

GENDER, MYTH, AND WARFARE: A CROSS-CULTURAL ANALYSIS OF  
WOMEN WARRIORS

by

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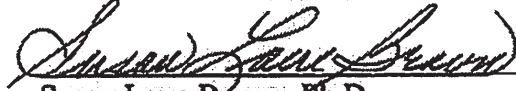
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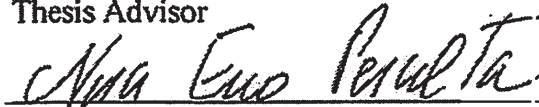
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This thesis was prepared under the direction of the candidate's thesis advisor, Dr. Susan Love Brown, Department of Anthropology, and has been approved by the members of her supervisory committee. It was submitted to the faculty of the Dorothy F. Schmidt College of Arts and Letters in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

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## ABSTRACT

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A combination of cross-cultural and symbolic methodologies suggests that women warriors occur in societies where there is both an emphasis on the sacred feminine that allows women greater access to positions of power and authority (as per Peggy Sanday) and where marital residency rules permit female fighters (following David B. Adams's theory on women warriors). While neither theory can stand alone in explaining the existence of women warriors, when combined both theories give a solid picture of societies that allow for female combatants. In this paper I propose that by combining Sanday's work on female power and Adams's work on women warriors we can come to a better understanding about just what makes the cultures that allow for women's participation in warfare unique, and perhaps what characteristics must be in place in order for a culture to have women warriors.

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## INTRODUCTION

In general, in most societies, women are not warriors – they are not involved directly in combat situations, and oftentimes they are not even involved in an indirect manner in the thick of battle (for example as assistants to soldiers or as “encouragers” or “inciters”). However, there do exist societies where women are warriors, where they participate in combat, in raids, and in the defense of their communities, just as men do. I believe that the extent of their involvement and their conspicuousness as warriors depends upon, as Peggy Sanday claims, women’s “secular power roles [being] derived from ancient concepts of sacred power.” That is, in societies where the feminine is directly related to sacred power and divine creation, women have access to greater amounts of secular power – which equates to more power in the political, economic, and religious spheres. Thus, I believe that this relationship between divine creation and sacred power (“the divine feminine”) and female secular power also gives women access to more power in the realm of warfare.

There have been numerous studies done on the subjects of women and warfare, women and revolutions, and women and civil war; however, the vast majority of these studies have examined women as the victims of warfare, not as active participants. Until recently (the last few years) there were very few serious studies of women as warriors or women as active, willing participants in combat, raids, or community defense. Now

research on women warriors seems to proliferate, however, I have seen no studies on why women warriors appear in some societies and not in others. The few serious studies that I initially found when I first began my research into women warriors in 2001 all seemed to focus on the lack of women warriors: why there are so few examples of women's involvement in war and combat, or explanations for why women do not participate in warfare that run the gamut from behavioral and psychological explanations (women lack the "so-called aggressive instinct," Konrad Lorenz 1966), to physical explanations due to sex differences and women's supposed lack of physical strength to be effective warriors, to David B. Adams's quite convincing cross-cultural methodology that points to women being barred from combat because of "a contradiction arising from marital residency systems that arose, in turn, as a function of warfare" (1983: 196). None of these explanations, however, completely satisfies my original question: why are women warriors found in some societies and not others? What makes societies with female warriors special, what unique characteristics do these cultures have that allow for women's participation in battle?

To try to answer these questions I begin with Peggy Sanday's book Female Power and Male Dominance, in which she investigates the relationship between female power, male dominance, and myth. According to Sanday, the myths of a people, and especially their creation myths, seem to have a direct relationship with the power roles that people are allowed to or are not allowed to assume within a culture (1981: xv-xvi). Sanday hypothesizes that each culture must select a sex-role plan – a set of expectations that organize human behavior and set limits as to what is acceptable and what is not, a sort of "symbolic template" (Clifford Geertz) that guides human behavior (and sex-roles) along



“predictable paths” (Sanday 1981: 3; Geertz 1973: 92). Working from Sanday’s research on sex-roles and sacred power – her theory that “secular power roles are derived from ancient concepts of sacred power” – and utilizing her structure of analyzing myth with regards to power roles, I intend to research how creation myths relate to women’s roles in warfare (1981:xv-xvi).

There are societies that have powerful female goddesses, but no women warriors. The Ashanti in West Africa, the Iroquois in North America, and the Semang of the tropical rain forest region of the Malay Peninsula are all examples of groups that have very powerful female deities but lack women who participate in a formalized manner in warfare. While there are no women warriors in these societies, women do wield much power in the political and economic spheres. Among the Ashanti and the Iroquois, women are instrumental in making the decisions that would lead the groups to war, and dual-sex systems allowed women to participate in economic and political decisions that affected the entire tribe (Sanday 1981: 27-8). Among the Semang neither men nor women go to war – it is unheard of among these nomadic (small game) hunter-gatherers; however, women as well as men had political and economic power in this society, where, “to the extent that leadership exists, it is based on the ability to be assertive” – and women as well as men have the ability to be assertive (19, 21).

Although there are societies in which powerful female deities are found, but where women warriors do not exist, it is difficult to find societies where women warriors exist but that have no powerful female deities. However, Sanday’s theory on the mythological bases for female power is only a partial explanation of why women join in

on warfare, revolution, raiding and battle. Therefore it is necessary to incorporate other theories on why women warriors appear in some societies and not others.

Because of this I will also incorporate David B. Adams's research on women warriors. As per Adams, there are few women warriors due to marital residency systems that arose as a function of warfare (1983:196). Adams utilizes research first presented by Carol and Marvin Ember (1971, 1974) that shows a strong relationship between marital residence patterns and patterns of warfare (internal or external), but Adams goes further and postulates that not only does marital residency determine what type of warfare a group engages in, but it also determines whether or not women are allowed to participate in warfare.

Murdock and Provost explained male-restricted, sex-based tasks as having to do with men's greater physical strength, their greater capacity for short bursts of excessive energy, and the "burdens of pregnancy and infant care" that women have (in Sanday 1981: 77). However, physical strength is not a very good determinant of sex-based tasks, as "there is plasticity in the development of physical strength, so that cross-culturally there is considerable diversity in the degree to which males are stronger than females" – women perform many tasks that take a great deal of strength in many cultures, such as water-carrying or the carrying of firewood or food-gathering (77).

Other theories on why women don't participate in warfare include the culture-bound concept called the "Danger Hypothesis," which states that it would be less efficient for women – especially nursing mothers or childbearing women – to be exposed to activities that might be construed as "dangerous" (Sanday 1981: 77-8). According to White, Burton, and Brudner, danger, travel over great distances, and "economies of

effort,” rather than physical strength alone, determine activities that are strictly male ((77). Danger, however, is also a culture-bound concept: what might be construed as dangerous in one culture may not be considered dangerous at all in another culture.

Finally, there are economic and social reasons for women going to war or participating in battle, raiding, or revolution. Revolution is perhaps the clearest example of economic and social reasons for women’s participation in warfare, and I use the Mexican Revolution as an example of these economic and social reasons. In Mexico the Revolution came about because economic and social policies failed to provide the masses with enough food, employment, land and education to support them in any meaningful way, and most of the populace was subject to a terrible loss of means of production and subsequent alienation via subjugation. Porfirio Diaz’s positivism, and the belief in order and progress had failed miserably. Marx states that “[s]ociety as a whole is more and more splitting up into two great hostile camps, into two great classes directly facing each other: Bourgeoisie and Proletariat” – in Mexico of 1910 this was certainly true, and the warfare that followed could certainly be attributed to the subjugation of masses of peasants by the great political and economic interests of the time.

The suffering of the majority, then, became the cause of the Revolution – and it was specifically the economic and social suffering that the majority were exposed to that lit the fuse that exploded in Mexico in 1910. Women suffered as much as men under the Porfirian economy, and women, as much as men, were invested in the Revolution that followed. Because of this women participated in a very real sense – they were camp followers and soldaderas, but they were also soldiers with rank and tenure. This difference – that women were soldiers with rank and tenure – I believe, is because the

culture of Mexico permitted women to assume these positions as much as the revolutionary situation demanded it.

But what is it that makes cultures with female warriors different from cultures that lack female warriors? Is it a structural difference, a difference in mythology and concepts of sacred power, a combination of the two, or something else entirely? It is my hope that by joining these two theories on female power and participation in warfare, that is, by joining Sanday's and Adams's theories, I will be able to come to a conclusion about why women are free to participate in warfare in some societies – that is, what is different about these societies that allows for female participation in battle – and why women are precluded from battle in other societies.

## THESIS STATEMENT

As per Sanday's theory on sex-roles and sacred power, in cultures where the mythic creator is either a female or is dual in nature (i.e.: the creator is either a couple or a dual male/female being) women's status is higher than in cultures where the creator is a male being. That is, in societies where the mythic creator is female or dual in nature women have strong roles in the economic, political, and religious spheres of their societies. I argue that women in these societies are also more likely to participate in warfare. However, I believe that women's participation in warfare is not solely linked to an access to secular power that depends upon the presence of the sacred feminine, therefore I also include information on marital residency and descent, following, and hopefully expanding upon, David B. Adams's theory on why there are (so few) women warriors. Thus, it is my hypothesis that the presence of women warriors in a society depends not only on residence rules and descent systems, but also on concepts of sacred power. Women have access to roles as warriors not only because the marital residency system permits it, but also because concepts of sacred power give women the secular power to assume warrior status.

## APPROACH/METHODOLOGY

In order to find out under what circumstances women warriors appear, or do not appear, in a given society, I will begin by researching societies where there is direct historical evidence for women warriors. By direct historical evidence I mean that there is written documentation for the presence of women involved in combat, feuding, raiding, or battle – women involved in warfare. The written documentation can be from any of the following sources: anthropological case studies and monographs, information contained in the HRAF, and written and/or oral documentation from historians, sociologists, archaeologists, colonized and colonizers, participants in warfare, and, in the case of Latin America, written documentation from the conquistadors and indigenous participants/witnesses of the Spanish Conquest. I may also include other kinds of information, such as information on women warriors from the archaeological record, although in my research so far I have found very little such archaeological information. As an aside, with regard to women warriors in the archaeological record, there is some question as to the interpretation of the archaeological data available (grave goods, for example, or injuries to bones) and the interpretation of this data being, perhaps, biased (see Weglian 2001: 137, Hollimon 2001: 188, Doucette 2001: 165-8, Conkey and Spector 1984, and Conkey and Williams 1987).

In sum, the documentation for women warriors will come from a broad number of sources. Because women involved in combat has traditionally been a topic that few have

studied, and even fewer have bothered to document until recently, many of my sources are merely a sentence from a document in the HRAF, for example, or a few lines on the subject from a Spanish conquistador nearly five hundred years ago.

Other documentation is more extensive, such as Blanca López de Mariscal's book on depictions of women in writings by witnesses of the Spanish Conquest in Mexico (La figura femenina en los narradores testigos de la Conquista), which, by compiling testimony from both the conquistadors and indigenous people who saw the conquest first-hand, helps to round out a picture of women's participation in the war that ensued. Or the documentation on women warriors in Dahomey, where a good deal of evidence for women warriors exists, and where writing on the subject has flourished over the last few years (for example Sanday 1981, Jones 1997, Alpern 1998). Evidence for women as warriors in many of the societies I examine is modest, but it does exist, and I believe should not be overlooked. In quite a few of the societies that I examine, the evidence for women warriors comes from anthropological sources from the early days of anthropology, when representations of women's involvement in their societies were biased, distorted, or simply scarce because anthropologists either lacked access to women's accounts or brought their own assumptions and expectations about gender relations to their research. As Rayna Rapp Reiter states

Male bias is carried into field research. It is often claimed that men in other cultures are more accessible to outsiders (especially male outsiders) for questioning. A more serious and prior problem is that we think that men control the significant information in other cultures, as we are taught to believe they do in ours. We search them out and tend to pay little attention to the women. Believing

that men are easier to talk to, more involved in the crucial cultural spheres, we fulfill our own prophecies in finding them to be better informants in the field (1975: 14).

Mexico has its own special form of white, male, hegemonic bias, casually referred to as “*ninguneo*.” I address *ninguneo* in my case study of Mexico because it is an important social reason behind the virtual disappearance of women warriors from the historical record, unless they fit a very specific, idealized feminine mold. This disappearance of women warriors from the official historical record dates back to pre-conquest times and continues all the way up until the present. Women warriors are there, but hidden just beneath the surface, generally because they refuse to fit the social mold of what constitutes “feminine.”

Some of the information that I include are just “one-liners,” that is, just a sentence or two on women’s participation in warfare, from anthropologists early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century whose studies were more likely than not limited by male bias or lack of access to women and their stories (Kroeber 1908, Erdland 1914, Lowie 1935, Hill 1936, Michelson 1937, and Kinietz 1946, for example).

Curiously, male bias is often not as apparent (although it without a doubt occurs) among the writings of the conquistadors: their initial informants were often women, and many of the conquistador-chroniclers expressed astonishment at indigenous women’s participation in everything from the economy and politics to warfare, and fortunately they left written records of their astonishment for posterity. The first writings of the encounter between the Spaniards and the indigenous people of Mexico allow us to see a world in which women are autonomous and powerful in their own right, a view that changes once



the Spaniards are established as colonizers of the Mexica world. A wonderful example of an indigenous woman who was not just a major participant in the conquest of Mexico, but who could be perceived as the significant driving force that ultimately led to the conquest of Mexico, is the woman erroneously called 'La Malinche' (Malinche was the Mexica name for Hernán Cortés – it means "Malinalli's Captain"). Malinalli (also called Malintzín by the Mexica and Doña Marina by the Spaniards) became Cortés's interpreter, informant, second-in-command, and lover, and is remembered in early colonial writing and art as the example of a woman who participated fully in the Spanish Conquest.

