
“WORTHY WIVES AND MOTHERS:”

State-Sponsored Women's Organizing in Postrevolutionary Mexico

Jocelyn Olcott

During the mid-1930s, as the postrevolutionary Mexican government embarked on its modernization project, women mobilized for rights ranging from suffrage to religious freedom. In an effort to control and direct women's organizing energies, the regime established a network of official women's leagues, which policymakers hoped would attract women away from both left- and right-wing movements. Although these leagues sought to circumscribe women's activism, they also created an organizing infrastructure that women instrumentalized. This article examines women's leagues as both an explicitly gendered instance of state formation and a historical case study in women's organizing.

On 19 August 1936, twenty thousand agricultural wage laborers walked off the job in the middle of the cotton harvest in Mexico's northern region of the Comarca Lagunera. Entire families abandoned plantations during this critical season and demanded union recognition, plots of land for subsistence cultivation, and improved working conditions. Strikers flew the red and black flags of communist-supported labor unions, and more than forty-five thousand industrial and manufacturing workers signed solidarity pacts, pledging economic support and threatening sympathy strikes with agricultural workers from 154 haciendas.¹

To many *campesinos*, or peasants, the strike and its resolution marked the long-delayed arrival of Mexico's 1910–1917 revolution to the Comarca Lagunera. Much like the revolution, mobilization before the strike and the strike itself were masculinized experiences, marked by frequent, violent outbreaks, while women's participation broadened the strike into a social movement. The scope of the strikers' demands—ranging from wage increases to improved housing—reflected the breadth of participation and mobilization.²

The strike ended on 3 September, after President Lázaro Cárdenas (1934–1940) promised to break up the huge haciendas and distribute them among the fifteen thousand eligible resident laborers. By the time he declared the agrarian reform on 6 October, that number had ballooned to include an additional twenty-five thousand workers, many of them strike-breakers. The reforms replaced plantation-style haciendas with collectivized production governed by agricultural worker committees that

determined the division of labor and monitored the distribution of profits.

The measure resulted not from a commitment to collectivization and socialism but rather from a determination to modernize production systems. The faction that emerged as victors after the revolution—in contrast with rival revolutionary factions—put a premium on modernization as a critical ingredient of Mexico's redemption. In particular, postrevolutionary state builders wanted to replace both plantation and subsistence agricultural production with wage-labor production, using modern agricultural techniques. Cárdenas would add political transparency and social progressivism to the list of modernizing objectives. In 1936, the regime sought to remake the Comarca Lagunera, using the region as a laboratory for modernist ideas, prizing "scientific" reconstruction of societies and strong state intervention.³

The Cárdenas regime's efforts to redefine society in the wake of the 1936 Laguna strike and its dramatic aftermath offer insights into the complex relationships among identities, institutions, and states in shaping social movements. Just as the number of workers affected by the agrarian reform grew, the scope of the reforms expanded to encompass the region's political, social, and economic structures. The Cárdenas regime, having just emerged from Plutarco Elías Calles' ten-year political domination, saw the Laguna reforms as a chance not only to resolve an explosive labor situation but also to begin realizing its broader vision for postrevolutionary Mexico.⁴ Cardenismo blurred the lines between state and civil society, creating a corporatist society neatly organized into sectors represented by recognized entities. This political system highlights a central question about social mobilizations: What is the relationship among identities (race, gender, class, and ethnicity), organizing institutions (political parties, labor unions, churches, and neighborhood groups), and states (government agencies, judiciaries, and legislative bodies)?

Mass mobilization left a legacy of popular organizing and collective notions of citizenship.⁵ Organized groups of women, many of whom had participated in Communist Party (PCM) activities and the struggle for land and labor rights, developed a strong organizing network and a sense of collective entitlement. When Cardenista policymakers stepped into the fray, they created the impression that the federal government—not the PCM or local labor unions—had transformed life in the Comarca Lagunera. Among the most touted of these efforts was the campaign to create *Ligas Femeniles de Lucha Social* (Women's Leagues for Social Struggle). Organized by public schoolteachers and representatives of the federal Agrarian Department, these state-sponsored women's organizations smoothed the path to collectivization and modernized social relations by facilitating govern-

ment campaigns favoring temperance, hygiene, and universal public education. These leagues sought to define the meaning of postrevolutionary womanhood by explicating the goals and norms of these official "revolutionary" women's leagues.

The Cárdenas regime's program of modernizing the Mexican economy relied upon a gendered ideology of production, with a sharpened separation between the feminized realm of reproductive labor and subsistence production and the masculinized realm of wage labor. The *Ligas Femeniles*, as part of the liminal space between state and civil society, constituted part of the public realm through which reproductive labor assumed a publicly recognized role while retaining its feminine cast. However, the Lagunera women did not live in such a neatly parsed world of gendered spheres. Seeing the government's program as an opportunity to gain legitimacy for their demands, women activists appropriated elements of the official organizing agenda, but within the more fluid gender identities that reflected their lived experiences rather than Cardenista policymakers' modernizing imagination. Mobilized under the aegis of the *Ligas Femeniles*, women pushed the regime to accommodate their more complex and pragmatic understanding of gendered meanings.

This article explores the encounter between government agents and women activists within the tripartite context of social unrest in the Comarca Lagunera, a Mexico City-centered women's suffrage movement, and the progressive agenda of the Cárdenas administration. This historical conjuncture set in relief competing gender identities and their complex relationships with existing and emerging organizing structures. During this watershed period of state formation, federal government agents, local authorities, and rank-and-file activists sought to define postrevolutionary gender ideals, offering a spectrum of interpretations of "natural" meanings of masculinity and femininity that might be restored in the postrevolutionary aperture.

Gender and the Politics of State Formation

Women's organizing has received considerable attention from feminist scholars and, more recently, from scholars of "new social movements" drawing on postmodernist and post-structuralist approaches to highlight tension between identity-based organizing and formal institutions. While earlier feminist scholars debated how institutions might better reflect women's interests and modes of activism, new social movements theorists extol a more fluid civil society in which "a multiplicity of social actors establish their presence and spheres of autonomy in a fragmented social and political space. Society itself is largely shaped by the plurality

of these struggles and the vision of those involved in the new social movements."⁶

Understanding the government-sponsored *Ligas Femeniles* requires a selective adaptation of theoretical perspectives and an examination of how women themselves navigated the terrain of identity politics and institution building. Members of the leagues understood their identities in fragmented ways, first and foremost, seeing themselves as mothers or potential mothers.⁷ They linked femininity to performing their reproductive labors and protecting their families and communities. However, they also saw themselves as members of labor unions and villages and, particularly in the wake of the labor struggles of the 1930s, as citizens of a new, revolutionary Mexico. Women simultaneously held identities that some observers saw as contradictory, such as mother and union member. Motherhood, moreover, entailed quite different duties for a working-class woman in Mexico City and a *campesina* in the Comarca Lagunera, making even this most "natural" of identities unstable and contingent.⁸

For both men and women, moreover, the strike and postrevolutionary social changes created an opening to reconstitute gendered identities. Male activists sought to rectify the dissonance between the ideal of the postrevolutionary citizen peasant and the reality of dependence, subjugation, humiliation, and uncertainty that characterized most agricultural laborers' lives. They laid claim to a notion of manly honor based on land ownership, effective political rights, and a sense of dignity that put them above the whims of their employers and control over their households.

