-Franco era Spanish governments.
As mentioned earlier, the memory boom in Spain culminated in the passage of the Law of Historical Memory in 2007 to legitimatize and consolidate national identity and to validate the societal claims from all those who have not yet been vindicated (Boyd 144). The passage of the Law of Historical Memory, however, is relatively recent and has endured acute debate. Thus, representations of the milicianas have not yet reached the status of national symbols of idealized femininity in political propaganda and popular culture, as have the Adelitas of the Mexican Revolution. The recent 2007 Law of Historical Memory opens up the possibility that the miliciana might become a symbol of national identity in Spain similar to La Adelita in Mexico.
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