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BENJAMIN T. SMITH

The Paradoxes of the Public Sphere: Journalism, Gender, and Corruption in Mexico, 1940-1970

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<Abstract>Abstract

This article examines the way in which conceptions of gender and the public sphere affected Mexican print journalism in the period 1940 to 1970. Though the Mexican Revolution (1910-1920) opened up some spaces for female journalists to write about politics, the expansion of industrial press operations in the immediate post-revolutionary period once again cut back opportunities. After 1940, women were generally relegated to writing about household affairs and society news. But, gendered ideas of what could and could not be written also had profound effects on the nature of mid-century journalism. On the one hand, the perceived link between femininity and the discussion of private spaces vaccinated against the exploration of corruption in the public sphere. On the other hand, in order to breach these regulations both male and female journalists often adopted and subverted women's voices or their traditional discursive spaces.

For two years, the print shop owner, Aristarco Montiel, ran the small town of Apizaco's combative weekly, *Don Roque*. Over the period, the newspaper shifted from a chronicle of local events to a critical space for public complaints over political corruption, commercial exploitation, and even state-backed murder. Many of *Don Roque's* readers were women; they filled the letters pages with their complaints; and they drove Montiel's exposés of price manipulations, taxi drivers' catcalls, and the trafficking of young women. In August 1946, Montiel claimed his paper was the "forum of the people... the clamor of a people in need of maize and food with a thirst for justice and teaching."¹ Such popular critical reporting eventually brought reprisals. On February 5, 1947 eight thugs bundled Montiel into the back of a waiting truck. They held a gun to his head and forced him to down a bottle of cheap liquor. They then

¹ *Don Roque*, Aug. 25 1946; *Don Roque*, Aug. 4 1946; *Don Roque*, May 12, 1946.

dressed him in women's clothes, shoved him out of the van, and abandoned him on the edge of Apizaco's main square. Here, he was immediately arrested by the local chief of police. The following morning, the local authorities assembled a large crowd outside the police station and let Montiel go. As he staggered out, terrified, bleary eyed and still robed in a woman's dress, the people of Apizaco shouted a "torrent of insults."²

From the 1940s onwards, the readership of newspapers and magazines in Mexico rose rapidly. Print publications became the key mediators between the state and society. Newly literate women as well as men now read the press. Yet, as the example above suggests, print journalism was still understood to be a distinctly male space, with its own set of guidelines. Montiel's brand of muckraking—which named names, exposed the links between officials and illegal industries, and engaged women in political revelations—overstepped the bounds of accepted practice. The local governor, who wrote to the president to deny involvement in the scandal, argued that Montiel was not a journalist, but a gossip whose acts were more befitting of a woman than a man. Montiel's cross-dressing (which the governor claimed was voluntary) simply made such tendencies explicit.³ Few acts of censorship revealed the connection between gender and print culture as openly as Montiel's forced humiliation. As this article makes clear, expectations over gender roles shaped Mexico's public sphere throughout the post-war period. They structured the division of labor in the newsroom, shaped the culture of mid-century journalists, and stunted the writing of political journalism. But, these rules were there to be

² Archivo General de la Nación (AGN), Presidentes Miguel Alemán Valdés (MAV), 542.1/112, Aurelio G. Hernández to President Alemán, Feb. 7 1947; Rafael Silva to Rogelio de la Selva, Feb. 10, 1947; *La Prensa*, Feb. 7 1947.

³ AGN, MAV, 542.1/112, Rafael Silva to Rogelio de la Selva, Feb. 10, 1947.

subverted and both men and women manipulated and disrupted these expectations in order to challenge officials and the state.

Since the 1980s, European and U.S. social theorists, media specialists, and historians have adopted and adapted Jürgen Habermas' ideas on the public sphere to describe the links between journalism and politics.⁴ Feminist historians and theorists have made one of the most fruitful critiques of the theory. They have claimed that the Enlightenment's public sphere did not simply leave out women (as Habermas acknowledged), but was explicitly constructed upon the exclusion of women.⁵ As Jane Landes argued, for example, by valorizing an austere style of public discourse, the bourgeois public sphere of post-revolutionary France was established in deliberate opposition to the more female friendly tradition of the intellectual salon, which was now deemed frivolous, effeminate and aristocratic.⁶ Recently, the linguistic anthropologist, Susan Gal has gone even further, arguing that the gendered construction of both the public and private spheres do not simply denote "places, domains, spheres of activity... types of interaction" or "descriptions of the social world." The "semiotics of the public/private distinction" also acted as "tools for arguments about and in that world."⁷ Or in simple terms, conceptions of what was private and what was public were not only built upon gendered

⁴ Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere, An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, (Cambridge, 1991).

⁵ Jürgen Habermas, "Further Reflections on the Public Sphere," in Craig Calhoun, (ed.), *Habermas and the Public Sphere* (Cambridge, 1999), 421-62.

⁶ Joan Landes, *Women and the Public Sphere in the Age of the French Revolution* (Ithaca, 1988); Mary Ryan, *Women in Public: Between Banners and Ballots, 1825-1880* (Baltimore, 1990); Dena Goodman, "Public Sphere and Private Life: Toward a Synthesis of Current Historiographical Approaches to the Old Regime," *History and Theory* 31.1 (1992): 1-20; Nancy Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy," *Social Text*, 25/26 (1990): 56-80.