Once I have determined the presence of women warriors in a society I will then test the theories of Peggy Sanday and David B. Adams – I will look at the creation myths in each of the societies to see if Sanday's theory on the presence of the sacred feminine equates to female power, and hence female warriors, and I will also look at each society's marital residence rules to see if they also follow Adams's criteria for presence/absence of women warriors. Finally, I will determine the descent system of each society and see if this might have anything to do with the presence of women warriors. I will provide a survey of cultures with evidence of women warriors throughout the world, dividing the culture areas into Africa, North and South America, and Asia and the Insular Pacific. I also will present a case study of women warriors among the Mexica in pre-conquest and early post-conquest Mesoamerica and women warriors in Mexico since the conquest and up to the present day. It is my intent to determine whether the presence of women warriors is based purely on symbolic relationships between power and the sacred feminine, on marital residence rules and descent, or on a combination of all of these

factors – thus I plan on using both symbolic and standard cross-cultural methods in order to determine why women warriors are present in a given society

## PRELIMINARY RESULTS/DISCUSSION

### Africa

#### Igbo

The Igbo are an ethnic group located in Nigeria consisting of many subgroups, however, only two subgroups will be considered here: the Ohaffia and the Afikpo Igbo. The Ohaffia are matrilineal, with bilocal marital residency. The Afikpo reckon kinship bilaterally, and reside bilocally after marriage (HRAF Culture Summary). The Igbo believe in a supreme (male) god, Chukwu, creator of the universe and his counterpart Ala, the earth goddess who created humans and proclaimed “the law that is the basis for all moral human behaviour” (Stone 1979: 141).

The Igbo have a dual political organization that includes acknowledged roles of authority for both sexes. The male obi is in theory the “acknowledged head of the whole community,” however, in practice he is generally concerned with the male section of the community; it is the female omu who is the “acknowledged mother of the whole community,” and who oversees the women in the group (Okonjo 1976: 47). Both obi and omu have their own respective cabinets and counselors, called *ilogo*, and, while the male political leader and his cabinet are “responsible” for the community as a whole, if the women have any problems or disagreements with male decisions they are free to “challenge male authority in the community if necessary” (48-9). This ability to

challenge male authority asserts itself in various situations, including the marketplace, which is under the complete authority of the women (48-9).

Traditionally, women were involved in the judicial system and political organization of the Igbo, but in 1929, at the time of the British colony, the colonizers excluded women from the composition of the native courts. This led to the Women's War of 1929. The women, seeing themselves not only excluded from the new political structure, but also threatened with possible taxation without legitimate *female* representation rebelled and waged traditional "women's war." The women donned the traditional Igbo dress of a warrior (loincloths, palm fronds, and mkpatat leaves), armed themselves with pestles and machetes, and went out to confront the colonial enemy. According to Alicia Abaraonye, the mkpatat leaf was "the official emblem of the Ekong of Ebieowo society of warriors. It was only worn when the war drum sounded and the young men came out for battle" (Abaraonye 1998: 122).

### Dahomey

The Dahomean people of West Africa reckon descent matrilineally (Blier 1995: 409). Residency after marriage is bilocal (Murdock 1957:676). The Dahomean people worship Mawu-Lisa, believed to be the creator of the universe and the people of Dahomey (Sanday 1981: 71). Mawu was the female, earth part of the creator; Lisa was the male, sky portion. Mawu and Lisa came together to create the universe and the people of Dahomey. Their first creation was their daughter Gbadu, from whom all the people of Dahomey are descended (hence matrilineal descent). According to Sanday, "Mawu-Lisa expresses the equilibrium between opposites and the unity of the world" (71). This equilibrium is also expressed in the political structure of the Dahomeans: they

have, like the Igbo, a dual-sex political system where both men and women participate, with acknowledged roles of power and authority for both sexes.

In the kingdom of Dahomey each and every male official had a female counterpart who functioned as a balance to his power. The almost all-female palace political structure (except for the king) was counterbalanced by male officials outside of the palace. Even the army was in equilibrium, so to speak: “the army was divided into two wings, the right and the left; [e]ach wing was further divided into a male and a female part (86). Every male in the army, from the foot-soldier to the highest ranking officer, had a female counterpart in the all-female palace army. The palace army constituted a true fighting force: the women’s only duty was to protect the king (87). This female army had specialized divisions that were experts in bayonets, musketry, archery, and ammunition, and companies with names like the “razor women” (specialists in light swords, the “elephant huntresses” (the bravest women), and the “gan’u-nlan,” meaning the “sure to kill company” (Jones 1997: 90).

### North and South America

#### Delaware

According to Murdock’s World Ethnographic Sample the Delaware are both matrilineal and matrilocal. According to Ives Goddard in his article on the Delaware, the Delaware had two creation myths, one whereby the world was created by an omnipotent (male) god, and another with a female creator. Goddard states: “[s]ome Europeans were satisfied that the Delaware believed in creation by an omnipotent god, but a creation myth involving a pregnant woman falling from the sky was also recorded” (Goddard

HRAF doc. #20). Myths involving a pregnant woman who falls from the sky (like in the Iroquois creation myth) or a woman who is impregnated by the wind, for instance, are relatively common in Native American creation stories. Since the origin stories of the Delaware were recorded by Europeans at the time of contact, there is a good possibility that cultural bias by the colonizers allowed the female creation myth to be passed over in favor of the all-powerful male creator myth.

Evidence for women warriors among the Delaware is presented by W. Vernon Kinietz in the HRAF. Kinietz states: “Anciently the women were never known to accompany a war party, but since booty has been an inducement they have been much in the habit of joining them.” Kinietz also reports that while women rarely go to battle, they “have however a right to fight, which entitles them to a place in the ranks – if they behave well, they are as much commended as the male warriors” (HRAF doc. # 9).

### Ojibwa

The Ojibwa are patrilineal, reckoning descent exclusively through the father, however marital residence rules are ideally matrilineal – at least initially after marriage, and sometimes permanently (Murdock 683, HRAF Culture Summary). Their origin myth is dual; according to the Ojibwa religion, their people come from the male culture hero Nanabozho. Nanabozho is the progeny of the (male) Sun or Wind and the (female) daughter of the Nokomis, the Great Grandmother figure in Ojibwa mythology (Vecsey, HRAF doc. #41). There is yet another version of the creation, called “The Woman Who Fell From the Sky;” it is similar to the Iroquois creation myth, and similar to the creation myth recorded for the Delaware (Mythologies 1160).

The Ojibwa also had women warriors, a fact which has been overlooked by many Europeans who recorded Ojibwa history and culture, according to Priscilla Buffalohead in her article “Farmers, Warriors, Traders: A Fresh Look at Ojibwa Women.” Colonization interfered with women’s access to power and status within the group as Europeans, unaccustomed to dealing with women in positions of power (chief, trader, etc.), insisted on dealing solely with men. Ojibwa women in positions of authority were slowly replaced by men, and this has to some extent obscured women’s true participation in Ojibwa society.

The oral tradition of the Ojibwa has tales of women warriors and, according to Buffalohead, there is evidence that

this position was institutionalized, that there was a patterned, community-recognized way of becoming a woman warrior. Warrior women, for example, exhibited common life histories: youthful vision quests which pointed them in the direction of a career that crossed gender categories [...] (HRAF doc. #28)

Although the Ojibwa are a patrilineal society, the residence rules point to, as Adams claims, a lack of “contradictory loyalties during warfare” (Adams 196)

#### Fox (Mesquakie)

According to Murdock, the Fox reckon kinship bilaterally, and post-marital residence is uxorilocal (bilocal after an initial period living with or near the wife’s kin). The Fox, like the Ojibwa, are an Algonquian tribe, and their creation myth is nearly identical to the Ojibwa myth about the “Woman Who Falls From The Sky.” There is also evidence for women warriors: as Michelson states “[a]mong the Fox women could go to

war with their husbands and it has been reported that ‘even some women have become warrior women’” (Michelson 1937:11).

### Gros Ventre

The Gros Ventre reckon descent bilaterally and residence after marriage is either patri- or uxori-patrilocal, according to Murdock (683). Thus, they do not exactly fit Adams’s rule for female participation in war, as the residence rules could lead to what Adams calls “contradictory loyalties during warfare”. However, the Gros Ventre origin story is a dual myth, and very similar to the Crow origin story, according to Clark Wissler’s Blackfoot Mythology. In the Gros Ventre creation myth the women and men live in separate villages, and one day the female chief of the women’s village decides to have the women of her village go to the men’s village and marry the men, thus creating the Gros Ventre people (HRAF doc. #22). Here is Wissler’s account of the story:

Now in those days, the men and the women did not live together. The men lived in one camp and the women in the other. The men lived in lodges made of skin with the hair on; the women, in good lodges. [The idea is, that the women dress the skins, hence the men could not live in dressed-skin lodges.] One day Old Man came to the camp of the men, and, when he was there, a woman came over from the camp of the women. She said she had been sent by the chief of the women to invite all the men, because the women were going to pick out husbands. Now the men began to get ready, and Old Man dressed himself up in his finest clothes: he was always fine looking. Then they started out, and, when they came to the women's camp, they all stood up in a row. Now the chief of the women came out



to make the first choice. She had on very dirty clothes, and none of the men knew who she was. She went along the line, looked them over, and finally picked out Old Man, because of his fine appearance. Now Old Man saw many nicely dressed women waiting their turn, and, when the chief of the women took him by the hand, he pulled back and broke away. He did this because he thought her a very common woman. When he pulled away, the chief of the women went back to her lodge and instructed the other women not to choose Old Man. [...]

The chief of the women comes back dressed in her finest, and, ignoring Old Man, she chooses another man to marry. Old Man becomes angry, being the only unpaired male, but the woman chief tells him that after this he will become a tree, and just stand there like he is doing now. To this day Old Man is still standing there as a tree, and he is still mad (HRAF doc. 22).

There is also some evidence for women warriors: Alfred Kroeber, in his work among the Gros Ventre, came across female warriors. Kroeber states: “women not infrequently went with the war parties” to fight (1908:192).

### Crow

Culturally the Crow were quite similar to the Gros Ventre; although matrilineal, like the Gros Ventre they were patrilocal, and their origin myth – the story of Old Man and the woman chief – was identical (Murdock 683, Wissler HRAF doc. 22). Women warriors were definitely not unheard of among the Crow: “the warfare pattern was open to anyone, man or woman, and when a woman was able to develop her reputation to the point where she was equal to a chief, her war honors guaranteed acceptance in the

councils” (Voget 1964: 490). And Robert Lowie, in his study of the Crow, claims that among the Crow “there are memories of a woman who went to war... indeed one of my woman informants claimed to have struck a coup” (Lowie 1935: 215). And finally, according to Denig, the female warrior came to be a male gender variant, who “kept up all the style of a man and chief, has her guns, bows, lances, war horses, and even two or three young women as wives, but in reality servants” (Denig 1930 quoted in Voget 490).

### Comanche

The Comanche, according to Murdock, reckoned descent bilaterally, and after marriage took up bilocal residence. In the Comanche origin story the Great Spirit (an all powerful being who is both mother and father) took dust from all of the four cardinal directions and formed the Comanche people. Comanche women did occasionally participate in warfare, albeit the extent to which they participated seems to have been limited: according to Wallace and Hoebel, the women warriors of the Comanche would “snipe with bows and arrows from fringes of the fray” (1952: 253).

### Apache

The Apache reckoned descent matrilineally and residence after marriage was matrilocal (HRAF Culture Summary, Buchanan 1986: 12). Perhaps because women stayed with their natal families they were especially valued for their roles as mothers and daughters, even more valued than sons: at marriage a son moved away, but the economic power of a daughter was never lost (13). Not surprisingly, the feminine also figured prominently in the Apache cosmology: the supreme deity was Ussen, a deity with no particular gender, and Ussen’s contemporary was White Painted Woman, who was the

mother of Child of the Waters, the culture hero of the Apache (15). Ussen and White Painted Woman were jointly responsible for the creation of the world, and for making the first Apache, Child of the Waters.

Women warriors were far from unusual – and since the Apaches taught both their boys and girls the arts of horseback riding, handling weapons, and the necessary knowledge for accompanying warriors on raids and war parties, women learned to be involved in warfare and raiding from childhood (19). Even after marriage women continued to accompany husbands on raids: “[A]pache wives were frequent companions on raiding and warring parties. Customarily those wives who desired to accompany their husbands were allowed to do so without reservation” (19).

### Navajo

According to Murdock the Navajo are matrilineal and matrilocal (684). However, residency rules are quite flexible, and, depending on individual wants or needs, couples may live wherever they choose after marriage (Reynolds et al 1967:189-91). The Navajo origin story is a myth about First Man, First Woman and Coyote, who, working together, find the Earth and create the Navajo people. In the beginning, First Man, First Woman and Coyote find themselves in a tiny world, too small for them, so they decide to climb up to the next world, inhabited by Sun and Moon. In this world First Man becomes rather angry when Sun tries to seduce First Woman, and so, along with their new friends – the men of the cardinal points – Coyote, First Man and First Woman decide to climb up to the next world. In this world there is an evil sea creature that has two beautiful children; Coyote carries off the children of the sea creature, and the angry creature floods

the world. By gathering enough stones to build a mountain, Coyote, First Man, First Woman and the men of the cardinal points manage to climb into the next world – our world, the Earth. Thus the creation myth of the Navajo – the “creation” of the Earth – is more of a discovery. And with male, female, and animal actors this myth could be considered a “dual creation myth.”