Women looked to the postrevolutionary regime to create conditions to fulfill feminine roles of wife and mother. Often struggling to feed and care for their families, *campesinas* sought improved conditions for their reproductive labor, even as they strained against the perceived boundaries between the masculine and feminine realms. While women activists often invoked the gendered language of maternal duty, their conception of motherhood emerged from their own experiences as *campesinas* and as activists. The creation of the *Ligas Femeniles* further blurred the gender boundaries, offering women access to income and decision-making apparatuses.

Government policy makers, however, sought more clearly delineated gender identities. Although many postrevolutionary leaders encouraged women to join the wage labor force, the project of modernization sharpened the divide between the public and private spheres as part of eliminating plantation and subsistence production. The creation of a modern wage labor force would depend upon the concomitant maintenance of a strong reproductive labor force. As historian Mary Kay Vaughan has argued, the Cárdenas regime sought to "modernize patriarchy" in the ser-

vice of national development.⁹ However, the women's leagues also undermined modernized patriarchy and the productive/reproductive divide by promoting women's production cooperatives, access to land and credit, and state-subsidized child care.

Anarchy and Opportunity in the Comarca Lagunera

The near-anarchic climate that prevailed in the Comarca Lagunera in 1936 created an opening for both activists and policymakers. In the mid-nineteenth century, the region was controlled by two families who traced their ancestry to a Spanish marquis. They parceled out land to pay debts and eventually sold out to foreign investors, the largest of which was the American- and British-owned Tlahualilo Land Company. These estates functioned as plantations, relying primarily on immigrant labor from other regions of Mexico to cultivate cotton and wheat. Some families came to work as resident laborers, others harbored dreams of setting up their own farms, and still more arrived as *bonanceros*, or seasonal laborers who came for the cotton harvest "bonanza." This proletarianization of agricultural labor rendered the region an ideal target for both government modernization schemes and PCM organizing efforts.

Geographic factors helped define the relationship between local organizations and the federal government. Straddling the border between the northern states of Coahuila and Durango, the Comarca Lagunera did not have the well-established state-level political machinery that, in other regions, interfered with the federal government's efforts to implement modernization policies. Activists in the region often appealed to federal authorities, arguing that no local or state official could claim authority over a region crossing jurisdictional boundaries. This political setting offered policymakers in Mexico City an unusual opportunity to implement their programs.

The federal government's eagerness to intervene was undeniably important to women activists during this period of intense state building. The Cárdenas administration witnessed the creation of the two most enduring national mass organizations, the Mexican Workers' Confederation (CTM) and National Peasants' Confederation (CNC), and sought to create a similar network of women's organizations. In exchange for their allegiance, the regime offered women legitimacy as political actors and a seat at the corporatist bargaining table. At a time when women had virtually no formal political rights, this trade-off was readily accepted. Official recognition allowed women to call on the federal government to intervene in their defense against arbitrary local authorities.

While women activists often appealed directly to Cárdenas for support, the region's distance from Mexico City made it impossible for the federal government to control the execution of its agenda. The foot soldiers of the Cardenista state-building project—Agrarian Department representatives, public school teachers, and social workers—often reinterpreted federal mandates according to personal experiences and local conditions. Similarly, although PCM leaders in the Mexico City headquarters rallied to the consensus-building Popular Front cause, communists in the Comarca Lagunera lived with the fault lines created by the divisive strike and its resolution. However much PCM organizers might have wanted to build alliances among labor unions, peasant organizations, and lower income professionals, they encountered persistent divisions among anarcho-sindicalist, communist, and socialist organizers competing for legitimacy and clientele.

Agricultural wage labor was primarily men's work, while rural women spent most of their time on reproductive labor. They often supplemented men's wages by growing garden produce for household consumption or for sale at local markets. Women and girls living in or near the city of Torreón often labored in the service and manufacturing sectors, particularly in the textile mills and the incipient garment industry. Women also worked as teachers throughout the region. Only during the summer picking season, when landowners paid workers by weight rather than by day, did women and children join the men in the fields.¹⁰

The Laguna conflict primarily took place among men—male landowners, hacienda managers, agricultural workers, and industrial laborers. While women closely observed these disputes and even participated in them, the battles themselves played out on the masculinized terrain of violent, often armed, confrontations. The municipality of Matamoros, Coahuila, the site of a violent police crackdown on communist demonstrators on 29 June 1930, elected communist Alejandro Adame as municipal president six months later. The PCM newspaper proudly reported that women "participated as magnificent militants in all efforts."¹¹ Matamoros women were no doubt galvanized in part by the fact that Martina Derás, the founder and leader of the town's PCM-supported "Josefa Ortiz de Domínguez" Feminist Union, was among those killed by the police during the 29 June demonstration.¹² Even in cases when women were arrested, they were generally released almost immediately, as if women's violent political protests were juridically unrecognizable. When Torreón police arrested PCM militants Elvira Sosa and Flora E. de Duarte (along with seven children between them) and six men during a demonstration against fascism and imperialism, they appeared confounded about how to deal with them. After four hours, they released the women and children with-

out charging them but fined the six men 50 pesos each, the equivalent of more than a month's wages.¹³

Women's participation in these demonstrations attracted particular attention and unsettled local authorities. A police report describing a 1935 May Day demonstration in Matamoros remarked with alarm regarding communist women and children's participation and singled out the women as shouting "death to" the PNR, the federal government, and Lázaro Cárdenas, and "long live" the Soviet Union.¹⁴

The region's social upheaval in the Comarca Lagunera drew many women into political activism and collective organizing. Through labor unions, teachers unions, temperance leagues, and neighborhood organizations, women activists developed a sense of shared rights, legitimacy gained through appeals to the rule of law, and the power of collective action. In San Pedro, Coahuila, an active center of labor agitation, organized prostitutes protested to the governor of Coahuila that the health inspection requirements had become too costly given their income.¹⁵ Women millers and seamstresses agitated for enforcement of minimum wage laws, accusing the labor board of maintaining contact with factory owners and engaging in "disgusting manipulations" to workers' disadvantage.¹⁶ Several women's garment workers' unions petitioned Cárdenas for sewing machines to establish a cooperative and create jobs.¹⁷

Other women worked with community organizations to improve local conditions. One women's neighborhood association participated in a fierce struggle to defend its neighborhood from an urbanization program.¹⁸ The members of a peasant women's union complained to Cárdenas that their *compañeros* endured endless harassment by municipal authorities, state and federal military agents, and company union members. Inverting traditional gender roles, they demanded physical safety guarantees for their male family members.¹⁹ A local union leader told reporters that women and children were prepared to stage a hunger march protesting the starvation conditions suffered by the striking agricultural workers.²⁰

Women supported striking workers with provisions while struggling to stretch reduced food supplies to meet their families' needs. In a moment of desperation, the PCM-dominated strike committee, assuming the federal government's sympathies, appealed to the Secretary of Government in Mexico City for support. Describing the appalling conditions, the committee requested beans and corn to feed striking workers and asked that Cárdenas intervene to end persecutions against strikers by federal guards. The unidentified functionary receiving the telegram in the Ministry of Government penned a note at the bottom querying, "How do we answer?"²¹ Bureaucrats in Mexico City were saved from having to answer that difficult question. By the time the telegram reached the Ministry of

Government, the strike was on its way to resolution. Union leaders had secured a commitment from Cárdenas to bring the region in line with the federal agrarian code and labor laws. The promise of intervention by the Cardenista regime was enough, given their trying circumstances, to bring most strikers back to work.

