

**From soldaderas to citizen**  
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**Resumen:**

México estaba en la vanguardia continental en asuntos fundamentales de los derechos humanos de la primera generación, como la abolición de la esclavitud en 1810 y el establecimiento de una independencia entre el estado y la iglesia en 1859. Luego, era el primer en el mundo para incorporar la segunda generación de derechos humanos, las primeras sociales en su constitución en 1917. El segundo era la república de Weimar en 1919.

**Abstract:**

Mexico was at the continental forefront in fundamental topics of first generation human rights, like the abolition of slavery in 1810 and the establishment of a state independent of the church in 1859. Afterwards, it was the first in the world to incorporate second generation of human rights, the social ones in its constitution in 1917.<sup>1</sup> The second was the Republic of Weimar in 1919.

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<sup>1</sup> Galeana, Patricia, “Los instrumentos internacionales de rights human de las mujeres y su aplicación en México”, en: *Gaceta. Comisión de Rights Human del Distrito Federal*, México, CDH – DF, v. IX, nueva época, no. 11, noviembre, 2002, pp. 59 – 66.

### **Human Rights in Mexico:**

Mexico was at the continental forefront in fundamental topics of first generation human rights, like the abolition of slavery in 1810 and the establishment of a state independent of the church in 1859. Afterwards, it was the first in the world to incorporate second generation of human rights, the social ones in its constitution in 1917.<sup>2</sup> The second was the Republic of Weimar in 1919.

But we have been in retrogression in women's rights, having been one of the last six countries of Latin America<sup>3</sup> to recognize their political rights, in 1953; after the United Nations recommended their recognition in December of 1952. The greatest delay is in the rights of the indigenous communities<sup>4</sup>, as the last constitutional reform of the Fox government gives less rights to these communities than those that were awarded in convention 169 of the International Work Organization (Organización Internacional del Trabajo) and those of eight Latin American constitutions.<sup>5</sup> Let see what happens in the case of women.

### **Indigenous antecedents:**

The ancient Mexicans, as all of the Mesoamerican peoples, had a vision of a dual cosmos. In order to maintain universal balance, the World was divided into two equal parts: the feminine and the masculine. For every masculine deity there was an equally important corresponding feminine deity.

In the city – states of the Mayan civilization there were female governors, but in the Mexica Empire the situation of women did not correspond to the vision of a dual cosmos. She played a secondary role, not participating in political life or in public religious rites, and their mercantile activities were scarce. They were dedicated to reproductive tasks; domestic labors and the weaving of fabrics and clothing. Many of the pre-hispanic traditions still remain.

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<sup>2</sup> Galeana, Patricia, "Los instrumentos internacionales de rights human de las mujeres y su aplicación en México", en: *Gaceta. Comisión de Rights Human del Distrito Federal*, México, CDH – DF, v. IX, nueva época, no. 11, noviembre, 2002, pp. 59 – 66.

<sup>3</sup> Ecuador 1929; Brasil y Uruguay 1932; Cuba 1934; El Salvador 1939; República Dominicana 1942; Guatemala y Panamá 1945; Argentina y Venezuela 1947; Costa Rica y Chile 1949, y Bolivia 1952.

<sup>4</sup> Galeana, Patricia, coord. *La Condición de la mujer indígena y sus rights fundamentales*, FEMU – CNDH - UNAM y SEGOB, 1997, 462 p.

<sup>5</sup> Argentina, Brasil, Colombia, Ecuador, Guatemala, Venezuela, Perú y Nicaragua.

The Mexica women were kept in virtual captivity until the moment they were married. They were taught to weave and spin and were punished physically for disobedience. Even in the noble classes they had fewer rights than the males.

Women that died during their first childbirth were transformed into goddesses that accompanied the sun, while the male warriors that died in battle had a similar destiny, but they returned to earth transformed into humming birds, sacred birds that would live in eternal happiness drinking the nectar of flowers.

### **Novohispanic antecedents:**

In the Abrahamic religions: Jewish, Christian and Moslem, the divine creator is singular and masculine, therefore women take second place since creation.