Willard W. Hill provides us with documented evidence for the participation of women in warfare in his 1936 book entitled Navajo Warfare. According to Hill, the Navajo accepted women into their war parties: “a woman, if she wished, might join a war party. There were never more than two women in a party. They fought just as did the men” (1936:3).

### Tupinamba

The Tupi-Guarani speaking peoples inhabit the coastal areas of northeastern Brazil, and according to Murdock, the Tupinamba reckon descent bilaterally and live matrilocally (686). According to the Tupi-Guaraní cosmology, during the “chaos of the first primordium Nandé Cy, the mother of all, was devoured by a ravenous beast but was miraculously restored to life in a world without evil” (Sullivan 2002: 189). Nandé Cy is the one that all things come from (the creator of all things) and to whom all people return at death, in the world without evil. The “other” creator and hero of the Tupinamba people is the god/culture hero named Nanderú Guazú, thus there seems to be a double creation for the Tupinamba – the first through the female Nandé Cy, and the second through the male culture hero Nanderú Guazú (189).

The first explorer to visit the Tupi-Guaraní tribes of northeastern Brazil, Pedro de Magalhães de Gandavo, left a written record with first-hand evidence of female warriors.

Magalhães de Gandavo states that there were some Indian women who determine to remain chaste: these have no commerce with men in any manner, nor would they consent to it even if refusal meant death. They give up all the duties of women and imitate men, and follow men's pursuits as if they were not women. They wear the hair cut in the same way as the men, and go to war with bows and arrows and pursue game, always in company with men; each has a woman to serve her, to whom she says she is married, and they treat each other and speak with each other as man and wife (HRAF doc. #12).

### Asia and the Insular Pacific

#### Majuro

The Majuro are from the Marshall Islands and, according to Murdock are matrilineal and matrilocal (681). In the creation myth of the Majuro (Marshall Islanders), the creator is a god (possibly male, although there is no specific mention of gender), who first makes the islands, and then sends down four men to the cardinal points to help in the creation of the world. Later the deity sends down more men, and all the men work together to create the culture of the Marshallese Islanders. People are told by the deity that in order to get to the spirit land after death they must first, respect their mother, second, respect their father, third be brave in battle, and fourth, respect their chief (Davenport 1953: 221-23). I find the first command ("respect your mother") curious, as the creation myth seems to only contain men – perhaps when the myth was recorded the person who recorded it used "men" in the sense of humankind, perhaps the Majuro only have one word for humans and that was translated as "men," regardless this would need more investigation to get to the bottom of this linguistic/gender puzzle.

Majuro women were full participants in battle – women did not just take part in defense of the home from enemies, but accompanied men to battle: “women take part in war, not only to when they have to defend the home ground from the enemy, but also in attacks, and although in the minority, they form part of the squadron... throwing stones with their bare hands” (Erdland 1914: 93).

### Maori

According to Murdock the Maori reckon descent bilaterally, and live bilocally (682). The Maori creation myth is dual in nature and involves the deities Rangi and Papa (heaven and earth). In the Maori myth, at the beginning of time Rangi and Papa – “the source from which, in the beginning, all things originated” – were embraced in perpetual sexual intercourse (Grey 1970:1). All about Rangi and Papa was darkness, the entire universe was dark. Their children, however, tired of the perpetual darkness and decided they wanted light. They realized that they had to split up their parents in order to bring light to the universe, and so all the brothers got in between their parents and pushed their father off of their mother, creating the sky (Rangi) and the earth (Papa). The earth and the sky exist thanks to the children of Papa and Rangi; it is said that the mutual love of the earth and sky continues:

the soft warm sighs of her loving bosom still ever rise up to him, ascending from the woody mountains and valleys and men call these mists; and the vast Heaven, as he mourns through the long nights his separation from his beloved, drops frequent tears upon her bosom, and men seeing these, term them dew-drops (11).

Perhaps because of this emphasis on the dual nature of creation, along with the Maori marital residency rules, Maori women are able to take part in warfare. Elsdon Best states

that “among the Maori, women occasionally took part in the fighting and also accompanied raiding parties” (Best 1924: 231).

### Orokaiva

There is also evidence for women warriors among the Orokaiva, a group from Papua New Guinea. However, due to their kinship and residence patterns they do not fit neatly into the categories for the societies already discussed: the Orokaiva are patrilineal and patrilocal, according to both Murdock and Annette Weiner in her article “Women of Value, Men of Renown” (Murdock 681, Weiner 1976: HRAF doc. #25). Despite this seeming conflict of Adams’s theory regarding residence rules and participation in warfare women did participate in warfare: “the women were always ready to urge on the fighting men and even to mingle in the fray as W. E. Armit found... when they finally were beaten off that two of the women lay dead with spears in their hands” (Williams 1930: 164).

### Vietnam

The Vietnamese, according to Murdock, are patrilineal and patrilocal – although occasionally matrilineal (680). Murdock states that occasional matrilocality could indicate a survival of an earlier form of marital residency (670). Similar to the patrilineal/patrilocal society of the Orokaiva, the Vietnamese have a tradition of women warriors that dates back possibly to before the colonization by the Chinese. The origin myths of the Vietnamese are both dual myths – one, the myth of the giant *Không Lo*, *Không Lo* has a female companion, and together they co-create the world (Mythologies 996-7). The other Vietnamese origin story tells of Lord Dragon and Lady Au-Co.

Lady Au-Co gives birth to a pouch from which 100 eggs emerge. From these 100 eggs come 100 boys, the first people of Vietnam (1001-2).

Vietnamese legend is full of stories of women warriors, and the legend of the Trung sisters, who led an unsuccessful rebellion against the Chinese invaders in 40 A.D., is the legend that is the most widely known (Tétreault 1994: 121). In modern times women warriors are prevalent: women participated heavily – both as camp followers and as soldiers – in the war against the French and the Americans (121). Women participated in battle and earned ranks within the forces. It is said that the participation of women was so extensive that very high rates of female casualties (upwards of 250,000 deaths in the south alone) have been reported (121). Called “long-haired warriors” by the French and American forces, the tradition of the woman warrior lives on in modern Vietnam.



## CASE STUDY: MEXICO

### Introduction: History and the effect of 'Ninguneo'

The Aztecs, or Mexica, reckon descent bilaterally, and residency after marriage is quite flexible (matrilocal, patrilocal, or neolocal), according to Frances Berdan in her book The Aztecs of Central Mexico: An Imperial Society (1982: 67-69). The Mexica also had many creation myths; one of the earliest is the dual-sex creation by the Cipactli, the first living thing, and the thing from which all subsequent life springs (Brundage 1979:31). Yet another myth speaks of Citlalinicue (“Star Skirt”), who is the mother of all – “all the gods were stars and she had borne them all” – Citlalinicue is the source of all wisdom and all creation: it is she who creates the universe, the gods, and the tecpatl or knife used in sacrifice, the holiest ritual in the Mexica religion (36). The gods she gives birth to (both male and female) create human beings through their own autosacrifice and with Citlalinicue’s help (36). Finally there is the mythical couple the Lord and Lady of Sustenance: both Mexica and Maya believed that this mythical couple created the sky, paradise, and the earth.

Warriors in Mexica culture were almost always male; however, evidence for women’s participation in war exists both in the archaeological and the historical records. Small clay figurines were excavated in the 1950s that are, according to Frederick Alvyn

Peterson, “veritable Amazons, bare-waisted, serious-faced, carrying shields, and wearing huge studded headdresses” (1954: 215). There is even more convincing evidence in the historical record, where, according to Elizabeth Salas in her book Soldaderas in the Mexican Military, the legends of the Toltecs speak of “women [who] fought side by side with men for Topiltzin until the tribe was destroyed in A.D. 1008” (1990:3). The Mexica had a named position for the women who accompanied men into battle: the *mociuauetzque*, or valiant woman (6). Women who died in childbirth were likened to warriors and given post-mortem warrior status. It is interesting to note that men who died in battle and women who died in childbirth were considered equivalent and were both granted a “glorious afterlife” in paradise (Berdan 105).

The participation of women in battle in Mexico is not just a thing relegated to the distant past; women in more recent times have also participated as women warriors in combat. Perhaps the best example of this was during the Mexican Revolution of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, where women and men took up arms and fought in the battles of the revolution. Some women so distinguished themselves that they were promoted for their valor and achieved titles in the ranks, such as Colonel Juana Ramona viuda de Flores and Lt. Colonel Angela Jimenez. Others, like Petra Herrera formed their own fighting brigades of women warriors and commanded their own troops in battle. Herrera was called La Generala (“the general”) by her women. Men were forbidden to enter Herrera’s camp, and the women were required to remain celibate if they desired to remain in the brigade.

The institution of the women warrior continues in present day Mexico: according to Salas in her article “Soldaderas: New Questions, New Sources,” between 20 and 30 percent of the fighters of the EZLN, the revolutionary group based in Chiapas, are

women (1995: 112). In fact, the second in command of the EZLN was, for many years, Comandante Ramona, until her death in 2006 (the first in command is Comandante Marcos). Comandante Ramona not only gained prominence in the organization but organized other women in the organization in order to make women's rights a major issue for the EZLN (113). In Mexico the institution of the woman warrior has not only survived colonization and culture change, but it has remained a vital part of indigenous culture and revolutionary movements up to the present day.

There are, however, societal factors that cover up or hide the woman warrior in both past and present day Mexico. A strong tendency toward machismo, combined with a denial of women's actual participation in the public sphere (and thus in warfare) work together to submerge women's history in Mexico. The name for this phenomenon of erasing or concealing women's and other subaltern's history in Mexico is called "*ninguneo*," which translates, roughly, into "nobodyness." *Ninguneo* is the removal of the social body, practiced by those accepted within the social sphere upon those whom they wish to remove or exclude from the social sphere. Women and the indigenous, the brown, the poor, and the uneducated are all victims of *ninguneo*, victims of those who would seek to remove them from society, push them out of the public sphere, and who would seek to take away the authority they should have over their own person, their own bodies, their own lives, and their own histories.

For women, *ninguneo* is the ultimate alienation practiced by the hegemony on women, and tells them that 'this public space is not yours; you have no identity outside of your (private) identity as daughter, sister, mother, or wife.' *Ninguneo* of women and the concurrent cultural practice of machismo have effectively removed women's bodies from

history. The dominant order, that is the orthodoxy “that has established itself as ‘historically true’ and concretely ‘universal’ ” has relegated these bodies to the realms of legend, myth, and stories to be told, not written down (Jean and John Comaroff 2002: 210).

Mexico as a society rests uneasily on this social foundation of white, wealthy male hegemony; it is a society that suffers from a split-consciousness: the old, pre-colonial ways of thinking and being intersect with the social order installed at colonization by the Spaniards. More often than not this intersection of orders is brutal: from uprisings and wars, social unrest, the Revolution of 1910, Tlatelolco in 1968, and the Zapatista movement of the 1990s to more subtle forms of institutionalized brutality like *ninguneo*. The wealthy white male who is in the social position to “*ningunear*” another person knows that his authority does not rest on an uncontested social foundation: the foundation is as uneasy as the earth beneath Mexico itself.

### Preconquest and Colonization

Warfare, colonization and revolution can all be seen as the place where public (political) and private (home) lives intersect: they are the ultimate private-public acts. During colonization a dominant, established order is overthrown in favor of a new, foreign order. What once was secure – the culture that was known, practiced and relied upon by a people – disappears or changes radically. While colonization begins in the public sphere, the warfare or negotiations between the established order and the new order that inevitably take place have a profound impact on the private spheres of home and family. The public act of colonization forever changes and radically rewrites both

the public and the private spheres. Colonization of the Mexica by the Spaniards was significantly different from the kind of colonization practiced by the Mexica in central Mexico. While the colonizing Spaniards forced their language, laws, educational system, and religion on the colonized Mexica, the Mexica themselves practiced a very different form of colonization, one of tribute. As per Jean Franco: “El dominio Azteca sobre el México central se basaba en un sistema tributario. No obstante, en su movimiento de expansión no se esforzaron en imponer su idioma y religión sobre los territorios conquistados” (Franco qtd. In Madrigal 2002: 35). Colonization of Mesoamerican tribes by the Mexica was therefore radically different from the experience of colonization by the Spaniards.

War, colonization and revolution bring the internal, private into the external, public. “Natural” spaces – that is, what the new, dominant Spanish colonial culture sees as “natural” divisions of space, public as male, private as female – are transgressed, and indigenous women’s participation in the Conquest typifies this transgression. Thus we have the importance of the official history and the eventual push to cover women’s participation up, or change the character of this participation: the power structures are threatened and the center cannot hold when now-colonized women attempt to insert themselves into the public, masculine domain of a colonized society.

Reports of women’s involvement at the early stages of the Conquest of Mexico are radically different from later accounts: testimonies of women who seemed to be on equal social footing with men were the norm; there were even multiple testimonies of women going to battle as warriors (both of these will be covered later on in this paper). In later accounts, women’s involvement was minimized or even back-tracked on, in the

case of Nuño de Guzmán, who states that there are amazons in this New World, but who later, in his second version of the events of the conquest, states that this is untrue (López de Mariscal 1997:43). Cortés, for obvious political reasons, minimized Malintzin's involvement in the conquest as much as possible in his Cartas de relación, to make it look as though he (and his men) were single-handedly responsible for the Conquest (68). Malintzin, also called "Malinche" or Doña Marina, was Cortés's native guide, translator, partner, and often-times battle ally; she was also the one person who made the conquest possible. Without her knowledge and linguistic ability, the conquest of Mexico may never have happened, or might have turned out very differently for the Spaniards. The breadth of knowledge held by Malintzin, however, would not have been possible if it were not for the social foundation of the Mexica, a social system where women were valued, educated, and seen as equal partners for men and important parts of society.