Defining Revolutionary Motherhood

In setting up the *Ligas Femeniles*, Cardenista officials sought a national strategy in a two-front battle for Mexican women's hearts and minds. On one side, Catholic and fascist organizations successfully appealed to women through their emphasis on strengthening families.²² These organizations challenged the anticlerical regime and engaged in violent attacks against the government and its employees. During his tenure as governor of the center-west state of Michoacán (1928–1932), Cárdenas had quashed the Cristero rebellion (1926–1929), composed primarily of devout peasants opposing anticlerical policies, that included women's brigades for intelligence gathering, provisioning, and armed combat. He also created women's leagues affiliated with the state's welfare department to attract women away from Catholic organizations.²³ As president, Cárdenas recognized that the federal government must make an effort to gain Catholic women's allegiance. In the mid-1930s, the resurgence of violence against antireligious public education and the establishment of the fascist Sinarquista and Gold Shirts movements contributed to postrevolutionary leaders' unease about these movements and their appeal to women. Although the federal government poured energy and resources into such projects as public education and social work, all its hard-won gains could be unraveled by mothers and wives who distrusted the regime and its programs. While Catholic women's organizing was less successful in the Comarca Lagunera than it had been elsewhere, the fascist Gold Shirts were a persistent concern.²⁴

On the other side, the Cárdenas regime had to contend with the vocal and well-organized center-left movement for women's economic, political, and social rights.²⁵ Although suffragist and communist women had fought each other bitterly during the early 1930s, the 1935 emergence of the Popular Front fostered a unified women's organization, drawing leadership from both the PCM and the ruling National Revolutionary Party (PNR). While Cárdenas supported women's suffrage and maintained friendships with leading communist women, he remained wary of their disruptive potential and made decisions about women's issues within the context of heated national debates about the political and social impacts of women's suffrage.

Commentators expressed concern about feminists' morality and about the unsettling effect that feminism had on traditional gender roles.²⁶ Dubbing the suffragists *marimachos*—"dykes" or tomboys of uncertain sexuality—opponents of the women's rights movement argued that feminists subverted dominant gender ideologies, precipitating social disorder. Furthermore, the feminist movement's reputation for undermining motherhood and traditional familial roles alienated many ordinary Mexican women. The regime would not gain the allegiance of large numbers of Mexican women by co-opting the existing center-left women's organizations. Policymakers needed a program that would appeal to both conservative and progressive women, to Catholics and Communists, and to fascists and feminists. The Comarca Lagunera, where both the PCM and the Gold Shirts were gaining strength, offered a suitable testing ground for the regime's strategy of sponsoring women's leagues to gain women's allegiance.

Building upon a tradition of state-sponsored women's leagues dating back to the Yucatán Socialist Party in 1915, the idea for the *Ligas Femeniles* came from Agrarian Department employees, who reported to Cárdenas in August 1936 that they were organizing women into leagues "to achieve their liberation and improvement" through various temperance, hygiene, and educational campaigns.²⁷ However, the organizing committee initially paid little attention to organizing women in the Comarca Lagunera, concentrating their energies instead in the center-west states where Catholic women persistently resisted the policies of the anticlerical regime.²⁸ Within six months, however, the project of organizing women in the Laguna would completely overshadow the Agrarian Department's efforts in the center-west.

The Agrarian Department's organizing project also addressed national concerns about the mounting suffragist agitation in Mexico City. Government representatives arriving in the region and attempting to appease popular organizations brought with them the ideas and experiences of the metropole. Antonio Luna Arroyo, a Mexico City-born educator and bureaucrat, assumed a connection between women's prominent participation in the Laguna conflict and the feminist organizing occurring in the federal district. In a speech on the "woman question" at a February 1936 convention of peasants' unions in Coahuila's capital city, he urged, "Woman should collaborate with man, and for this purpose she must be educated, naturally without losing her femininity, without destroying her character as a domestic woman [*mujer hogareña*]. She will not be transformed into a mannish voter [*electora marimacho*] but rather will continue being feminine, educated for the new life, for the new humanity."²⁹

Luna Arroyo thus laid out the Cardenista alternative to women's

political rights and foreshadowed the regime's subsequent strategy for state-sponsored women's leagues centered on domestic concerns rather than political matters. He clearly hoped to advance the domestic helpmate ideal over the feminist firebrand. However, Luna Arroyo had imported from Mexico City the dichotomy between the *mujer hogareña* and the *electora marimacho*; these categories did not reflect the contestations over gender identities within the Comarca Lagunera. The *mujer hogareña* was an elusive fiction for nearly all Laguna women, and the militant suffragist, *marimacho* or otherwise, was not a character in the local drama.

At a mid-October speech marking the grant of the first definitive *ejido* (collectively cultivated, state-owned parcel), Agrarian Department chief Gabino Vázquez urged *ejidatarios* (generally male heads of households), to include women. Vázquez ignored the prior activism of PCM women and instead underscored the government's role in fostering the leagues. By effacing women's political activism from his account, and by giving agency in women's organizing to the male *ejidatarios* rather than the women themselves, Vázquez reinscribed patriarchal privilege and control into postrevolutionary gender roles.

His statements underscored several important aspects of the regime's vision for women's role in agrarian reform. Incorrectly situating women outside social struggle, he instructed a group of men to remake women's roles and prevailing notions of femininity, to transform them from sexualized and subjugated "beasts of burden and pleasure" into mothers and modern, revolutionary citizens. Women, however, would "shape a happy home" and "satisfy all your needs," thus retaining the critical aspects of male privilege. In Vázquez's understanding, women should participate in community meetings because of the benefits that they would gain through participation rather than for improvements women's participation might bring to community governance; they would *become* "elements of social struggle" through men's coaxing and government agents' guidance.³⁰

Despite his efforts to obfuscate women's earlier activism, Vázquez's emphasis on organizing women also opened the door for existing women's organizations to make their mark on the Agrarian Department's emerging program. While official accounts portrayed the Cárdenas government heroically stepping in to initiate the Laguna women's movement, women activists' experiences hardly rendered them pliant objects of state policies. Particularly in regions where the PCM had gained a following, women's participation in political conflicts left them with a sense of entitlement to the gains made through the strike. With the impressive restructuring of power through agrarian and political reforms, organized women identified an opportunity to make claims for their gender-specific

interests, seeking to secure rights and services that would enable them to fulfill feminine ideals while also expanding women's opportunities.