As when Spain unified around the Catholic religion, expelling Muslims and Jews; the Spanish conquest imposed Catholicism intolerant of any other religious beliefs and unified the Mesoamerican peoples settled in the territory that made up New Spain.

During the Novohispanic period, Marianism, or imitation of the Virgin Mary, was the model for women to follow. For them there was no middle ground, their conduct could only fluctuate between virginal exaltation and reduction; between abnegation and sin. Religious culture perpetuated a patriarchal society, in which the social function of women was limited to reproduction. The life of women elapsed in private. They lived secluded in their family home; in the houses of God; of meditation or in brothels. Few could break out and transcend. Sor Juana Ines de la Cruz achieved it, but did not escape suffering the consequences.

The principle of intolerance reigned in Mexico since the XVI century, until the triumph of liberalism in the second half of the XIX century.

### **XIX century:**

Women actively participated in the fight for the independence of Mexico,<sup>6</sup> some transcended not only through their support of the insurgence but also for being transgressors of the rules imposed to the feminine model.

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<sup>6</sup> Entre ellas han destacado: Josefa Ortiz de Domínguez, Leona Vicario, Mariana Rodríguez del Toro de Lazarín y Gertrudis Bocanegra, que fue fusilada en 1818 por los realistas. María Ignacia Rodríguez de Velasco y Osorio Barba, "La Güera Rodríguez".

With independence achieved, since 1824 the Zacatecan women demanded that the constituent congress of the first federal republic recognize them as citizens. However none of the constitutions of Mexico<sup>7</sup> in the XIX century awarded citizenship to women.

The female sarape knitters of Puebla and tobacco workers of Mexico City demanded that equal work corresponds to equal pay, without achieving their objective.

The secularizing process that Carlos III began in Ibero-America toward the end of the XVIII century, culminated in Mexico until the triumph of liberal reform, with the establishment of the liberty of cults in December of 1860. This began a true cultural revolution.

The Mexican liberals of the XIX century, headed by Benito Juarez, considered the need to create institutions for the education of women.

With the triumph of liberalism non religious teaching was established and primary school was made free and obligatory. The secondary school for young women was created, then normal high school and after women could enter university. Margarita Chorne,<sup>8</sup> Matilde Montoya<sup>9</sup> and Maria Sandoval de Zarco<sup>10</sup> were the first women to graduate as a dentist, medical doctor and lawyer respectively.

Nevertheless, the social function of women continued being reduced to reproductive life. First they had to educate children for the Holy Church and after citizens of the state. Their intervention was necessary only as a means, as an object and not as a subject of history.

Until only a few years ago, the history of women was a forgotten history. That is why many people do not know that, since the beginnings of independent life in our country, there were women that demanded their rights. Sadly, more than a century would go by for their demand to be answered.

Toward the end of the century women's publications proliferated, as well as feminists. The former gave advice for women to continue being an angel in the

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<sup>7</sup> 1814, 1824, 1836, 1843, 1847 y 1857.

<sup>8</sup> 18 de enero de 1886.

<sup>9</sup> 25 de agosto de 1887.

<sup>10</sup> Julio de 1898.

home, the latter outlined their liberation. Women like the journalist and writer from Guerrero, Laureana Wright Gonzalez, fought through her writing for the benefit and equality of women. The author of *The emancipation of women through study*, founded the first feminist's publication of Mexico, *Violets of Anahuac*,<sup>11</sup> as well as the newspaper *Women of Anahuac*. Laureana defended the advances that the women-suffragists were achieving in other parts of the world in her articles and demanded right equality of both sexes, as the true regeneration of human kind.<sup>12</sup>

### **XX century:**

The construction of the Mexican national state culminated with the triumph of liberalism, but during the Porfirist dictatorship, liberalism stopped being revolutionary and was converted into a way of conserving peace and order. Liberties were suppressed in favor of the concentration of wealth, which incremented inequality until provoking the outbreak of revolution.