The social foundation prior to colonization was a dual-sex system – a system that was parallel and equivalent with regards to gender. According to Susan Kellogg in her book chapter entitled "From Parallel and Equivalent to Separate but Unequal: Tenochca Mexica Women, 1500-1700,"

[g]ender roles and relations in late pre-Hispanic Tenochtitlan were compounded of both complementary and hierarchical relations, though the former outweighed the latter. The complementary aspects of gender relations expressed themselves in a variety of ways, including genealogy and kinship, labor and work, and politics and religion. Complementary gender relations were frequently expressed through parallel structures of thought, language, and action in which males and

females were conceived of and played different yet parallel and equally necessary roles (1997: 125).

There is also evidence from the colonizers that women were in charge of their own lives and livelihoods in pre-conquest Mexico. In his Historia general y natural de las Indias, islas y tierra firme del mar océano, Fernández de Oviedo states that in the city of Cihuatlán (in Náhuatl the name Cihuatlán means “place of the women”), located on the border of the state of Jalisco with the state of Colima, women were in charge of their homes, their fields, and their children. Fernández de Oviedo describes women’s relation to men and divisions of male and female labor:

[...] quarto meses del año a dormir con ellas, é aquel tiempo se casan con ellos de prestado é no por mas tiempo, sin ocuparse en mas de las servir é contentar en lo que ellas les mandan que hagan de dia en el pueblo ó en el campo; é las noches dánles sus propias personas é camas: en el qual tiempo cultivan é siembran la tierra de maizales y legumbres, é lo cogen é lo ponen en las casas. Donde han seydo hospedados. E cumplido el tiempo ques dicho, ellos todos se van, é vuelven á sus tierras, donde son naturales... (1851-55:222-223).

According to Fernández de Oviedo, men spent four months with the women, were workers in their fields and company in the women’s homes and beds, but once the crops were harvested, the men went back to their own lands. The female children who were products of the four-month union of the women of Cihuatlán and the men from the neighboring territories were kept with the women, while the male children went with their fathers.

Fernández de Oviedo is not the only witness of the Conquest who notes the parity that women seem to have with men among the indigenous peoples of the Americas – Christopher Columbus in his Diario de a bordo, Bartolomé de las Casas in his Historia de las Indias, Juan de Sámano in the Relación de la conquista de los teules chichimecas, que dio Juan de Sámano, and Nuño de Guzmán in the Primera relación anónima de la jornada que hizo Nuño de Guzmán a la Nueva Galicia are all in agreement that the economic and social relationships between men and women in this New World are very different from those in the Old World.

According to Blanca López de Mariscal, women's place in the social structure was absolutely not inferior to men's, in fact women's work and economic output was seen as just as necessary for the family as men's work and economic output, and just as necessary for life and society as the men's contribution (1997: 109). As per López de Mariscal, the mythological equality of women in the creation myths of Mexico extends to the social and economic spheres of Mesoamerican society. As proof of this, López de Mariscal points to Fray Diego de Landa's *Relación de las cosas de Yucatán*, a chronicle written at the time of conquest, wherein de Landa describes the social and economic place of Mesoamerican women:

[S]on grandes trabajadoras y vividoras porque de ellas cuelgan los mayores y más trabajos de la sustentación de sus casa y educación de sus hijos y paga de sus tributos, y con todo esto, si es menester, llevan algunas veces carga mayor labrando y sembrando sus mantenimientos. Son a maravilla granjeras, velando de noche el rato que de servir sus casas les queda, yendo a los mercados a comprar y vender sus cosillas (109).



Women's work encompassed not just sustaining the home and family, but, according to López de Mariscal, commerce, farming, raising animals for the home and marketplace, and payment of tribute (111). Women's contribution was necessary, valued, and esteemed.

It seems that not only were women's contributions esteemed, but within the marketplace women were not only buyers and vendors, but also had access to administrative authority. According to Kellogg, women were charged with being the *tianquizpan tlayacanqui*, the "marketplace judge or administrator," a position that was held by both men and women (566). The responsibilities of the market administrator encompassed "overseeing the fairness of prices of goods, supervising the production of war provisions and assigning tribute" (566). Women also held supervisory positions in trade guilds associated with craft production and "quasi-political, quasi-religious supervisory positions in the *cuicalli* (song house)," a politico-religious entity that was attached to major temples and to the royal palace (566).

Because of the Mexica emphasis on empire-building and warfare, men were often away from the home for long periods of time, and women were essentially in charge of overseeing the home and local economies. As per Kellogg, "men and women were different kinds of human beings, with distinct responsibilities and fates. Men were envisioned as warriors and women as spinners and weavers, but each was acknowledged as providing essential labor necessary to the proper functioning of Mexica society" (569). The emphasis on warrior status for men, and women as the prime movers of both home and local economies meant that women served in a variety of positions: as priestesses, merchants, healers and midwives, teachers, professional spinners and weavers, and

embroiderers, along with being farmers (570). Women's service in these positions not only gave them autonomy – adult Mexica women were not considered dependent upon men – but it also gave women property rights (570). As per Kellogg, there is a passage in the Florentine Codex that supports this vision of women as autonomous, and potentially prosperous, beings:

She would have food and drink available. She would have food for others to eat; she would invite others to feast. She would be respectful. She would be visited by others; she would revive and refresh the spirits and bodies of those who lived in misery on earth.... Of her fatigue and effort, nothing would be in vain.

Successful would be her dealings around the marketplace in the place of business; it was as if it would sprinkle, shower, and rain her wares upon her. (570).

Women who excelled at commerce were also able to pass on the fruits of their labor to their children, and the adult Mexica woman with property was able to dispose of her property as she wished, once tribute was paid (570). According to Kellogg, women merchants born under the sign of *ce coatl* were believed to be particularly successful: “[s]he would be quite rich, she would be a good provider; she would be well-born. She would look to and guard the services and the property of our lord. She would be a guardian and an administrator. Much would she gather, collect, save, and justly distribute among her children” (571). Mexica women's contributions to the home and economy were valued and important in Mexica society, and gender relations in the economic sphere certainly seem to have been complementary.

These complementary gender relations, or dual-sex systems, are treated extensively by Sanday in her book [Female Power and Male Dominance: On The Origins](#)

of Sexual Inequality. Because, according to Sanday, “[s]ecular power roles are derived from ancient concepts of sacred power,” in dual-sex systems “the inner [female] and outer [male] conceptions of sacred power support sexually balanced spheres of economic and political power [...] the balance of power between the sexes is not obscured by the myth that males rule” (1981: 8). For the Mexica the ancient concepts of sacred power included both male and female, and gender relations were complementary.

Among the Mexica (they named themselves after the goddess Mecitli or Maguey Grandmother) one of the earliest creation myths is a dual-sex creation myth, the myth of the Cipactli (Salas 1990: 4, Poniatowska 1999: 21; Brundage 1980: 31). The Cipactli is the first of all living things, “a leviathan, monstrous alligator, shark or sawfish” that lives in the ocean (Brundage 31). Burr Cartwright Brundage, in his book, The Fifth Sun, an all encompassing work on Mexica mythology, describes the Cipactli as a bisexual or female “leviathan, monstrous alligator, shark, or sawfish” that lives in the ocean and is the first living thing, and the thing from which all subsequent life springs was conceived. The Cipactli is bisexual in the myth where two male gods split the Cipactli in two, creating the sky (male) and the earth (female), or female in the myth in which the Cipactli was conceived of as the “Earth Lady” (31). Yet another creation myth, the myth that Brundage classifies as “without a doubt the most crucial of all Aztec myths,” is the myth of Citlalinicue, or Star Skirt. According to the myth Citlalinicue was the mother of all: “all the gods were stars and she had borne them all” (35). Citlalinicue was the source of all wisdom, and, indeed, the source of all that was and is – the source of all creation. It is the myth of Citlalinicue that gives the Mexica reasoning behind sacrifice, as it is she who creates the *tecpatl*, or flint knife used in sacrifice; the creation of the *tecpatl* was done by

Citlalinicue even before she gave birth to the other gods (stars) (Brundage 35, Berdan 1982: 146). Once created and birthed by Citlalinicue, the gods go about creating humanity, via their own blood sacrifice and with Citlalinicue's help. It is because of this initial blood sacrifice by the gods to create humanity that the Mexica reasoned that human beings must provide the gods with blood sacrifice, as a feeding of the gods and in thanks for their initial sacrifice (Brundage 36).

The Cipactli myth and the myth of Citlalinicue seem to predate the myth of all-male gods creation, wherein several gods get together and decide to create the world (this is in the Tezcatlipoca myth cycle). Yet another creation myth is found in both Mexica and Maya mythologies: the myth of the divine couple Tonacatecutli and Tonacacihuatl (the Lord and Lady of Sustenance). This divine couple created the sky, paradise, and the earth; they created both the place where human beings live and the place they return to at death. This divine couple are called grandmother and grandfather by both the Mexica and the Maya.

Finally, there is the creation myth of Ometeotl, a dual being who was both mother and father. According to Miguel León Portilla, this dual being in the maternal role was conflated with Coatlicue (Serpent Skirt) who was the Great Mother of the gods and the mother of both the god of war, Huitzilopochtli, and his sister Coyolxauhqui. Coatlicue's alter ego was Cihuacóatl (Serpent Woman) who was both a goddess and the title for the war chief among the Mexica. It was Coatlicue who "incited" her son Huitzilopochtli to fight (she triggers the war) and it was the "hunger" of Cihuacóatl (the goddess) that the Mexica linked to war (Brundage 168, 170; Salas 6). In Mexica society it seems that the creation myths are either creation by a female or by a couple – Sanday would say that this

is an excellent indication that women in Mexica society would tend to have access to power in the secular (public) sphere, because they are regarded as powerful in the sacred sphere. Curiously enough, for the Mexica, it is these two female goddesses who trigger or incite warfare.

Mexica females involved in war are not unique to the sacred realm, they are not just found among the goddesses. It has been posited that the myth of Huizilopochtli and his sister Coyolxauhqui is actually a legend based on real events that transpired among Mexica tribes in the Valley of Mexico sometime before the Mexica became a statal system, perhaps around A.D. 1143 (Salas 4). Salas states:

[w]hile little is known about the real Coyolxauhqui [except that she was a prominent female warrior], in myth she is said to be the Amazon daughter of [...] Coatlicue, her avatar and a titan [...] the male warrior who fought Coyolxauhqui and her many brothers [the 400 Southerners, the Centzonhuitznahua] for power and control of the Mexicas was the youngest brother, Huizilopochtli. Allied with him was [...] Coatlicue. The conflict suggests a shift away from the mother/daughter mythical relationship to a mother/son relationship (4).

According to Salas, the real Coyolxauhqui may have rebelled against her mother in order to “establish a more systematic and rational way to govern the tribes” (4). According to Adela Formoso de Obregón Santacilia, Coyolxauhqui “ordered the end to warfare and warrior groups” and decreed the “establishment of cities not based on warfare” (1939: 9). Yet another reason behind the fight between Coyolxauhqui and her brother comes from Laurette Sejourné, who believes that the conflict could have stemmed from sibling rivalry, and that Huizilopochtli was the personification of a “sexual revolution” whereby

men became the warrior chiefs and the dominant warriors, replacing women as warrior chiefs (1956: 19). Perhaps the real warrior who is remembered in legend as Huizilopochtli took advantage of the conflict between his mother and his sister to spark this “sexual revolution” and change Mexica civilization from a dual-sex system to a system that was more defined along male lines.

The Mexica dual-sex system was expressed in a variety of manners in language, thought, and action, and men and women were believed to play parallel and equally important roles. This gender parallelism is reflected in the two highest political positions in the Mexica empire: the position of *tlatoani* (supreme chief) and the complementary position of *cihuacóatl* (literally “snake woman,” the war chief). The *cihuacoatl* was the co-ruler of the Mexica, and if the *tlatoani* was unable to perform his duties, it fell to his second-in-charge, the *cihuacóatl* (Salas 6, Berdan 52). It is my belief, and I stand with Elizabeth Salas in this although it is an unpopular belief, that, when originally conceived, the position of war chief was occupied exclusively by women (Salas 6). As Salas states “the scholarship in this area is decidedly negative” – there are few who would support the idea that women once held the position of war chief. For example, Miguel León Portilla believes that the name *cihuacóatl* is merely the acknowledgement of the “feminine” aspect of all men, and not, as Salas states “linguistic evidence that women were war chiefs” (León Portilla qtd. in Salas 6; Salas 6).

There are, however, a few clues that would point to this particular take on the *cihuacóatl* being female as true. First, the linguistic evidence of the title *cihuacóatl* – Snake Woman – would seem to point to it being important that the role be played by a woman; this would be very much in keeping with the dual-sex, gender parallel system of

the Mexica. Second, following a victory the war chief (now a male) entered the conquered city or town dressed as a woman, in garments referred to as the “eagle garments” (Salas 6). According to Salas this practice of the *cihuacóatl* cross-dressing in women’s clothing was recorded after the conquering of the city of Quetzaltepec during Moctezuma Xocoyotzin’s reign, sometime between 1502 and 1521 (6). Third, the timing of the Coyolxauhqui myth is curious, for it is a late myth, a myth that seems to come into being once the Mexica enter the Valley of Mexico (sometime after 1143 A.D) and begin to establish their empire (Salas 4).