Cooperating with Agrarian Department agents, the Communist women's organization founded in 1929 by Martina Derás spearheaded efforts to define women's issues for the agenda of the region-wide reform program. Soon after Vázquez's visit, the organization's officers, seasoned militants Cristina Ibarra and Prisiliana Huereca, wrote to him of their enthusiasm for the slated reforms. However, rather than emphasizing maternal abnegation, as official women's leagues later would, they argued that their overwhelming reproductive labor impeded their "physical and moral well-being."³¹

Although the organization's specific petitions prefigured the program for the Agrarian Department's *Ligas Femeniles*, several demands would remain notably absent from the Agrarian Department's subsequent program. Ibarra and Huereca demanded a reduction in the prices of basic foodstuffs and potable water, the creation of cooperative child care centers to allow them to work with their *compañeros* in the schools, women's vocational training, a library, a collective kitchen and laundry facility, a health clinic, and a special tribunal for women's and children's court cases. In short, they sought to exert control over their own labor to create opportunities for their own improvement and independence.

Conspicuously absent from this list of demands was any mention of formal political rights. Laguna women were undoubtedly aware of the increasingly contentious battle for women's suffrage throughout the country. The PCM promoted women's suffrage, and the PNR had granted women the right to vote in party plebiscites in March 1936. In September 1936, Torreón women participated in the PNR election for the municipal president. By April 1937, suffragists in Mexico City gained international attention by threatening a hunger strike outside the presidential palace. Rather than seeking formal political rights, however, the Laguna women activists employed organization and direct action to secure government services and political influence. This approach reflected the dominant political culture in Cardenista Mexico of securing rights by establishing a group as a recognized and "revolutionary" collective. Having developed a consensus within their organization about the needs of women in their community, Ibarra and Huereca established the league's legitimacy as working women and wives of *campesinos* who always worked within the revolutionary framework. Rather than seeking expanded political rights, they sought access to education, child care, and the rule of law in order to effect social change in a more direct and participatory manner than the ballot box would allow.

The Agrarian Department program to organize the *Ligas Femeniles*

drew heavily on such petitions for inspiration—largely to co-opt existing organizations—but shifted the emphasis to sharpen the divide between productive and reproductive labor and to reassert male privilege. According to official statutes, women's leagues would remain under the control of the all-male *ejidal* commission and the male officers of the Agrarian Department and the National Ejidal Credit Bank. Such regulations came from the Agrarian Department's organizing pamphlet, which included a constitution to be signed by the officers of each new *Liga Femenil de Lucha Social*.³² Its language and structure reiterated paternalist patronage pointing to the "redemptive work of our President Lázaro Cárdenas" and the importance of the "conscious backing of our husbands and heads of family" while endowing women with the trappings of formal citizenship. The membership requirements—that members be 14 years old and "living honestly" in the community—explicitly echoed the constitutional requirements for citizenship and the amendment demanded by the suffragists. This document, written by functionaries from Mexico City, was as much in dialogue with those debating women's suffrage rights as it was with Laguna women seeking social services. The women's leagues would help prepare women for the duties of full citizenship that the government seemed on the brink of granting. Indeed, one early booster of rural women's organizations had touted them as the women's analog to men's obligatory military service, an experience that would inculcate revolutionary values and define feminine citizenship.³³

The Agrarian Department also saw the *Ligas Femeniles* as a productive resource that would facilitate modernization in the Comarca Lagunera. One survey of *ejidos'* material assets included questions about the number of mules, access to water, area of irrigated land, and whether they had a women's league.³⁴ Most responded that they did not yet have a women's league, but several added that they were "already disposed to its organization." During Cárdenas' tour through the region in November 1936, several communities specifically requested support to establish women's leagues, along with petitions for new wells, health clinics, and increased access to credit.³⁵ Cárdenas himself urged that women and youths be "stimulated to become elements of activity and advancement within the communities."³⁶

Although statutes did not ban league members from joining fascist and Catholic organizations, they did require members to ensure that their children regularly attended the public schools opposed by conservative groups. However, to avoid alienating women who would have been attracted to the conservatives' celebration of families and motherhood, the Agrarian Department distinguished the *Ligas Femeniles* from feminist organizations. The leagues neither promoted formal political rights nor ad-

vocated women's interests as distinct from those of their husbands and families. In a radio address delivered in late December 1936, Gabino Vázquez cited the organizing pamphlet's objective of shaping "worthy wives and mothers responsible for the future of their children."³⁷ The leagues charged women with duties ranging from urban planning and planting decorative trees to maintaining "dignity and respectability" of their homes and neighborhoods and ensuring community participation in public health campaigns.³⁸ Such programs as child care centers, women's land grants and vocational schools, and separate courts, all labor-saving priorities for many women's activists, were absent from the Agrarian Department's agenda, even though the Cárdenas regime promoted such programs for working-class Mexico City women. The *Ligas Femeniles* members would be modern yet traditional mothers.

When Cárdenas returned to the Comarca Lagunera after the implementation of land reform measures, he laid out his plan to make the *Ligas Femeniles* models for women's organizing throughout the country.³⁹ In a national address, Cárdenas described Laguna women as "a hope for the future of Mexico" and "exceptionally prepared to fulfill [their] lofty aims in the heart of the family and the collectivity."⁴⁰ In the ten days between Cárdenas' announcement and his departure from the Comarca Lagunera, the Agrarian Department constituted the first sixteen leagues, with a total membership of 1,256 women. The Agrarian Department and the PNR donated sewing machines and corn mills to the new leagues.⁴¹ By 1940, the Agrarian Department would claim 159 leagues with a total membership of over 4,000 women.⁴² All of these leagues pledged their support for the Agrarian Department's organizing program and regulations, and the creation of the *Ligas Femeniles* figured prominently in government propaganda about the Laguna reforms.⁴³

While Agrarian Department organizers viewed the leagues as a vehicle for the government's modernization program, the women who joined saw them as an opportunity to pursue their own ends. Within a month of beginning the organizing campaign, constitutions of new women's leagues and requests for the promised assistance rolled into offices in Mexico City. Women throughout the Comarca Lagunera submitted their registration materials and requested corn mills and sewing machines as well as medical assistance and school improvements. Organized women took to heart Cárdenas' exhortation to act as the *ejidos'* moral conscience, petitioning to close billiard halls and cantinas, where workers wasted "money that would be better spent on buying things that we urgently need and must do without because the money does not go far enough."⁴⁴ The Spanish vice-consul in Torreón wrote to Cárdenas, "the women's leagues and women's land

parcels are, I think, urgently necessary to combat alcoholism."⁴⁵ Temperance efforts often encountered obstacles, however. Women's leagues frequently called on state and federal authorities to intervene in temperance conflicts, earning them the disapprobation of local authorities and, of course, cantina owners. In at least one instance, complaints by the women's league and the *ejidal* committee led to the removal of municipal authorities who flouted temperance regulations.⁴⁶ Even when the women's leagues enjoyed the support of local authorities, they often found that they lacked the power to compel adherence to their temperance aims.

Official women's leagues occasionally ran afoul of Agrarian Department-decreed objectives. For example, women organizing against an urbanization program found themselves opposing measures that *Ligas Femeniles* had pledged to facilitate. They agreed with the plan to clean the neighborhood and straighten the streets, they explained, but opposed displacing residents to widen streets and create new ones, pointing out that most residents rented their homes and would not receive compensation for their eviction.⁴⁷ Thus, organized women found themselves opposing a regime-sponsored modernization program that ran counter to their principal objectives of protecting families living in the neighborhood.