The social insurrection demanded the rights of rural and city workers. The repression of strikes and the political fight mend the armed movement to break out. Women stood out as leaders in the textile factory strikes of Rio Blanco.

The precursors of the Mexican Revolution, the first social revolution of the XX century, were made heirs of the social liberalism of the XIX century. The liberal party was constituted and retook the line of Ponciano Arriaga that "as long as the people are hungry, all constitutions are dead words".

The program of the Liberal Party of 1906 of the Magonists recognized women as a subject of rights, including the recognition of their domestic labors.

Toward the end of the XIX century and the beginning of the XX century women organized political clubs against the dictatorship. They actively participated in the anti-reelection clubs.

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<sup>11</sup> En 1884 nació esta revista con el nombre de *Las hijas de Anáhuac*, y a partir del número 9 cambió a *Violetas del Anáhuac*.

<sup>12</sup> "Ya en el territorio de Wyoming la mujer goza del derecho de sufragio por completo –escribe Wright en uno de sus artículo -; en Kansas, del sufragio municipal; en Arkansas y Mississippi tienen el voto en la cuestión de licores, y en catorce estados más y cuatro territorios tienen el derecho más o menos amplio para el voto sobre escuelas". "El sufragio de la mujer", en *Violetas del Anáhuac*, México, 24 de febrero de 1889.

In 1906, in Mexico City the group Admirers of Juarez with Eulalia Guzman, Hermila Galindo and Luz Vera was constituted with the objective of obtaining the right to vote. They also organized groups in the states like the Liberal Club of the Disciples of Juarez in Veracruz, which supported the Liberal Party and the club of Antiania Nava in Matehuala, San Luis Potosi.

The revolution favored the political participation of women; the suffragists demanded that Emilio Vazquez Gomez award them the vote. With the triumph of the Maderist revolution, the Friends of the People Club demanded the help of interim President Francisco Leon de la Barra. They argued that women's vote was not excluded from the Constitution of 1857, as the Carta Magna had not referred to the sex of voters, but their demand was not even taken into account.

The Maderist revolution managed to overthrow the dictator, but the government of Madero failed in its conciliation attempt, it could not consolidate the new democratic order. The military of the old regime organized the counterrevolution and assassinated Madero. *Pandora's box* had been opened and the forces sprouted everywhere; revolutionaries of diverse ideological shades and the counterrevolutionaries became radical, some in their political and social demands, others in their conservatism and reaction.

Women actively participated in the Maderist revolution and then in the Constitutionalist. *Soldaderas*, *adelitas*, *marías* and *marietas* were the suppliers of the revolutionary armies. Some left their skirts in order to wear pants and transform themselves into officials. In the Zapatista army they were colonels. But the revolution did not bring justice for women, nor awarded them citizenship.

### **First Feminist Congress:**

The state that came out of the revolution looked for structural changes; Salvador Alvarado,<sup>13</sup> governor of the state of Yucatan, was conscious of the need of the participation of women in the process. Under the auspice of this

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<sup>13</sup> En 1919, Salvador Alvarado publica su obra *La reconstrucción de México*, en la que da a conocer su pensamiento: "¿Por qué negarle el derecho de sufragio, en asuntos municipales, por ejemplo, si la ciudad no es sino un conjunto de hogares y la mujer el sostén directo, el hogar donde se desarrolla la vida familiar? Más adelante se le concederá el voto provincial y el general; cuando su educación cívica, le permita desempeñar esas funciones electorales a conciencia, y los puestos de elección popular le puedan ser confiados."

revolutionary governor, the First Feminist Congress was held, in Yucatan from the 13 to the 16 of January, 1916.<sup>14</sup>

In the calling together of the Congress, Alvarado stated: "Its an error to educate women for a society that does not exist, getting her accustomed to, as in the past, staying secluded in the home, only abandoned to attend evening parties and religious celebrations, and it will not vindicate her by putting on her tomb the Roman epitaph: "she looked after her home and knew how to spin wool," as the active life of evolution demands her participation in the majority of human activities."<sup>15</sup>

At the Congress 617 delegates were in attendance, notable among them was Hermila Galindo, who in her report "The woman in the future", outlined intellectual equality between women and men, and at the same time demanded maximum sexual liberty for both sexes and the right to vote for the female population. The report shocked both men and women.