At minimum, the myth itself seems to point to a shift in the parallel gender structure at the very highest levels of Mexica society, that is, a probable shift from a woman being the second-in-command to a cross-dressing man being the second-in-command. Fourth, and finally, women in childbirth were equated with warriors in battle (Berdan 81). It was women who, through childbirth, were entrusted by the gods with life and death, who were the intermediaries between this world and the world of the gods, and the moment of childbirth might be seen as a cosmic battlefield between this world and the other. A woman who died in childbirth was “revered as a goddess” and accompanied the sun (the war god, Huizilopochtli) on his daily journey across the sky, just as warriors who died in battle (Berdan 81-83). It would make sense, then, that if the gods have entrusted women with the power of life (birth), which is really the divine, cosmic moment that encapsulates both life and death, that humans, too, should trust women with life and death here on earth – that is, the decision to make war – and the decision to make war was entrusted to the *cihuacóatl*, the Snake Woman, the war chief.

This is the point where myth becomes reality: women warriors among the Mexica are both mythical and real, they are forever embodied in myth and their bodies and the actions performed by these bodies forever form a part of the history of Mexico. No amount of *ninguneo* can remove these bodies from history, no amount of *ninguneo* can erase the social structures that lie just beneath the surface of a social structure that was imposed at colonization: the social structure that lies beneath (that is, the indigenous social structure, the social structure that gave women and the indigenous authority) is still important, it still affects thought and action.

There is good evidence for women being full-fledged participants in warfare prior to and during the Conquest. Queen Xóchitl, leader of the Toltecs in 1116 A.D., created a battalion of women to serve in the military and led them to battle (Salas 3, Poniatowska 1999: 21). Queen Xóchitl lost her life in that same battle (Salas 3). During the conquest of Mexico women are depicted in the Lienzo de Tlaxcala and the Códice Florentino as full participants in battle, as per Blanca López de Mariscal in her book La figura femenina en los narradores testigos de la Conquista. López de Mariscal states:

la lámina veintidós del *Lienzo de Tlaxcala* nos presenta la batalla que se llevo a cabo en Tepotzotlán, en ella aparece una escena de combate, en la que las mujeres tienen que tomar las armas y participar en la batalla. En el *Códice Florentino* y en las pinturas de los *tlacuilos* de Durán podemos también encontrar grabados en los que se representa a las mujeres en el combate (1997: 73).

Fernández de Oviedo, in his Sumario de la natural historia de las Indias states that indigenous women did indeed participate in the battles that came with the Conquest, for example, “[...] aunque no son gigantes [...] son muy altos, y ellos y ellas flecheros [...]”



and “[...] algunas mujeres principales van a las batallas con sus maridos, o cuando son señoras de la tierra, y mandan y capitanean su gente [...]” (Fernández de Oviedo qtd. in López de Mariscal 93). Fernández de Oviedo is just one of many witnesses of the Conquest who saw and recorded women’s participation in battle – the writings of the chroniclers of the Conquest are replete with references to indigenous women’s participation in warfare and battle.

Perhaps the most striking evidence of one woman’s participation in armed conflict during the Conquest of Mexico is that of the Malinalli or Malintzín, also called the Malinche or Doña Marina, the woman who accompanied Cortés during the conquest of Tenochtitlán. It is striking because we know her name, we know she was real, alive, and we know about her particular participation because it was recorded. Many unnamed women must have participated in the Conquest, but Malintzin’s name and history are forever recorded thanks to testimonies of both native people and the Spaniards. In the Florentine Codex an informant of Sahagún states:

“Y se dijo, se declare, se indicó, se relató, se puso en el corazón de Motecuhzoma, que una mujer de aquí, de los nuestros, los guiaba, les servía de intérprete hablando náhuatl. Ella se llamaba Malintzin, su hogar estaba en Tetípac. Allá, en la costa, de entrada *la habían prendido* (79, emphasis mine).

The phrase of interest above is the last sentence: “de entrada la habían prendido,” which, translated, means that they – the Spaniards – took her, and indicates that she was not with the Spaniards of her own volition. However, as López de Mariscal points out, in earlier texts from the Spanish chroniclers Malintzin seems to have accompanied the Spaniards as translator, negotiator, spy and warrior very much of her own volition (70-71). Bernal

Díaz de Castillo in his chronicle Historia verdadera de la Nueva España relates an episode in which Malintzin has the opportunity to escape from the Spaniards – while the Spanish forces and Malintzin are in Cholula, resting before resuming their march to Tenochtitlan, an old Indian woman covertly tells Malintzin that she will help her escape from the Spaniards, as she is certain that the Spaniards will kill Malintzin and everyone else in the City. The old woman extends an offer of marriage between her son and Malintzin, and gives her the option of fleeing from the Spaniards and receiving safe harbor with her own people. Malintzin agrees to go with the old woman that very night, but asks for a few hours to gather her things. Immediately she tells Cortés what she was offered, and Cortés demands to see the old woman (219).

Díaz de Castillo is not the only chronicler to tell this same story about Malintzin's commitment to the Spaniards: Andrés de Tapia and Fray Juan de Torquemada also have very similar versions of the same story (López de Mariscal 70-71). Whatever her reasons for what she did, and they must have been very complicated reasons, ones that essentially led to her being forever branded as a traitor to her people, Malintzin chose to go with Cortés, she chose to be on the Spanish side of the Conquest.

If Malintzin was a willing participant in the Conquest, a woman who served as Cortés's second-in-command, translator, negotiator, spy, and informant, a woman who made decisions for herself based on the various options open to her, what, then about her participation in battle? If we are to believe the chroniclers and the codices of the time, then it is certain that she did participate in the armed conflict, and that she was much admired by the Spaniards for being a brave-hearted woman in battle.

Malintzin's participation in the Conquest of Mexico is not the only participation of a woman chronicled during that time, although it is the only chronicled participation of a named woman. Fray Diego de Durán in his *Historia de las Indias de la Nueva España, e islas de tierra firme* tells the story of the wife of Martín Partidor, an indigenous woman who requested permission to participate in a battle against the Mexica and who “tomó un caballo y una lanza y adarga e [...] invocando a voces del nombre de Santiago y a ellos, y tras ella empezaron [las fuerzas españolas]” (in López de Mariscal 73). This unnamed indigenous woman armed herself, mounted a horse, and with the Spanish battle cry of “Santiago y a ellos!” she inspired the Spanish forces to battle.

Women like Malintzin, Queen Xóchitl, and the unnamed wife of Martín Partidor are a part of Mexican history that is not generally recognized, but the evidence for their participation in warfare is certainly there. Women warriors didn't merely exist in the distant past in Mexico – the Mexican Revolution of 1910 is replete with stories of women who participated in warfare, although the “official” history tends to leave these brave women out. The next chapter will discuss the conditions that led up to the Mexican Revolution and women's participation in the fight.

### Pre-Revolution Mexico

By the time of the Porfiriato, the period from 1876 to 1910 when Porfirio Díaz was the president of Mexico (excepting the four year period from 1880 to 1884 when Manuel Gonzalez was president), the economic situation of Mexico for the vast majority was rather dire: the nation was tremendously undeveloped thanks to its status as a colony from conquest until the war for Independence (1810), with that war, and other wars,

...serving to perpetuate economic misery up until and for many years after independence was gained in 1821. After the war for independence the country was saddled, on-again, off-again, with the dictator Santa Anna, who, thanks to a rather bellicose streak managed to lose half of the nation's territory by military loss and by selling off vast portions of the nation's territory. Santa Anna was eventually ousted in 1855 by Benito Juarez and the liberal movement, but the nation sank yet again into war, this time a civil war between the liberal forces of Juarez and the conservative forces backed by the French, who were eager to gain a foothold in the New World again. The civil war ended on January 1, 1861, and by March of that same year Benito Juarez, the liberal leader, was elected president.

Juarez's first term as president was marked by further strife from the conservatives, who now saw fit to encourage French troops to continue to wage war. Juarez was forced from the capital, Mexico City, and in 1863, Maximilian of Hapsburg, a well-intentioned noble from Austria, accepted the crown of Mexico from the Mexican conservatives. Maximilian came to Mexico in 1864, and was crowned Emperor Maximilian I of Mexico. His reign, however, was short, as Juarez continued to wage war and Maximilian surrendered in 1867; he was executed by Juarez's order that same year. In July of 1867, Benito Juarez again presented himself for the presidency, and won re-election by the end of the year. Juarez's second term focus was on national economic development (especially natural resources like mining) and on education; under Juarez universal primary education for Mexicans was made law. Mexico's primary problem, however, was still the economy, and the Juarez years were difficult because Mexico's national debt was enormous due to the prior fifty years of on and off wars. Juarez ran for

another term in 1871, but in that election there were three candidates who split the vote evenly – Juarez, Porfirio Diaz, and Sebastian Lerdo de Tejada. It was then up to the Congress to decide the winner, and the election was called for Juarez; Porfirio Diaz led a revolt under the banner of “No Reección,” translated as “no re-election” of Juarez, and in the middle of the revolt Juarez died of a heart attack. New elections were called and Lerdo de Tejada was elected president. When finished with his first term Lerdo wanted to run again, but Porfirio Diaz again led a revolt based on his “no re-election” slogan, and Lerdo backed down; Porfirio Diaz remained in power for the next 34 years.

Porfirio Diaz’s vision for Mexico was that of a modernist: Mexico needed to change with the times, utilize natural resources, capitalize on foreign investment, introduce industry, and expand the railroad system. At Diaz’s election the country’s coffers were bare due to all of the wars, and debts were owed to many foreign countries; Diaz, however saw the nation’s cheap labor force as an easily exploitable good, and managed to garner enough foreign investment to get Mexico’s economic ball rolling again. Economic conditions in Mexico improved initially, thanks to Diaz’s program of “order and progress,” industry thrived, the all-important rail system was built, and foreign capital poured into the country allowing the war-crippled country to regain its footing. This vision of order and progress essentially amounted to placing the economic and social progress of the country in the hands of the “científicos,” a group of technocratic advisers educated in positivism that Diaz believed would be central to the development of Mexico. Diaz’s laissez-faire attitude toward foreign investment and the promise of capitalism, along with the notion that capital would provide order and progress was successful, for a time, and Mexico’s economy improved.

While this focus on positivism and development did initially improve life in Mexico for a great number of people, maximizing the exploitation of natural resources and foreign exports, the economic engine of the country increasingly ended up in the hands of fewer and fewer powerful families. Government seizure of communal land for the purpose of exploitation and the ever-growing masses of landless peasants with fewer and fewer job opportunities eventually led to social and economic instability that bred the conditions for the Revolution that occurred in 1910. From 1900 to 1910, the Mexican economy deteriorated: foreign trade and interior growth slowed, food and basic commodities prices went up, salaries deteriorated, and unemployment surged (Cerdeña 1991:314). Lower and middle class Mexicans were especially affected, and a definite resentment towards the wealthy and political classes grew.

By 1910, the call for “Tierra y Libertad” (land and freedom) from the anarchist Ricardo Flores Magón – a phrase he used at the end of his articles in the magazine *Regeneración* – had certainly struck a chord with the masses in Mexico; the beginning of the Revolution soon followed. Women as well as men were involved in this push toward the Revolution, and a part of this push involved a “new” old idea: women as equal partners with men, that special complementary gender relation dating back to pre-conquest times that was submerged during the colonial years and through the years after Independence.

Flores Magón’s cry for land and liberty heavily influenced Emiliano Zapata, the revolutionary from the South, and was eventually translated into Zapata’s 1914 Plan de Ayala in the form of “Reforma, Libertad, Ley y Justicia” (reform, freedom, law and justice). The Plan de Ayala was presented to then-President Madero (also a revolutionary

leader, and one whom Zapata had supported in the war against Porfirio Diaz) as a protest of Madero's policies on post-revolution reform. Zapata felt Madero's plans focused too little on the landless peasants who were still suffering the effects of years of poor economic policies and years of war. The Revolution may have ended in 1920, but the policies that caused the Revolution still remained substantially intact – the biggest difference was a new group of politicians, former revolutionaries, ruled the country. The fight for policies that benefited the majority of the people of Mexico has been a centuries-long struggle, and women and men took part in this struggle; for the same reason women and men were participants in both the active conflict of the Revolution and the lobbying and legislation that took place afterward. As we will see in the next two chapters, the first on the forgotten women warriors of the Revolution and the second on the present-day women soldiers of the EZLN (Zapatista Army), these social and economic policies have only managed to continue to provoke unrest in Mexico; the names and dates may change, but the problems remain much the same.

### The Forgotten Woman Warrior of the Revolution

Revolution is the space and time where private, family interests and group or community interests are so interfered with by the state (the public, the political) that populations feel the need to take action: revolution, therefore, is a private-public act. Revolutions begin in private spaces, in the domestic domain, and then spread to the public domain; hence women, as much as men, are involved. *Ninguneo* is no more clearly seen than in the denial of women's importance to – that is, the removal of women's social body from – the official story of the Mexican Revolution of 1910. The

official story of the Revolution has not just minimized women's participation, but it has removed their bodies from the scene. According to Elena Poniatowska "[s]i no fuera por las fotografías de Agustín Casasola, Jorge Guerra y los kilómetros de películas de Salvador Toscano, nada sabríamos de las soldaderas porque la historia no sólo no les hace justicia sino que las denigra" (1999: 21). And according to Marcela Del Río, in order to find information on the soldaderas and women's participation in the Revolution you must "escarbar en archivos polvorientos, preguntar verbalmente a los sobrevivientes, deducir de frases perdidas entre los libros de historia escritos sobre la Revolución, en la que parece que los hombres fueron los únicos que combatieron" (175).