Women's leagues' activities revealed the complicated notions of citizenship that organized women developed, even amid a national campaign for formal suffrage rights. The strike and the political climate cultivated by the Cárdenas regime fostered a conception of citizenship that mingled consensus building and direct democracy with liberal ideals of electoral politics. In rural areas where informal politics regularly trumped ballot-box decisions, women often viewed collective mobilization as the exercise of their citizenship rights. The Cárdenas administration encouraged confusion over women's citizenship status as part of its efforts to engage historically disenfranchised groups. That the *Ligas Femeniles'* standard constitution included statutes and language that pointed to civic republicanism—including explicit rights and responsibilities that echoed liberal formulations in the 1917 Constitution—fostered a belief among many league members that they enjoyed recognized political rights. League officers sent Cárdenas indignant letters that local authorities had denied them "voice and vote" in community decisions.

However, the tools of the leagues were not the mechanisms of formal politics but rather the tactics of collective action. A coalition of six leagues proclaimed that "as an integral part of the Mexican people, we have the full right to enjoy the benefits of the Revolution and have organized to fight for our complete liberation." They went on to issue demands including concrete objectives, such as medical clinics and child care, as well as

more abstract needs, such as "the full support of the government and all public institutions," indicating that such support was lacking. Among their host of demands, however, they did not mention suffrage or any other formal political rights.⁴⁸ Likewise, when Lequeitio's women's league and *ejidal* administration moved to close down billiard halls and beer vendors in the town, they grew impatient with official procedures and dubious about the outcome of a municipal council vote. Several days before the scheduled vote, they closed down the establishments in question by force, rendering the council's vote a rubber stamping of a de facto decision.⁴⁹

The Price of Success

In part because of their efficacy in such matters, women's leagues became an established element of the Agrarian Department's agenda. They proliferated throughout the Comarca Lagunera and spread into the surrounding regions, strengthening their membership through milling and garment-making cooperatives, temperance campaigns, and material improvements in their communities. By late 1937, several regional confederations of women's leagues had developed as well as confederations within municipalities. These aggregations gave the leagues greater collective force, but they also created new layers of authority and bureaucracy that precipitated tensions between local and regional organizers. As the leagues began to exercise control over material resources, power struggles developed within and around them. Women's leagues, much like organized groups of male *ejidatarios*, rivaled one another for official status and the federal government's legitimacy.

Women's leagues often encountered open hostility and opposition, exposing residual hostilities from before and during the strike itself, layered with turf wars that emerged after the agrarian reform.⁵⁰ One women's league wrote to the regional school inspector demanding the deportation of local Spanish merchant Vicente Arteaga.⁵¹ He staunchly opposed the women's league and harassed the local schoolteacher who had organized it. Furthermore, he employed as his henchman a man who "has never believed in the ideals of the revolution, was never a unionized *campesino*, and is not an *ejidatario*." However, he retained the loyalty of many *campesinos* by providing work and lending out his truck. Several women, torn by the loyalties of their husbands, abandoned the women's league. The league's officers reported that its members' husbands were the targets of attacks and "When the league holds its meetings in the schoolhouse, it is the target of vulgar, trash-talking criticisms by its opponents, who stand at the windows and, greatly desiring to provoke us, even throw clods of dirt and lighted cigarettes at us." Arteaga enticed women away from the

league by offering access to his corn mill and merchandise from his store. The league did not explain the origins of Arteaga's hostility, but his attitude most likely resulted from a combination of concerns that the league had violated protocols of class and gender through its organizing activities.

The acquisition and control of corn mills sparked particular controversies within many communities.⁵² These disputes merit some discussion, since they were surprisingly persistent and violent. *Ejidal* regulations granted the official women's leagues exclusive rights to operate the mills and limited competition based on the local population. In order to "encourage women's organizing," competing corn mills could be opened only with permission from the municipal president.⁵³ Thus, the organized women in the *ejidos* controlled one of the communities' most basic services so long as they remained in the good graces of local authorities. The need to retain this support perhaps explains the concurrent decline in temperance petitions, another source of friction between women's leagues and local authorities. Not surprisingly, this newfound power produced countless conflicts over who would control the mills. Cecilia Magallanes, the head of the federation of women's leagues in Francisco I. Madero, wrote to Cárdenas that *ejidatarios*—men within their own communities—had expropriated the mills from some women's leagues and had established competing mills to undermine the cooperatives of others.⁵⁴

The struggle over the corn mills stemmed from a host of symbolic and material factors. Agrarian Department organizers pointed to the grinding stone, or *metate*, on which women ground corn into *masa* for tortillas and other basic foods, as the symbol of pre-modern rural practices and of women's oppression. Accounts celebrating the postrevolutionary regime's role highlighted the donation of corn mills as a critical element of women's liberation. Access to corn mills was among the most popular benefits of the women's leagues in the Comarca Lagunera since they provided women with not only relief from their most arduous domestic chore but also a modest source of income. In other words, the motorized corn mills sat at the intersection of the modernizing priorities of the Agrarian Department and the laborsaving objectives of the women activists. However, they also threatened to undermine patriarchal household authority by providing women more free time, independent income, and a homosocial space to share ideas away from the scrutiny of men.

Confrontations over the corn mills turned bitter and even violent. In one incident, the new officers of a women's league accused their predecessors of refusing to surrender the keys to the mill. The new governing board called a general assembly to install the new officers, but the meeting degenerated into chaos. With no clear authority in the meeting, every-

one spoke at once. Speakers arbitrarily took the floor to make their cases as opponents shouted obscenities from the audience. The new officers grew frustrated and turned to leave the assembly, only to find that armed municipal police blocked the only exit from the meeting hall. Their husbands arrived to demand their release, but several of the women were beaten by police as they fled.⁵⁵

Samuel Azuela, an Agrarian Department engineer, intervened and oversaw a new election. The officers who had earlier claimed victory won the election and took control of the league and its corn mill, as well as the sewing workshop, the consumer cooperative, and offices. According to the new officers, they enjoyed support in the community because their husbands worked the *ejido*, while the husbands of the previous leaders appeared on the census rolls but did not actually work the land. Their husbands, they explained, "practice Cardenismo by working daily in the field." The new officers also applauded the Agrarian Department's enforcement of the rule of law in the league's proceedings, carefully balancing claiming credit for their own initiative and paying homage to the patronage of the postrevolutionary regime. The new officers had won the battle but not the war, however. Months later, when the two factions had still not settled their differences, federal forces intervened to confiscate the league's possessions to prevent further conflicts.⁵⁶

Agrarian Department agents could be as arbitrary as local authorities, however. Azuela soon alienated another league that sought his support. The women of the *Liga Femenil de Lucha Social* "Leona Vicario" had met with particular success in their milling enterprise.⁵⁷ They used the profits from the corn mill to pay off their debt and purchase another mill. They turned a storage house into a meeting hall and established a consumer cooperative, a first aid center, and a sewing workshop. They had divided a portion of the mill's profits among themselves but resolved to pool the rest for future projects or for improving the homes of league members.