Highlighted in the conclusions of the Feminist Congress were: "the woman in the future can perform any public post that does not demand physical vigor, as there is no difference between her intellectual state and that of a man, and is just as capable of being a leading element of society."<sup>16</sup>

Hermila Galindo was twenty years of age when she reiterated her demand for citizenship for women before the Constituent Congress. She headed a vigorous group of women that protested in the entrance of the Iturbide Theater of Queretaro, where the deputies were in session. At the same time, Ines Malvaez presented the petition not to award the right to vote women. Although the pro-vote proposal was supported by the representative of Michoacan, Salvador Gonzalez Torres, it was not debated.

Patriarchal atavism still prevailed in society and did not look well upon the feminist conquest to yield them higher education. It was considered that whoever followed a professional career tended to become masculine. It was still

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<sup>14</sup> En el Teatro Peón Contreras de la Ciudad de Mérida, Yucatán, del 13 al 16 de enero de 1916, se llevan a cabo los trabajos del Primer Congreso Feminista de Yucatán.

La portada de la memoria del Primer Congreso Feminista en Yucatán presenta como lema: "La hembra es el producto de la Naturaleza y la mujer el fruto de la Civilización", de Alfonso Karr,

<sup>15</sup> *El Primero Congreso Feminista de Yucatán*, Mérida, Talleres tipográficos del Ateneo Peninsular, 1916, p. 31.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 131

less accepted that a woman entered politics, where she would become perverted.

The deputy Felix Palavicini had written: "We are partisans to the instruction of women, but we do not want the multiplication of brained women."<sup>17</sup> However, during the Constituent debates, the same Palavicini asked to be explained why initiatives related to the vote of women were not under consideration.

In the meantime, the revolutionary vehicle did not stop. After the proclamation of the Constitution, the disputes for power of the diverse revolutionary groups would continue for more than two decades. The fights were resolved with arms in hand. An authoritarian, patriarchal and patrimonial regime was established that had no room for women, and therefore not for democracy. A party from the dome of power was created, and this absorbed the women's groups, influencing the suffragist fight, as the majority of the same revolutionary leaders did not share the vision of the statesman Alvarado.

Since the Church have supported the counterrevolutionary movement of Victoriano Huerta, the revolutionaries radicalized their anticlericalism, which caused many women that had participated in the Maderist movement to abstain from participation. The confrontation of the revolutionary state with the clergy brought about the *guerra cristera*. They did, however, participate in regard to their religious beliefs which supported the idea that women should not be given the vote, because it was to give the vote to the Catholic Church, which dominated them from the pulpit and the confessional.

Others were opposed to giving women the right to vote by considering it to be giving a double vote to married men, because the women would vote as her husbands indicated. Yet others sustained that there was no need to make constitutional reforms, because when the vote of Mexicans was spoken of it also included women, although such a right had never been put into practice. Still others feared that women would become masculine if they were to be awarded political rights.

Women's fight for this benefit continued in the decades of the 20's and 30's; multiple associations appeared. The First National Feminist Congress was celebrated in Mexico City, from the 20th to the 30th of May, in 1923. It was held by the Mexican chapter of the Panamerican Women's League; it had an

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<sup>17</sup> Palavicini, Félix F., *Problemas de la educación*, México, F. Sempere y Compañía Editores, 1910, p. 67.

attendance of one hundred delegates. Among its resolutions the petition for civil equality, so that women were eligible to hold administrative posts, was highlighted; to promote the decree of political equality and the participation of social groups in parliamentary representation.

The Southeast Socialist Party, headed by Felipe Carrillo Puerto launched the candidacy of three of his own deputies: Elvia Carrillo Puerto, Beatriz Peniche and Raquel Dzib Cicero. With the assassination of Carrillo Puerto, none of his deputies could exercise their functions, as the elections in which they had already triumphed were annulled.