This removal of women from Mexican history is not surprising: as "[t]he man-made codes which are the inscription of Mexican reality exclude women from history. Mexican history is a man's history, manufactured by men to legitimize centuries of domination, falsification, and prejudice, and calling it 'Mexico' " (Valdés 1998: 16-17)). I would add that this history is not just a man's history, it is a certain kind of man's history: a wealthy, fairer-skinned Mexican man's history. This removal of women's social body, and in particular the removal of her social body from the Revolution, has been accomplished in an intentional and orderly fashion, not just by historians, but also by authors of novels of the Revolution, songwriters of the *corridos* sung about soldaderas in the Revolution, artists, and the generals and other officials who fought in the Revolution themselves. Julia Tuñón Pablos states:

Women's presence in the Revolution was so pervasive that their image has become part of the mythology surrounding the events of 1910. Soldaderas [...] are key figures in the collective memory and they, like other subjects, have been



stereotyped. The image of the soldadera has been consistent with the traditional archetypes of abnegation and sweetness, although a sexual overlay has been added (1999: 86).

These archetypes of “abnegation and sweetness” are seen, for example, in Heriberto Frias’s novel Tomochic, in which soldaderas are characterized by the “loving care [they] gave the soldiers despite their own misery and poverty” (Salas 1990: 84). A definite contrast between and sweet, loving, caring, motherly soldadera (Camilla) and the rough, vulgar, soldier woman (La Pintada) can be seen in Mariano Azuela’s novel Los de abajo; essentially this contrast is between what makes for a ‘good’ woman and what makes for a ‘bad’ woman (1915). In the popular songs called *corridos*, soldaderas are often portrayed as loving, faithful women who care for and follow their *Juanes* (soldiers) into war, for example in the *corrido* Adelita:

If I die in battle  
and my body will be  
buried in the Sierras  
Adelita, I implore you  
cry for me (Vélez, qtd. in Salas 1990: 92).

However, even the authenticity of the lyrics of Adelita as they are now is challenged in Elena Poniatowska’s book Luz y luna, las lunitas. In it Jesusa Palancares states: “[...] la dichosa Adelita no es así, la Adelita es otra, le quitaron la mayor parte y le acomodaron nomás lo que se les hizo bueno, pero ésa no es la canción de la Adelita que es bastante larga” (1994: 67).

In art the soldadera can be seen in the murals painted by the great Mexican muralists, Diego Rivera, José Clemente Orozco, David Alfaro Siqueiros, and Rufino Tamayo. In Rivera's mural in the Hotel Prado in Mexico City, entitled The Dream of a Sunday Afternoon in the Alameda, only one woman who could be considered a soldadera appears, among more than one hundred people who appear in the mural (Salas 1990: 95). Although Orozco painted "many etchings and pictures" of soldaderas it seems he had "an antipathy" to soldaderas (Goldman qtd. in Salas 95). Orozco shows soldaderas as "devoted mothers" or wives "resignedly see[ing] their men off to war," as camp followers or even as prostitutes (Salas 95). For Siqueiros, in his mural Leaders of the Revolution, the soldadera is depicted as "unarmed" and "standing by the side of male soldiers" (95). Siqueiro's soldaderas also "wear rebozos and appear to have a baby in their arms" – all in keeping with the caring, motherly image of the soldadera (95). For Rufino Tamayo, in his work entitled Revolution, the soldadera is slightly more realistic, she is "wearing crossed bandoliers [and is depicted] in a tormented moment screaming out her anguish" (95). On the whole, however, women are depicted as resigned, caring, comforting, motherly types who care for the soldiers, or as camp followers and prostitutes, not as women who fought for the Revolution.

Finally, the military men: for Nicolás Durán, a lieutenant under Pancho Villa the soldadera was "an angel for the soldier; lighting his spirit so that he could reach victory [...]," and for Maj. Adán Uro García, also a villista, believed that soldaderas were "very important to the Revolution as they cooked and were faithful and self-sacrificing" (Salas 1990: 43-44). While some military men saw soldaderas in the virtuous, motherly mode, others, such as Gen. Joaquín Amaro, believed they were "the chief cause of vice, illness,

crime and disorder,” and still others simply denied their involvement at all, such as Gen. Juan F. Azcárate, who believed that the cinema had “created the fantasy of soldaderas with rebel armies” (Amaro qtd. in Salas 49; Salas 44-45). These authors, artists, and military men have systematically denied women’s involvement or changed the character of their involvement so that it fits stereotypical modes of female behavior: they have made women into “no-bodies.”

However, in the last half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century Mexican women authors have “re-authored” women back into Mexico’s history, especially the history of the Revolution of 1910. Women authors like Elena Poniatowska, Elizabeth Salas, Julia Tuñón Pablos, and Marcela Del Rio have all “re-authorized” women’s participation in the Revolution, reinserted female bodies, if only for a moment, into the history, and turned women’s “no-bodies” into “some-bodies.” This chapter is a look at the historical and social foundations of *ninguneo*, how it has been used to diminish women’s role in the Revolution, what social and cultural structures existed and are remembered that counteract *ninguneo* of women, and finally, how each of these women authors have dealt with women’s role – or better yet, roles, as their roles were multiple and varied – in the Revolution. As Valdés states in The Shattered Mirror :

Literature is a primary formative means of supporting dominant ideology *or* challenging it. [...] The cultural construct we call reality has been developed over centuries by the discourse of power and the distortions of ideologies. Literature constitutes a most valuable depository of discourse for examining the relationships of social action (26).

Literature can either uphold dominant ideology or challenge it – in each of these novels that I discuss the authors challenge the dominant ideology of *ninguneo* of women, creating a space for women to reposition their bodies back into the historical narrative of the Revolution.

In Mexico gender determines social function, and this determination means a radical difference not just between ‘what men do’ and ‘what women do,’ but *how it is decided* what they do. According to Rosario Castellanos in her essay “Self-sacrifice Is a Mad Virtue” [a woman is]

a creature who is dependent upon male authority: be it her father’s, her brother’s, her husband’s, or her priest’s. She is subject to alien decisions that dictate her personal appearance, her marital status, the career she is going to study, or the field or work she is going to enter (Castellanos qtd. in Valdés 1998: 16).

And, in keeping with Castellanos, Valdés states:

[w]omen’s primary purpose in life is to serve the male, in whatever capacity he needs her: as lover, mother, housekeeper, nurse, or teacher. In Mexico, women have not just been cast in the role of sex object, the role so prevalent in first world cultures; rather, they have been taught that their purpose in life is to serve and obey their father and then their husband (16).

By becoming a female soldier or *soldadera* – by participating in the public sphere – these women are essentially transgressing a border put in place by *machismo*: they no longer serve men in a strictly private sense or space. Whether making tortillas atop the roof of a railcar or joining the cavalry and the battle, women who participated in the Revolution took the private public and/or definitively joined the public world – the world of men.

At some point in the histories *ninguneo* and the social structures that support it are confronted with the other social structure that still exists, although it is submerged, and in Mexican history a major point of confrontation between these two structures is the Revolution of 1910.

According to Julia Tuñon Pablos, women took part in the Revolution in many ways; they were “couriers, spies, employees, arms and munitions runners, uniform and flag seamstresses, secretaries, journalists, nurses [... and some] helped draft plans and manifestos;” women were also included among fighting forces, according to Tuñon Pablos: “[w]omen’s presence transcended political divisions; women were included among the troops of Francisco Villa, Venustiano Carranza, Álvaro Obregón, and Emiliano Zapata” (90-91). One of the female participants in the Revolution was Josefina Bórquez, also known as Jesusa Palancares, and immortalized in the novel/testimonial written by Elena Poniatowska entitled Hasta no verte Jesús mío. Jesusa’s story serves both as a link between real-life stories of soldaderas who participated in the Revolution and the soldaderas found in literature since the Revolution, and as an example of woman as *ninguneada* and the Revolution as a space where women could create and control themselves and their own lives, dodging *ninguneo* and joining the social body.

Throughout the novel/testimonial, Jesusa is victim of an ever-present *ninguneo*. First, as a child, she suffers abuse at the hands of her stepmother, Evarista, who stabs her with a knife (“[f]ue entonces cuando Evarista me dio la cuchillada porque se me cayeron los trastes y se quebraron toditos”) and later on when, still a child, she must go to work as a maid in a series of houses of wealthy people who abuse her, including her “madrina,” Felisa, who treats her badly: “[d]ormía en la recámara de mi madrina pero como un perro,

en el balcón. [...] Tenía un petate y mi almohada era un ladrillo. Eso sí que fue más duro que la tropa [...] No es que mi madrina fuera mala, no, pues toda la gente de dinero es así” (Poniatowska 1969: 42, 49). For Jesusa being treated as a nobody is just a normal part of life for the poor, for women, and for the marginalized.

She joins the forces fighting the Revolution because her father joins the *federales* and takes her with him, as his *soldadera* (she cooks for him), until she gets annoyed with him for being a womanizer. There is a fight between Jesusa and her father and she abandons her father. She ends up being taken care of by a general, she asks that he send her back to her home, however, he decides that it is better to marry her off to a young official (Pedro Aguilar) than to let her go home alone on a cargo ship filled with male sailors. Thus Jesusa’s *ninguneo* continues, the general decides what is best for her – her will and her body are no longer her own – and she is married at fifteen, against her wishes, to Pedro. Pedro insists that she go with him to war, even though the general wants her to stay behind with the women: “Lo siento mucho, mi general, usted mandará en mí porque soy de su tropa, pero en mi mujer no manda; en mi mujer mando yo y va donde yo la lleve” (84). Jesusa is once again pushed out of the social sphere, *ninguneada*, she is not allowed to decide where she will go or what she will do. As it was for her with her father before, and the general thereafter, it is now with her husband, Pedro, who decides for her.

Pedro is brutally abusive from the beginning of their marriage, and the abuse continues until Jesusa is utterly fed up with it and literally willing to kill Pedro – or be killed by Pedro – in order to stop the abuse. Every time Jesusa does laundry Pedro takes

advantage of the moment to take her out into the countryside well away from people to beat her; however, this time Jesusa has had enough. She tells the story:

Ese día, que agarró la pistola. Traía yo un blusón largo con dos bolsas y en las bolsas me eché las balas y la pistola. ‘¡Qué jabón ni qué nada, de una vez que me mate o lo mato yo!’ Estaba decidida. Yo lo iba siguiendo. Llegamos a un lugar retirado de la estación y entonces me dice él: ‘Aquí se me hace bueno, tal por cual. Aquí te voy a matar o ves para qué naciste...’ Me quedé viéndolo, no me encogí y le contesté ‘¿Sí? Nos matamos porque somos dos. No nomás yo voy a morir. Saque lo suyo que yo traigo lo mío.’ No sé de dónde me entró tanto valor, yo creo que de la desesperación, y que saco la pistola. Lueguito se asustó, vi claramente que se asustó. Pensé: ‘Él es muy valiente, que saque también su pistola y nos balaceamos aquí. Algunos de los dos tendrá que quedar vivo.’ ” (99).

It is in this moment that Jesusa takes control of her life. By confronting Pedro and his brutality she takes control of her destiny, she makes him back down, she violently refuses his *ninguneo* and demands her personhood. As Jesusa states “Pedro se volvió más bueno desde que lo balacé. Pero entonces yo fui la que me emperré. De por sí, yo desde chica fui mala, así nací, terrible, pero Pedro no me daba oportunidad. *La bendita revolución me ayudó a desenvolverme*” (101, my emphasis).

For Jesusa it is in the space of the Revolution, the space where “natural” spaces are transgressed (“natural” spaces meaning public spaces are marked “male,” while private spaces are marked “female”) in which she is able to challenge the *ninguneo* she has been subjected to her entire life. However, it is not without a cost: Jesusa tells us that

she became a “perra,” a bitch, she is no longer “buena,” no longer a good girl: the lesson perhaps being that good women stay in private “female” spaces while bad women move into the public, “male” space and challenge (male) authority (significantly, Jesusa never remarries). But Jesusa also reminds us that being a good girl will literally get you nothing and nowhere – not in this life, and not in the hereafter. She believes that God told her to defend herself, and this is the reasoning behind why she defended herself from Pedro’s attacks; if she hadn’t defended herself she would have been classified as a “dejada,” and according to Jesusa “[...] en el mismo infierno ha de haber un lugar para todas las dejadas. ¡Puros tizones en el fundillo!” (101).

Jesusa is also an example of a woman warrior, a woman who participated in the thick of the battle in the Mexican Revolution. Elena Poniatowska describes her and tells of her life, in two chapters, in her book Luz y luna, las lunitas:

Jesusa, esposa del capitán Pedro Aguilar, conoció no sólo los rieles, la balacera tupida, “¡Los balazos son mi alegría, la balacera es todo mi amor, porque se oye muy bonita! ¡Viva la Revolución!”, los pleitos entre soldaderas cizañosas, también las glorias de la batalla, cuando ellas, las amazonas, derribaban de un disparo al enemigo (1994: 47).

And Jesusa tells us herself in Hasta no verte Jesús mío about the battle where Pedro is shot and dies, and Jesusa, as the captain’s wife and the only member of the group still with her wits about her, is asked to lead his men to safety. And this is exactly what she does: the now widowed Jesusa takes control of the situation, becomes the leader of the soldiers, and takes them across the border to safety in Marfa, Texas (1969: 128-9).