Perhaps the success of the league's endeavors made some *ejidatarios* uneasy, or perhaps the women who had not joined the league became envious. Whatever the reasons, *ejidatarios* and town council members descended upon the league's secretary general and confiscated the mill's keys and fuses. The civil judge proclaimed that creating the women's leagues had been an error and pledged to eliminate this one. Beleaguered officers claimed that several men had prevented their wives from joining the league and now wanted to claim control of the mills for the broader community rather than exclusively for the women's league, thus removing an important incentive of league membership. Furthermore, the civil judge turned the league's meeting hall, which also housed their cooperative, into a cantina and billiard hall, a clear affront to the league's temper-

ance and anti-gambling campaign. The league turned to local, state, and federal authorities for support, but to no avail.

Many league projects conformed to the letter but not the domesticating spirit of the Agrarian Department's agenda. In addition to operating the mills, women established garment workshops and sold ready-to-wear clothing at local markets.⁵⁸ Members and officers reinterpreted the stated objective of being "worthy wives and mothers" as a justification to agitate for publicly funded child care centers and maternity clinics. Furthermore, leagues petitioned for land that women could cultivate collectively for the league's benefit—a measure that had not been anticipated in the agrarian reform program.⁵⁹ Instead of confining their efforts to nearby neighbors, they acquired a truck to transport organizers into the region's furthest reaches to organize women and instruct them about their rights to government services.⁶⁰

Although the leagues invoked Cardenismo to explain their activities, Agrarian Department representatives and local authorities did not always support the leagues' efforts, exposing the difficulty of implementing policies devised in faraway Mexico City. Women activists solicited legal code to learn their legal rights and protect themselves from the growing hostility they encountered. A league representing several towns on the Durango side of the Laguna region complained that local officials had prohibited league members from sending their sick to the public hospital run by the Ministry of Health and Welfare. When the league sent a women's delegation to investigate conflicts in the local schools, they were infuriated to find themselves dubbed "country women and ignorant of the issues under consideration."⁶¹ The municipal president of Tlahualilo, Durango, evicted a women's league from its normal meeting place, forcing its members to appeal to Cárdenas to intervene on its behalf.⁶² Another league complained that the Agrarian Department had revoked its water rights, diverting the water to a former hacienda owner, and yet another submitted that the *ejidal* committee "refused to recognize [them] as organized women."⁶³

To be sure, not all women's leagues provoked such a backlash. Many never got off the ground. Emilia Guzmán of Torreón wrote in May 1939 that in the two-and-one-half years the women's leagues had operated in the Comarca Lagunera, many had already ceased to exist in any meaningful way, since teachers organizing the leagues often lacked commitment and raffled off the leagues' possessions when the membership lost interest. Citing one instance in which a temperance officer sold wine on the *ejido*, she observed that the growing number of billiards halls in the region underscored the leagues' inefficacy as guarantors of public morality.

The Cárdenas administration's commitment to allocating resources to women's organizing waned by 1939 with Congress indefinitely deferred women's suffrage and with violent conservative rebellion on the decline. As the need to control women's organizing receded, federal, state, and local authorities reduced their subsidies for women's leagues.⁶⁴ With scarcer resources, the women's leagues strengthened their position by fortifying their confederations, resulting in a more professionalized and bureaucratized organizing force. In August 1939, the Coahuila women's leagues convened to consolidate their efforts and strengthen ties among leagues across the state.⁶⁵ The Comarca Lagunera confederation also held a congress and produced detailed regulations regarding the use of corn mills and garment-making workshops, indicating that they had grown large enough and widespread enough to require more explicit regulations.⁶⁶

The Laguna confederation became a battleground for the broader conflict over the nature and direction of popular organizing. PCM fellow travelers initiated the confederation and controlled it in early 1940. The confederation published a newsletter entitled *8th of March: An Organizing Newsletter*, which carried poems and articles proclaiming the virtues of labor union organizing and peasant land ownership.⁶⁷ The confederation emphasized women's access to land, credit, education, and health care; the enforcement of the women's leagues' exclusive control over the corn mills; and the provision of sewing machines, kitchen equipment, and spaces to establish cooperatives.⁶⁸ Organized women sought improvements in working and living conditions analogous to those men had gained after the 1936 strike. While the rhetoric of maternal duty remained, the group emphasized labor conditions.

However, a dissenting group of non-communist women's leagues wrote to Cárdenas complaining that they had been denied the floor at both the state and regional congresses in 1939. Amid widespread tension about whether the CTM could continue to organize agricultural workers in the wake of the creation of the CNC, the dissenters demanded the ouster of CTM organizers. They wanted *campesinas* to administer the confederation and its member leagues, their cooperatives, and their corn mills. "Because we are certain," they explained, "that [the CTM organizers] have never felt the sufferings of the peasant woman, and thus we consider them incapable of reorganizing the peasant woman. For this reason, we ask [Cárdenas] to order these women to dedicate themselves exclusively to organizing working women in the city and not to mislead the peasant woman with false promises."⁶⁹ Other women's leagues switched their affiliation from the CTM to the more moderate League of Agrarian Communities.⁷⁰ One league charged that CTM leaders had expelled their hus-

bands "for not agreeing with their communist ideas" and that the leaders of the confederation of women's leagues had assaulted them for demanding justice for rural women.⁷¹ These attacks, and ensuing efforts by anti-communists to install competing women's leagues in the *ejidos*, precipitated hostility from existing leagues, many of which hoped to stand apart from the ideological fray.

Conclusions

The *Ligas Femeniles* defined the idiom of women's organizing both in the Comarca Lagunera and elsewhere. The Cárdenas regime's policy of withholding support—financial, moral, or logistical—from organizations that did not bear its imprimatur sent a clear message about the trade-off between allegiance and state support. By the end of Cárdenas' administration, women had come to view the *Ligas Femeniles* as the most promising means of pursuing their aims. However, the Cárdenas administration's success in winning nominal allegiance did not translate into women's wholehearted endorsement of its policies. The growing national women's suffrage movement and the mobilization leading up to the strike imbued Laguna women with notions of "revolutionary citizenship" that drew upon both the liberal political tradition and the regional experience with direct democracy. They expected "voice and vote" in local decision making and employed direct action when other means failed. The expectation cultivated by the Cárdenas regime that the federal government supported popular mobilizations and progressive aims led women activists in the Comarca Lagunera to pursue objectives that fell outside of the program prescribed by the Cárdenas government and instead reflected their own understanding of revolutionary femininity.

Although such goals as land reform benefits for organized women and publicly funded child care reflected women's experiences and priorities, they ran counter to regime objectives of modernizing production by sharpening the divide between public and private spaces, between productive and reproductive labor. The Agrarian Department and the ruling party attempted to foster a revolutionary femininity that centered on domesticity and support for public education, hygiene, and public health government programs. However, the experience of the women who organized for and participated in the labor mobilizations led them to interpret the regime's exhortation to organize as a call to pursue their own aims and interests. The enduring strength of the PCM in the region allowed both party members and fellow travelers to maintain a critical distance from the regime's agenda.