The Feminist Revolutionary Party and the National Block of Revolutionary Women held three National Congresses of Workers and Peasants. Among them the Singular Front of Pro Rights for Women arose, and united 800 feminist groups from across the country, with nearly 50 thousand members, whose objective was to win the right to vote.

In 1934, General Lazaro Cardenas during his presidential campaign announced that he would put “women on the same level of political equality as men”. As president, Cardenas presented the initiative to reform constitutional article 34°, so the citizenship of women would be recognized. There was great resistance from the federal deputies and the local legislators. They continued wielding the arguments afore mentioned, the double vote for married men or the vote for the Church.

With the motive of presidential succession, Cardenas “froze” his own initiative, by considering that the opposition candidate, Juan Andreu Almazan of the National Unification Revolutionary Party, would benefit from the female vote in the elections. Finally, in 1938 the government did not count the votes to approve the constitutional reform of the local legislators and therefore did not award citizenship to women.

The lack of continuity of the Cardenista project in the Avila Camacho government implied the holding up of the women’s situation, whom they wanted to maintain in their homes, away from the avatars of politics that could “corrupt them.”

It was not until 1947, as part of the modernization program, that President Miguel Aleman sent the initiative of addition to article 115° of the Constitution, to award women the right to vote and be voted for in municipal elections. The suffragist organizations had disbanded to transform the PNR

into the PRM, and be incorporated with peasant, worker and popular sectors; as such the municipal vote was awarded as a gift of power.

Finally in 1953, during the government of Adolfo Ruiz Cortines, the federal vote was given to women. In this case to strengthen the position of the PRI facing the Henrriquism, a political movement of the left of center to which the female vote was considered a counterbalance.

At the end of the XX century, on the 14 of November, 1996, an addition to subsection XXII transitory of article 1° of the Federal Code of Institutions and Electoral Procedures (Código Federal de Instituciones y Procedimientos Electorales) was approved, which stated that "national political parties will consider in their statutes that the candidacies of deputies and senators do not exceed 70 percent of the same gender."

In the second half of the XX century and the beginning of this one, women of different parties have demonstrated their ability and leadership. Nevertheless, the parties have denied the equal number of candidates of each gender in favor of popular election. They seek substitutes or candidacies that consider losses beforehand.

Today the female population continues to be sub-represented in the three powers and levels of government. There is only one governor among 32 entities and one Federal District. In the current legislature the number of women has descended in the Senate and in the Supreme Court of National Justice there are only 2 of 11 ministers.

With the triumph of the revolution, the Constitution of 1917 established social rights, however women had to fight for the rights that were awarded to become a reality; that equal work would correspond to equal pay. It was not until 1931 that general minimum wage was established. Nevertheless, today women receive an average salary of 13% less than that of male workers, and even less than 25%.

At the present time women's groups still continue being satanized, being considered as disintegrators of the family. Cases like the femicide in Ciudad Juarez and other cities around the country, the high incidence of interfamily violence, illiteracy and extreme poverty, remain significant in the female population and demonstrate the existence of discrimination against women.

Of all the poor, the women are the poorest, but without the income generated by us, extreme poverty would rise by double.<sup>18</sup> Illiteracy is greater among women, although when they can exercise their right to an education, they obtain better grades.

The time that passed between the participation of women in the Mexican Revolution and recognition of their citizenship was nearly half a century. This is owed to the Mexican revolutionary movement at the beginning of the XX century, when the concept of gender equality had not permeated. In the political system that came out of the revolution patriarchal culture subsisted, of which had a negative effect, not only on the rights of women, but on the development of the country.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> “La fuerza de las mujeres”, por Rodolfo Tuirán, en: *El Universal*, 6 de marzo de 2006, p. 27A.

<sup>19</sup> Ricardo Asuman, *et. al.*, *The Global Gender Gap Report 2006*, Geneva, World Economic Forum, <http://www.weforum.org/pdf/gendergap/report2006.pdf>