The Revolution is experienced by Jesusa as a space of liberation, a time and place where the old orders of *ninguneo* and machismo just cannot survive, at least for a time. However, later in her life story, after the Revolution, the social order that women and the revolutionary ideologues had hoped for is slowly snuffed out. Jesusa is conscious of this and separates herself from the failure that was the Revolution and the failure (for the marginalized) that is Mexico:

Al fin de cuentas, yo no tengo patria. Soy como los húngaros, de ninguna parte. No me siento mexicana ni reconozco a los mexicanos. Aquí no existe más que pura conveniencia y puro interés. Si yo tuviera dinero y bienes sería mexicana, pero como soy peor que la basura no soy nada. Soy basura a la que el perro le echa una mirada y sigue adelante. Viene el aire y se la lleva y se acabó todo (1994: 50).

Jesusa sees herself as marginalized and, very in keeping with her philosophy, before she is rejected, she rejects. According to Jean Franco, Jesusa, “repudiated by old-style patriarchy [...] cannot plot herself into the modernization narrative – that is, the narrative of transformation from community to the inwardly directed ethic of the capitalist nation state” (1989: 180). Once the Revolution is over, the ability to write herself into the historical narrative of Mexico is also over. However, for a time Jesusa the woman warrior stepped beyond the bounds of *ninguneo* and machismo and joined the social body.

While most Mexican women’s experience as *soldaderas* was generally limited to providing food for a mobile military force, oftentimes cooking on the tops of the trains that carried the troops from battlefield to battlefield and doing laundry at the nearest

source of water, there were also women who participated as verifiable women warriors who joined the ranks of the male soldiers or formed their own all-women rebel groups and fought in armed combat. Two such women, Rosa Bobadilla viuda de Casas and Juana Ramona viuda de Flores – both widows – distinguished themselves during battles and commanded brigades of women and men (Salas 1990: 42). Rosa Bobadilla viuda de Casas achieved the rank of colonel under Emiliano Zapata and participated in more than 160 armed battles, overseeing both men and women soldiers. Juana Ramona viuda de Flores, nicknamed The Tigress by her comrades, participated in the armed battle for Culiacán, Sinaloa (Poniatowska 1999: 16).

Women not only participated and distinguished themselves in battle, but there were cases of women given rank, and being able to move up the ranks thanks to their service. An example of this is the case of Encarnación Mares Cárdenas, who originally followed her husband to war, joining the Tenth Regiment of the Constitutionalist Cavalry under Victoriano Huerta in 1913, and remained in Huerta's forces for three years. During her three years under Huerta's command Cárdenas was promoted to standard bearer for her valiant fighting during the Battle of Lampezos; after she was honored with the rank of standard bearer she "began to dress in men's clothing, cut her hair short, and lowered her voice" (Salas 1990: 42). Later on she rose through the ranks to become corporal, second sergeant, first sergeant, and then second lieutenant. In 1916 she was dismissed from the army by a presidential decree from Carranza (Poniatowska 1999: 16).

Rising through the ranks and being recognized in Pancho Villa's army was particularly difficult for women, although a few managed to do so. Villa, according to Salas, was "the most vehement hater of the soldaderas" (45). Villa's desire to modernize

his forces and the way war was waged meant that soldaderas were unwelcome. He believed that women interfered with the troop mobility of his army and the efficient supply system that he wanted to implement. Believing that a modern army should be “entirely composed of men [who should] fill all line and staff positions,” Villa strived to exclude women from service, even for provisions, sanitation and as medical helpers, but most especially from the trenches (45). Villa had very precise views on the role of women in Mexico, and according to these views women belonged in the home, not on the battlefield, and were “things to protect and to love because they could not discern between right and wrong” (Salas 1999:45). John Reed, an American journalist who spoke with Villa about women and their role in Mexico after the Revolution stated that Villa acted surprised when asked if women would be given the right to vote, and that Villa “never thought about women voting, electing a government and making laws” (45). Villa’s views of women’s and their proper place were certainly consistent with the concept of *ninguneo*, however his philosophy and the reality of the social conditions of the Revolution were certainly at odds. A testimony to this philosophy being utterly at odds with the reality of civil war is demonstrated by Villa’s exclusion of women from the battlefield: this exclusion had only a momentary effect during the height of battle, according to a report from the El Paso Morning Times (November 27, 1913): “General Villa several times attempted to compel the women to leave the trenches and on numerous occasions had them escorted back of the firing line to places of safety, but when the rebel chief’s attention was called to some other direction on the field, they hurried to the front and continued their firing” (45).

Villa's hatred of the soldaderas and women soldiers reached a particularly horrific apex one day in 1916, when he ordered his men to mow down a group of soldaderas after a bullet shot from within a group of soldaderas narrowly missed his head, grazing his sombrero. When none of the women would reveal who fired the bullet Villa ordered his men to shoot into the crowd of women until someone revealed the culprit; according to Major Silvestre Cadena Jaramillo, a Villista who witnessed the slaughter, "[n]obody spoke up, they would rather die than tell who did it" (47). Ninety soldaderas and their children were slaughtered that day thanks to Villa's orders. As the soldiers went through the bodies of the dead women they found a baby among the bodies, still alive. When they asked Villa what to do about the baby, he retorted to the soldier "¿lo vas a cuidar tu?" ("are you going to take care of it?"); when he got no reply from the soldier he ordered the baby to be shot (Poniatowska 1999: 10).

While Villa's violent behavior towards the soldaderas was well-known, that behavior stands in contrast to the way he treated women who served valiantly in his forces and who distinguished themselves in combat. Colonel María Quinteras de Meras is an example of a woman who served under Pancho Villa, rose through the ranks and was respected by Villa, the man most determined to rid Mexican forces of women completely. Despite Villa's utter dislike of women soldiers, Quinteras de Meras – who enlisted in his army in 1910 and by 1913 had already participated in ten battles – rose to the rank of colonel, with her husband serving as a captain under her command. According to the El Paso Morning Times from May 7, 1914, Quinteras de Meras "shoots and throws a rope as well as any of the men in Villa's army. She wears a khaki suit and a broad brimmed Stetson. Three belts of cartridges and a Mauser rifle are thrown over her

shoulders. The colonel has led many desperate charges and her followers have come to believe she is endowed with some supernatural power” (qtd. In Salas 42). Quinteras de Meras never accepted pay from Villa for her service, something that, according to Poniatowska, garnered Villa’s respect (16).

Petra Herrera is one of the most interesting of all of the women warriors of the Revolution, thanks to her service, her ability to rise through the ranks in Villa’s army, and because during a portion of her service she dressed and acted as if she were a man, living under the name Pedro Herrera, in order to be able to participate in battle and be eligible for rank promotion. Once she had proven her leadership skills by soldiering, fighting in battle, and handling explosives, she put her hair in braids, “came out” as a woman and stated that she wanted to continue soldiering under her real name, Petra Herrera. Eventually she commanded a force of 200 men and achieved the rank of captain (Salas 1990: 48).

Herrera not only took part in one of the major battles of the Revolution, the second battle of Torreón on May 30, 1914, but her participation was key to the Villistas winning the battle. According to Cosme Mendoza Chavira, a fellow soldier in Villa’s army and part of the vanguard who accompanied Herrera in the battle, Herrera was “the one who took Torreón, she turned off the lights when they entered the city” (48). According to both Salas and Poniatowska, the official story of the battle of Torreón excludes Herrera’s contributions, perhaps because Villa was “unwilling to let it be known that women had played such an important part in the battle” (48). Lack of acknowledgement of her efforts by Villa (a promotion, perhaps even to general, would have been due Herrera on the taking of Torreón) may have been what led Herrera to form

her own women's army shortly after the second battle of Torreón. Herrera created a brigade of women soldiers that numbered anywhere from 25 to 1,000 women – the number depends upon which source is consulted, and Salas states that this could be due to Herrera's "fortunes in battle, recruitment, desertions, or the biases of the soldiers who remembered her," Poniatowska believes that Herrera started with 25 women, and that the number quickly ascended to 1,000 women (48). Regardless of the exact number of women soldiers that Herrera had in her brigade, her services as a leader were sought out by another revolutionary, Venustiano Carranza, where her women's brigade was utilized, and Herrera's services as spy and organizer were deemed necessary.

By the end of the war Herrera was promoted to colonel by General Jesús Agustín Castro, who then disbanded Herrera's brigade of 300 – 400 women warriors (48). In 1917, Herrera appealed to Carranza to be given the rank of general and to remain in the military, despite the end of hostilities, but Carranza denied her request (Poniatowska 1999: 17). Herrera worked as a bartender until the end of her life: she was shot three times by a group of drunken men in the bar after they had made insulting remarks to her. The physician who attended her after the attack, Major Dr. Cirujano José Raya Rivera, a former Villista, "believed that the violence against Herrera was a vendetta of some sort," because once they found out she did not die of her initial wounds the men came back and attempted to shoot her again (Salas 1990: 49). Herrera was never recognized for her part in the taking of Torreón, and she was never promoted to general.

Yet another Petra who became a "Pedro" during the Revolution was Petra Ruiz, who served in Carranza's army. Nicknamed "el Echa Balas," ("he who spits bullets") by her comrades for her violent disposition, she was in charge of one of the battalions that

broke through the Federal defenses during the battle for Mexico City. After helping win the battle for Mexico City she was promoted to lieutenant for her leadership and valor; later, when Carranza was mustering the troops out of services Herrera said to him, as he passed by her “quiero que sepa que una mujer le ha servido como soldado” (“I want you to know that a woman has served you as a soldier” (Poniatowska 1999: 16).

If Villa’s army was particularly hostile to most women soldiers, two other revolutionary leaders’ armies were significantly less so: Carranza and Zapata.

Venustiano Carranza and Emiliano Zapata both included women in their fighting forces and Carranza included women in relatively prominent roles in his government, once the hostilities had ceased. According to Julia Tuñon Pablos in her book *Women in Mexico: A Past Unveiled*, in Carranza’s army it was the Grupo Sanitario Acrata (Anarchist Health Group), “the women’s branch of the Casa del Obrero Mundial [that] took up the standard of constitutional rule in 1915” (1987: 93). The main focus of the Carranza movement was a concern with constitutional and legal questions, and this concern was held by both male and female Carrancistas; the standard bearer of the movement, next to Carranza, was Hermila Galindo, Carranza’s very feminist secretary, who exerted quite a bit of influence on the leader (93). According to Soto, Carranza was the first revolutionary leader to “appeal directly to women for their political support,” and this appeal led many feminists, including Galindo, to join political forces with Carranza (1990: 49).

Hermila Galindo served as Carranza’s secretary beginning in 1914, and delivered speeches supporting Carranza’s Constitutionalist cause throughout Mexico (51). There is some question as to Carranza’s personal and political views toward women – it has been said that he supported women and workers only when he needed their support for his

cause; Galindo herself questioned his views and was “allowed considerable latitude in her criticism because she had proven to be so valuable” to the Constitutionalist cause (53). In 1915, with Carranza’s support, she, along with several other feminists, launched the feminist magazine *La Mujer Moderna*; Galindo served as the magazine’s editor until it ceased publication in 1919 (51). Galindo was very vocal on women’s rights, and her thoughts on the matter “created a furor at the First Feminist Congress [January 1917] where she demanded women’s complete equality, including sexual equality (51). So respected was she by Carranza that he recruited her to deliver the Constitutionalist message not just at home, but abroad (51). In 1916, Galindo campaigned unsuccessfully for women’s suffrage, but in 1917, she managed to be elected deputy from the Fifth Electoral District in Mexico City; when she appeared before the Electoral College of the Chamber of Deputies to claim her seat she was denied her seat because she was a woman (52). Galindo retired from public life after the assassination of Venustiano Carranza in May of 1920 (52).

Carranza’s support from women was not just journalistic or political in nature, it was also physical: Carranza actively recruited women soldiers to his forces. Some of Carranza’s *soldaderas* became well-known and respected fighters – the aforementioned Petra “Echa Balas” Ruiz and Petra “Pedro” Herrera were two of Carranza’s most famous women warriors. Carranza not only recruited female *soldaderas* and female soldiers into his ranks, but he also established a pension fund for his soldier’s widows, and he was “diligent about reminding his field generals to implement this pension policy” (Salas 1990:47). There is no evidence, however, that Carranza rewarded female soldiers with pensions following their service – the pensions were extended only to widows. Proof of



this refusal to reward female fighters is shown in the policy of both Carranza and Obregón following the cessation of active hostilities and during the organization of the modern Mexican military in the late teens and early 1920's, when the secretary of war, General Miguel Ruelas stated "[t]here should be organized a corps of military administration which shall eliminate from our armies the women camp followers who, in addition to their disadvantages and the lamentable backwardness they reveal, make us the butt of all writers on this subject" (Salas 49). If Carranza was more than tolerant of women in the ranks during active hostilities, his policy makers during the political phase of the Revolution were actively intolerant of women in the ranks. Carranza showed himself to be, perhaps, exactly what the critics complained about before: tolerant of women when their bodies were needed for his political and military expediency and somewhat dismissive of their service once his goals were accomplished.

According to Rosa King, an Englishwoman who lived in Morelos during the Revolution, the Zapatistas "were not an army, they were a people in arms" (qtd. In Resendez-Fuentes 1995:534). Zapata's Army of the South was more of an army-village cooperative than a true mobile fighting force; villages cooperated (whether through desire or force) with the Zapatistas by providing food and other provisions, and Zapata's army recruited followers, women and men alike, and slowly spread their power over the southern portion of Mexico (Resendez-Fuentes 534-536). Women were part of the Zapatista army and served as provisioners of food, spies, messengers, smugglers and ideologues (Soto 1990:47).