The legacy of the strikes, the strength of the PCM, and the prevailing

concept of participatory citizenship often led organized women to test the limits of Cardenista policies and *ejidatarios'* tolerance. Women who had endured arrests and beatings at the hands of local and federal authorities as well as of rival factions within their *ejidos* had steeled themselves and been given a real stake in the project and goals of organizing. To be sure, these women were hardly above factional disputes and petty politics. The PCM ignored alternative visions, and its organizing strength marginalized dissenting voices. However, PCM women activists articulated a vision of social change that neither endorsed the ruling party's program nor parroted the aims of male *ejidatarios*. Rather, they envisioned a society in which women had access to income through their own cooperatives and collectively cultivated land, in which subsidized child care assisted women who performed wage labor in fields or factories, and in which women's domestic labor assumed the status of agricultural and industrial production.

The Manuel Avila Camacho presidency (1940–1946) brought the near elimination of government support—both moral and financial—for the women's leagues and the Laguna project more generally.⁷² While still committed to modernization, the Avila Camacho administration was less inclined than its predecessor to promote the interests of marginalized groups. Women's leagues lodged complaints that parcels of land, corn mills, and sewing machines were being taken away. One league with strong ties to the PCM struggled for at least five years to maintain control of the vineyard it had cultivated.⁷³ The two strongest confederations of women's leagues in the Comarca Lagunera endured at least into the 1950s.⁷⁴ While these confederations had been fraught with conflict and dissent during the latter years of the Cárdenas administration, the discord perhaps rendered them stronger, forcing them to engage with their constituencies and organize more effectively. As a result, the Comarca Lagunera had the most elaborate network of women's leagues in Mexico, and those leagues remained explicitly engaged with local issues.

The strength and endurance of the Laguna leagues underscore the importance of organizing structures grounded in local struggles. Where the Agrarian Department had stepped in and tried to create women's leagues from scratch, the leagues often floundered and eventually disappeared. The *Ligas Femeniles* had the most lasting impact where they built upon the framework of communist and labor union organizing structures. The leagues also appealed to women's identities as mothers and wives, creating opportunities to conform to a feminine ideal of maternal self-sacrifice and spousal solidarity that reflected local experience.

In the Comarca Lagunera, with its experiences of contestation and conflict, identities remained fragmented and fluid. Women who joined the *Ligas Femeniles* pursued a revolutionary womanhood linked to family

duties and commanded support and respect for reproductive labor. Still, the distinction that the Cárdenas regime drew between masculinized wage labor and feminized reproductive labor did not hold where both men and women moved between the realms of production and subsistence. Although the Agrarian Department's gender ideology may have offered a poor fit for Laguna women, activists accomplished their objectives by often ignoring the Agrarian Department's prescriptions while exploiting its opportunities. Motivated by the desire to define the terms of women's organizing, the regime created an organizing structure and recognized idiom through which many women achieved lasting and tangible benefits of the revolution.

NOTES

¹*El Universal*, 19 August 1936, 1; Liga de Agrónomos Socialistas, *El colectivismo agrario en México: la Comarca Lagunera* (Mexico: Industrial Gráfica, 1940); Alfonso Porfirio Hernández, *¿La explotación colectiva en la Comarca Lagunera es un fracaso?* (Mexico: B. Costa-Amic Editores, 1975); and Barry Carr, *Marxism and Communism in Twentieth-Century Mexico* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1992).

²State Department Decimal File, Record Group (RG) 59, docs. 812.00/30334, 812.00 Coahuila/231, 812.00/30358, and 812.00 Coahuila/237, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, D.C., (hereafter NARA).

³For a helpful analysis of state building during periods of "high modernism," see James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed*, (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1998).

⁴See Alan Knight, "Cardenismo: Juggernaut or Jalopy?" *Journal of Latin American Studies* 26, no. 2 (1994): 73–107.

⁵William V. Flores and Rina Benmayor, eds., *Latino Cultural Citizenship: Claiming Identity, Space, and Rights* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1997).

⁶Arturo Escobar and Sonia E. Alvarez, *The Making of Social Movements in Latin America: Identity, Strategy, and Democracy* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1992), 3. See also Joe Foweraker and Ann L. Craig, eds., *Popular Movements and Political Change in Mexico* (Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner, 1990); and Sonia E. Alvarez, Evelina Dagnino, and Arturo Escobar, *Cultures of Politics, Politics of Cultures: Re-visioning Latin American Social Movements* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1998). On Mexican women, see Alejandra Massolo, ed., *Mujeres y ciudades: participación social, vivienda y vida cotidiana* (Mexico City: El Colegio de México, 1992), and Alejandra Massolo, *Los medios y los modos: participación política y acción colectiva de las mujeres* (Mexico City: El Colegio de México, 1994).

⁷Temma Kaplan, *Crazy for Democracy: Women's Grassroots Movements* (New York: Routledge, 1996); and Seth Koven and Sonya Michel, eds., *Mothers of*

a New World: Maternalist Politics and the Origins of Welfare States (New York: Routledge, 1993).

⁸Judith Butler, "Contingent Foundations: Feminism and the Question of 'Postmodernism'," in *Feminists Theorize the Political*, ed. Judith Butler and Joan Scott (New York: Routledge, 1992).

⁹Mary Kay Vaughan, "Modernizing Patriarchy: State Policies, Rural Households, and Women in Mexico, 1930–1940," in *Hidden Histories of Gender and the State in Latin America*, ed. Elizabeth Dore and Maxine Molyneux (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2000), 194–214.

¹⁰Liga de Agrónomos Socialistas, *Colectivismo agrario*, 38.

¹¹*El Machete*, 20 December 1930, 3.

¹²Hernández, *¿La explotación colectiva . . . ?* 72–6; Dirección General del Gobierno (hereafter DGG), Archivo General de la Nación (hereafter AGN), Mexico City, Mexico, 2.312 (3) 28, box 2, file 12; and NARA, RG 59, 812.00 Coahuila/166.

¹³AGN, Ramo Presidentes (RP), Grupo Lázaro Cárdenas del Río, file 542.2/289. (hereafter LCR).

¹⁴AGN, DGG, 2.331.8(3), vol. 16-A, file 34.

¹⁵Instituto Estatal de Documentación de Coahuila (IEDC), Saltillo, Coahuila, Mexico, 1935, Box 3.2.45, folder 36, file 2-19.

¹⁶AGN, RP, LCR, file 432.1/91 and AGN, DGG, 2.331.8(3)12166, vol. 17-A, file 27.

¹⁷AGN, RP, LCR, file 136.3/455.

¹⁸AGN, RP, LCR, file 437/131 and AGN, DGG, 2.331.8(3)7748, vol. 17-A, file 18.

¹⁹AGN, RP, LCR, file 432.3/178.

²⁰*El Universal*, 25 August 1936, 1.

²¹AGN, DGG, 2.331.8(3)10838, vol. 17-A, file 20.

²²On Catholic women's organizing, see Kristina Boylan, "Mexican Catholic Women's Activism, 1929–1940" (Ph.D. diss., St. Cross College, Oxford University, 2001); and Patience Schell, "Teaching the Children of the Revolution: Church and State Education in Mexico City, 1917–1926" (Ph.D. diss., St. Antony's College, Oxford University, 1998). On fascists, see John Sherman, *The Mexican Right: The End of Revolutionary Reform, 1929–1940* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 1997).

²³Archivo del Congreso del Estado de Michoacán, Morelia, Michoacán, Mexico, Legis. XLII, Decrees 16 September 1928–16 September 1930, Box 5, file 3.

²⁴Archivo de la Unión Católica Femenina Mexicana, Archivo Histórico de la Universidad Iberoamericana, Mexico City, Mexico, Box 7, folder 38.

²⁵ Anna Macías, *Against All Odds: The Feminist Movement in Mexico to 1940* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1982); Gabriela Cano, "Una ciudadanía igualitaria: El presidente Lázaro Cárdenas y el sufragio femenino," *Desdeldiez*, (December 1995), 69–116; and Esperanza Tuñón Pablos, *Mujeres que se organizan: El Frente Unico Pro Derechos de la Mujer, 1935–1938* (Mexico City: Grupo Editorial Miguel Angel Porrúa, 1992).

²⁶Pablo de Góngora, "Mujeres nuevas y moral difícil," *El Universal*, 5 November 1937, 3.

²⁷AGN, RP, LCR, file 606.3/158.

²⁸Marjorie Becker, *Setting the Virgin on Fire: Lázaro Cárdenas, Michoacán Campesinos, and the Redemption of the Mexican Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).

²⁹Antonio Luna Arroyo, *La mujer mexicana en la lucha social* (Mexico City: Partido Nacional Revolucionario, Biblioteca de Cultura Social y Política, June 1936), 17.

³⁰"Discurso pronunciado por el Sr. Lic. Gabino Vázquez" in Gabino Vázquez, *La resolución del problema agrario en la Comarca Lagunera* (Mexico: n.p., 1937), 37–38.

³¹AGN, RP, LCR, file 151.3/1334.

³²*Las Ligas Femeniles en la Laguna* (Torreón, Mexico: Siglo de Torreón, December 1936).

³³See Jovita Boone, "Ejército de la Mujer Campesina," 21 November 1931, Archivos Económicos, Biblioteca Miguel Lerdo de Tejada, Mexico City, Mexico, file Voto Femenino.

³⁴AGN, RP, LCR, exp. 404.1/706-1.

³⁵AGN, RP, LCR, exp. 404.1/706.

³⁶"Mensaje a la nación del Presidente de la República, Torreón, Coah., 30 de noviembre de 1936," in *Palabras y documentos públicos de Lázaro Cárdenas*, vol. 1 (Mexico City: Siglo Veintiuno Editores, 1978), 230.

³⁷Vázquez, *La resolución*, 18.

³⁸*Las Ligas Femeniles en la Laguna*.

³⁹*Palabras y documentos públicos de Lázaro Cárdenas*, vol. 1 (Mexico City: Siglo Veintiuno Editores, 1978), 233–34.

⁴⁰*Ibid.*, 232.

⁴¹*Las Ligas Femeniles en la Laguna*, 61–65.

⁴²Clarence Senior, *Democracy Comes to a Cotton Kingdom: The Story of Mexico's La Laguna* (Mexico City: Centro de Estudios Pedagógicos e Hispanoamericanos, 1940), 65.

⁴³*El ejido en la Comarca Lagunera*; Gilberto Flores Muñoz, *Revolución versus imperialismo (en la Comarca Lagunera)* (Mexico City: S. Turanzas del Valle, December 1936); and *La resolución del problema agrario en la Comarca Lagunera*.

⁴⁴IEDC, 1937, Box 3.2.48, folder 24, file 2-20-9.

⁴⁵AGN, RP, LCR, file 404.1/706-1.

⁴⁶IEDC, 1937, Box 3.2.48, folder 24, file 2-20-9.

⁴⁷AGN, DGG, 2.331.8(3)7748, vol. 17-A, file 18.

⁴⁸AGN, RP, FLC, file 151.3/1132.

⁴⁹IEDC, 1937, Box 3.2.48, folder 24, file 2-20-9.

⁵⁰Senior, *Democracy Comes to a Cotton Kingdom*, and Clarence Senior, *¡Despertar Lagunero! : libro que relata la lucha y triunfo de la revolución en la Comarca Lagunera* (Mexico: Sindicato y el Consejo Técnico de los Trabajadores de los Talleres Gráficos de la Nación, September 1937).

⁵¹IEDC, 1937, Box 3.2.48, folder 24, file 2-20-9, 1939, Box 3.2.48, folder 22, file 2-20-9. Article 33 of the 1917 Constitution allows for the deportation of any foreigner in violation of federal laws.

⁵²Arnold Bauer, "Millers and Grinders: Technology and Household Economy in Meso-America," *Agricultural History*, 61, no. 1 (1990): 1-17; and Dawn Keremitsis, "Del metate al molino: la mujer mexicana de 1910 a 1940," *Historia Mexicana*, 130, no. 2 (1983): 285-302.

⁵³Instituto Municipal de Documentación de Torreón (IMDT), Torreón, Coahuila, Mexico, 2.1.5.8, Box 3, folder 20.

⁵⁴AGN, RP, LCR, file 604.11/122.

⁵⁵AGN, RP, LCR, file 437.1/641.

⁵⁶AGN, RP, LCR, file 404.1/2326.

⁵⁷AGN, RP, LCR, files 604.11/125 and 604.11/154.

⁵⁸IEDC, 1938, Box 3.2.46, folder 40, file 3-14.

⁵⁹AGN, RP, LCR, file 151.3/1132.

⁶⁰AGN, RP, LCR, files 151.3/1130, 565.4/2005, and 604.11/12.

⁶¹AGN, RP, LCR, file 151.3/1130.

⁶²AGN, RP, LCR, files 437.1/829 and 562.4/486.

⁶³AGN, DGG, 2.331.9(7)/1, Box 58-A, file 100 and AGN, RP, LCR, files 437.1/829 and 404.2/501.

⁶⁴IMDT, 2.1.5.8, Box 9, folder 10.

⁶⁵AGN, DGG, 2.331.8(3) 40559, Box 18-A, file 1.

⁶⁶AGN, RP, LCR, files 604.11/12 and 437.1/641.

⁶⁷AGN, RP, LCR, file 437.1/641.

⁶⁸AGN, RP, LCR, file 604.11/12.

⁶⁹*Ibid.*

⁷⁰The pro-communist CTM and the anti-communist League of Agrarian Communities had been at odds during the 1935–1936 labor unrest. PCM women's leagues affiliated with the CTM in 1936, when all PCM unions became part of the CTM. Despite having been restructured under the auspices the Agrarian Department, many of the *Ligas Femeniles* retained their affiliations with the CTM.

⁷¹AGN, RP, LCR, file 432.3/217.

⁷²AGN, RP, LCR, files 568.3/45 and 565.4/53.

⁷³AGN, RP, LCR, file 404.1/984.

⁷⁴AGN, DGG, 2.331.9(7)21, Box 59-A, file 12 and AGN, RP, LCR, vol. 2.331.5 (3–34)/1, Box 12-A, file 7.