Perhaps the best known woman among Zapata's followers is Dolores Jimenez y Muro, who not only held the rank of colonel in Zapata's army, but was the author of the

introduction to the Plan de Ayala, which spelled out Zapata's plan for agrarian reform in Mexico (47). Prior to becoming a revolutionary, Jimenez y Muro was a writer and journalist, writing and publishing under several masculine pseudonyms. Her most famous piece, the Plan Político-Social, was published in 1911, shortly after the Porfirio Diaz suspended constitutional guarantees. The Plan Político-Social was adopted by the states of Guerrero, Tlaxcala, Michoacán, Puebla and the Distrito Federal and was signed by representatives from each of the states and Jimenez y Muro. Emiliano Zapata was impressed by the Plan Político-Social and wrote a letter asking her to join his group of revolutionaries – the letter arrived a bit late, however, as Jimenez y Muro was serving a jail sentence for having provoked the Huerta regime (Del Rio 188). Portions of the Plan Político-Social were later incorporated in Zapata's Plan de Ayala. Jimenez y Muro was not just a writer who influenced Zapata and formed a part of his revolutionary force, she was also entrusted by Zapata to carry out dangerous and sensitive missions for him including being the carrier of messages between Zapata and Obregón (Soto 47).

Zapata's army also included women who were women warriors. According to Soto, the soldaderas in the Zapatista army participated in numerous offensives, including an attack on railroad workers in Michoacán in which “at least twenty women were seen among the attacking forces” (46). Zapatista women also formed their own battalions, according to the historian John Womack, who describes a revolt carried out by the famous Zapatista soldadera, La China, on a village in the state of Guerrero:

In Puente de Ixtla the widows, wives, daughters, and sisters of rebels formed their own battalion and revolted to “avenge the dead.” Under the command of a husky ex-tortilla maker called La China, they raided wildly through Tetecala district [...]

these women became the terrors of the region. Even de la O [a seasoned Zapatista commander] treated La China with respect. (1969:170).

Other women in Zapata's fighting forces include Espinosa Barrera, Carmen Amelia Robles, and Rebecca Bobadilla, who gained the rank of colonel and "regularly performed hazardous tasks" and worked as a soldadera and a spy. Espinosa Barrera was known for her skill with horses and was "a woman soldier" who "dressed like a man, and thought like a man" (Macías qtd. in Salas 75). Barrera was given a battlefield commission as lieutenant colonel by Zapata (75). Coronela Carmen Amelia Robles dressed as a man and fought for Zapata in the campaigns in Morelos, Guerrero, and the Distrito Federal (Soto 47). According to Antonio Uroz, Robles's contributions to the Zapatista forces as a fighter are ignored by historians, an unfortunate state of affairs since, as Uroz states, "it is inexcusable that women in our country have not been recognized for [...] what they've done for the Revolution, as much in war as in peace" (qtd. In Soto 47). Much like the women warriors in Villa's and Carranza's lines, Zapata's soldaderas were not generally recognized after the hostilities ceased. One of the very few exceptions to this was Dolores Jimenez y Muro who, in 1925, several months before she passed away, was granted a very small pension from José Vasconcelos, Mexico's Secretary of Education at the time (48).

The years after the Revolution saw the end of women in the military. Venustiano Carranza, along with the other revolutionary leaders who had soldaderas in their ranks, made sure that women were never again allowed to participate in the Mexican military. In 1925, all women were banned from military barracks by General Joaquín Amaro (49). The soldaderas and their participation in battle, their heroics and the danger they

confronted have been scrubbed from the official story of the Mexican Revolution. Only recently, in the last two decades, have the stories of the brave women who fought, risked their lives, or even died for the cause of the Revolution come to light. The ninguneo of women may have covered up their stories for years, but women's stories are making their way into the new official story of the history of Mexico. Yet another chapter in Mexico's history of women warriors is yet to be discussed, that of the current-day Zapatista women, who are even now fighting for democracy, representative government, justice and equality.

#### The Present Day: Women Warriors of the ELZN

Economic and living conditions for the average campesina, or peasant woman, in rural Mexico would be described as nasty, brutish and short – women in traditional society are devalued except for their ability to produce, especially children, commodities, and food (Rovira 2002: 452-457). Once they are married, generally at a very young age and generally as a result of bride capture or arranged marriage, women in the traditional societies of the Lacandón jungle in Chiapas go to live with their husband's family and are treated as chattel. The conditions of women aside, the peasants of the rural areas of Chiapas have little access to health care, education, and sanitation, and living conditions could generally be described as third-world in nature.

It is in this environment that the roots of the Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (EZLN) arose, beginning in the 1970s and following the student protests of 1968. Tired of the treatment, or lack of treatment, they were receiving at the hands of the government, groups of peasants began organizing to fight back against the large land

owners and government injustice (Hayden 2002: 10). In 1982, General Absalón Castellanos Domínguez becomes the governor of Chiapas; under his oversight a massive increase in militarization is seen to fight back against the loose organizations of peasants who are protesting their treatment at the hands of the wealthy land owners and the government. Castellanos Domínguez is directly responsible for the deaths of 102 campesinos and 327 disappeared persons, 590 campesinos are imprisoned and 427 are kidnapped and tortured, hundreds of peasant families are expelled from their homes (10). In 1983 Comandante Marcos and several others form what we know today as the EZLN, the modern-day Zapatistas (10). Over a period of ten years the Zapatistas came to form a force for political and social change for the campesinos of the Chiapas region, and their reach spread far beyond the Lacandón forest where they had their beginnings. Zapatista camps sprung up all over the sierra where comandantes trained young people to fight, and young people from the villages, faced with a life of poverty and desperation, joined the force.

According to John Ross, in his book *¡Zapatistas!*, comandantes for the Zapatista army frequently visited villages in the Chiapas region and “invited young men and, more pertinently, the young women, up to their training camps in the sierra, where they would learn how to use weapons and also learn Spanish [...] not to replace their [own languages] but to open up access to the larger world beyond the jungle mountains” (9). For the young women who joined the EZLN camps, the change was revolutionary: young women who before were forced into marriage, motherhood, forced labor and poverty were now able to fight with the EZLN, assume positions of power within the leadership, have control over their sexuality thanks to distribution of birth control, and choose to

marry – or not marry – the partner they desired (Ross 10; Rovira 460-462). The EZLN Revolutionary Law on Women includes all of the following rights:

- 1) Women, regardless of their race, creed, color, or political affiliation, have the right to participate in the revolutionary struggle in a way determined by their desire and capacity.
- 2) Women have the right to work and receive a just salary.
- 3) Women have the right to decide the number of children they will have and care for.
- 4) Women have the right to participate in the affairs of the community and hold positions of authority if they are freely and democratically elected.
- 5) Women and their children have the right to primary attention in matters of health and nutrition.
- 6) Women have the right to an education.
- 7) Women have the right to choose their partner, and are not to be forced into marriage.
- 8) Women shall not be beaten or physically mistreated by their family members or by strangers. Rape and attempted rape will be severely punished.
- 9) Women will be able to occupy positions of leadership in the organization and hold military ranks in the revolutionary armed forces.
- 10) Women will have all the rights and obligations elaborated in the Revolutionary Laws and regulations.

(translation of the original EZLN document published January 1, 1994 and found in Zapatistas! Documents of the New Mexican Revolution 1994)

Thanks to the rights outlined above, women in the EZLN are somewhat protected from the harsh life that would otherwise be their lot among their indigenous cultures in Chiapas. Because of the rights granted to women by the EZLN, they are less often subject to the *ninguneo* that permeates Mexican society, and especially the indigenous society of Chiapas.

Women's rights within the EZLN are taken seriously, and women have certainly progressed up the ranks of the organization. Apart from Subcomandante Marcos, the leader of the EZLN, the most recognized revolutionary was Comandante Ramona, who essentially fulfilled the part of second-in-command for many years until her death in 2006. Comandante Ramona was a very early member of the EZLN, who watched as women joined the ranks of the EZLN thanks to the conditions for women in Chiapas: “[I]a mujer fue entrando por el hecho de que nos veía a nosotras. Entonces las mujeres de los pueblos empezaron a instruir a sus hijas, hermanas o nietas, y les decían es mejor agarrar un arma e irse a pelear” (Lóyzaga de la Cueva 1996: 72).

It was Comandante Ramona, who, along with Comandante Susana, in 1993 took the Revolutionary Law of Women to the rural communities of Chiapas for discussion and approval (Ross 329). Introduction of the Law of Women was initially greeted with hostility from many of their male comrades, but the women were insistent: soon the Law of Women became part of the EZLN revolutionary canon (329). Comandante Ramona forged a path for the women warriors of the EZLN, along with other women like Mayor Ana María, who was in charge of the taking of San Cristóbal with a 1,000-person force that included Comandante Ramona in 1994. Mayor Ana María was also in charge during the breaking of the government forces that surrounded the Lacandón jungle in December

of 1994 (Lóyzaga de la Cueva 72-73). Women like Mayor Ana María and Comandante Ramona were instrumental in increasing the fighting force of the EZLN and making sure that a full third of that fighting force was comprised of women (Ross 329).

Women of the EZLN, like many women warriors throughout the centuries, are instructed not to have children: “no viven en casas ni tienen hijos, ni otro proyecto de futuro que acabar con las armas la injusticia insostenible que las viene sometiendo por lustros” (Loyzaga 1996:73). Women Zapatistas can be divided into “insurgentes” and “milicianas” – the insurgents live as uniformed soldiers with the regular army, generally in the sierra, training with arms and preparing themselves to fight (73). The “milicianas” generally live in villages and towns and they do productive work to keep the regular military afloat, although they, too, are trained in handling weapons (73). According to Comandante Ramona, the primary function of the female insurgent is to learn combat tactics, and for the “milicianas” to form groups of women and organize them into collectives for the benefit of the EZLN communities (73).

Finally, the women of the EZLN are involved directly in politics, occasionally even before the male leaders of the movement. The very first Zapatista to address the Mexican Congress was a woman, Comandante Esther, at the joint session of Congress on March 28, 1994 (Ross 80). Only 211 out of the full chamber of 628 legislators showed up for the historic joint session (79). The session was televised, and four comandantes were chosen to speak – Esther was chosen to speak first. Esther, who had been charged with the task of addressing the legislature by the leaders of the Zapatista movement, explained to the legislators why women and men were banding together and fighting for social and economic justice in Chiapas. A portion of her speech is below:



My name is Esther, but this doesn't matter, I'm a Zapatista and a woman. This is what's important. Through my voice speaks the voice of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation. No one remembers us, the Indian women. We live on the edge of the mountain and no one sees how hard it is for us. It is the women who give birth and see their children die in their arms, and there is nothing that we can do about it but cry [...] We are always carrying, carrying wood, carrying water over the mountain for two or three hours, always carrying our children, carrying the corn for the tortillas. Always carrying [...] The man goes off to work on the fincas and never comes back, and the woman is left only with her pain [...] The ladinos and the rich make fun of us because of how we dress, because of our language, our prayers, our ways of healing, of our color, which is the color of the earth [...] This is the life of the Indian woman. I'm not telling you all this to hurt you or make you run off to help us. We ourselves struggle to change these things. (Ross 80-81).

Repression of women and campesinos continues in Mexico, and Zapatista women and men continue to fight back. After the repressive government crackdown on protesters at San Salvador Atenco and Texcoco in May of 2006, Subcomandante Marcos addressed a group of Zapatista women at the public event "Women Without Fear. We Are All Atenco," encouraging the women to continue in their commitment to end injustice and repression, and praising the women for their fearlessness in the face of the government brutality (transcript originally published by the EZLN, May 22, 2006, translated by Irlandesa and found on [www.mujareslibres.org](http://www.mujareslibres.org)). In January of 2008,

Zapatista women gathered for the Comandante Ramona Women's Encounter to celebrate the anniversary of the promulgation of the Revolutionary Women's Law and the anniversary of the Zapatista uprising (from <http://mujereslibres.org/WomenNews.htm>). Zapatista insurgent women continue to train in the sierra and the milicianas continue to provide the EZLN with support.

## CONCLUSION

In most societies, women are not warriors – they are not involved directly in combat situations, and oftentimes they are not even involved in an indirect manner in the thick of battle (for example, as assistants to soldiers or as “encouragers” or “inciters”). In the societies I have discussed above I have shown that women do indeed participate as warriors or soldiers in warfare, battle, and raids. In this paper it was my intent to determine whether the presence of women warriors is based purely on symbolic relationships between power and the sacred feminine, on marital residence rules and descent, or on a combination of all of these factors. I utilized both symbolic and standard cross-cultural methods in order to try to determine why women warriors are present in these societies, including Peggy Sanday’s theory that women’s “secular power roles [are] derived from ancient concepts of sacred power” and David B. Adams’s theory that there are few women warriors due to marital residency systems that arose as a function of warfare (1983:196).

In the discussion above I have shown that, as per Sanday’s theory, in societies where the feminine is directly related to sacred power and divine creation, women have access to greater amounts of secular power – which equates to more power in the political, economic, and religious spheres. This relationship between divine creation and sacred power (“the divine feminine”) and female secular power also seems to give

women access to more power in the realm of warfare, and thus more leeway to become women warriors. But Adams's theory has also been shown to be a part of the equation as to why there are women warriors: in the majority of the cultures described above, his determination on residency does seem to have an effect on when and where women warriors occur. Women do indeed seem to have access to roles as warriors not only because the marital residency system permits it, but also because concepts of sacred power give women the secular power to assume warrior status.

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