⁷ Susan Gal "A Semiotics of the Public/Private Distinction." *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 13.1 (2002): 77-95, 79, 80. I would like to thank Paul Eiss for introducing me to this excellent work.

understandings of the world, but also provided a dynamic language with which people discussed the boundaries of what was deemed politics.

Building upon such insights, this article argues the following. During the nineteenth century, Mexican elites established the margins between acceptable and unacceptable public speech. The former was linked to masculine honor and to be done in the public sphere; the latter was termed gossip, was connected to female shame, and to be exercised in private. During the early twentieth century, some writers challenged these norms. But, they did not go away. In fact, during the 1940s they returned with greater force. The reasons were twofold. First, the market for newspapers rose dramatically. By the following decade, most Mexicans, including women, read the press. Second, Mexican newspaper production went through a process of industrialization. This not only involved the mass production of the printed word but also a more inflexible division of labor. Traditional prejudices, new markets, and novel organizational structures combined to engrave existing gender divisions with greater force. The most obvious effect was in the workplace. In Mexican newsrooms of the mid-century, men produced the serious political and crime news—the elements of the public sphere. Women were relegated to writing about the private realm in the society and domestic pages.

Yet the effects of such a division also went further, shaping the boundaries of news and politics. On one level, by denigrating the private sphere as female and non-political, such ideas militated against the revelation of corruption. At another level, the subversion of these same ideas could also lead to exposure and revelation. Sometimes, male journalists co-opted female pseudonyms or spaces to critique official graft. At other times women used acceptable spaces for female writing to write about politics. In both cases, state authorities suppressed such

infringements, often publicly using these crackdowns in order to restate the rules of the public sphere.

By examining the gendered construction of the public sphere, this article intersects with, brings together, and critiques three distinct historiographies. The first is the growing amount of work on journalism and censorship in post-revolutionary Mexico. As scholars have demonstrated, shared ideologies, an increasingly muscular official publicity machine, and a variety of financial incentives curtailed free expression in mid-twentieth century Mexico.⁸ Yet so did gendered conceptions of the division between public and private spheres. For many Mexican journalists, writing about political corruption was not only commercially dangerous; it was also unmanly. The second is the literature on patriarchy and the domestic realm. As many historians have argued, post-revolutionary elites embraced what Mary Kay Vaughan has termed “the modernization of patriarchy” that encouraged women to be the educators and caretakers of a new generation of disciplined, healthy, and productive workers.⁹ Yet, particularly from the 1940s onwards, ideas about gender also had other coterminous effects, shaping the public sphere and

⁸ Paul Gillingham, Michael Lettieri, Benjamin T. Smith, (eds.), *Journalism, Satire and Censorship in Modern Mexico* (Albuquerque, forthcoming 2018); Arno Vicente Burkholder de la Rosa, “La Red de los Espejos. Una Historia del Diario *Excelsior* (1916-1976)” Unpubl. Ph.D diss., Instituto Mora, 2007; Rafael Rodríguez Castañeda, *Prensa Vendida: Los Periodistas y los Presidentes, 40 Años de Relaciones*. (Mexico City, 1993); Carlos Moncada, *Del México Violento, Periodistas Asasinados*. (Mexico City, 1991); Carlos Monsivaís, *A Ustedes les Consta: Antología de la Crónica en México* (Mexico City, 1980); John Mraz, *Looking for Mexico: Modern Visual Culture and National Identity* (Durham, 2009); Stephen R. Niblo, *Mexico in the 1940s, Modernity, Politics and Corruption* (Wilmington, 1999), 311-61; José Luis Ortiz Garza, *México en Guerra, La Historia Secreta de los Negocios entre Empresarios Mexicanos de la Comunicación, los Nazis, y EUA* (Mexico City, 1989); Jacinto Rodríguez Munguía, *La Otra Guerra Secreta: Los Archivos Prohibidos de la Prensa y el Poder* (Mexico City, 2007); Julio Scherer García, *La Terca Memoria* (Mexico City, 2007); Julio Scherer Garcia and Carlos Monsivaís, *Tiempo de Saber, Prensa y Poder en México* (Mexico City, 2003).

⁹ Mary Kay Vaughan, “Modernising Patriarchy: State Policies, Rural Households, and Women in Mexico” in Elizabeth Dore and Maxine Molyneux, *Hidden Histories of Gender and State in Latin America* (Durham, 2000); Stephanie Smith, *Gender and the Mexican Revolution: Yucatán Women and the Realities of Patriarchy* (Chapel Hill: 2009); Susan Gauss, “Masculine Bonds and Modern Mothers: The Rationalization of Gender in the Textile Industry in Puebla, 1940-1952,” *International Labor and Working-Class History* 63 (October 2002): 63-80; C.M. Jiménez, “Popular Organizing for Public Services: Residents Modernize Morelia, Mexico, 1880-1920,” *Journal of Urban History*, 30.4. (2004): 495-518.

the practice of politics. The third is the growing historiography of Mexico under the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI). For decades, historians and political scientists have debated the shifting balance of co-optation, coercion, and corruption that sustained the one-party dominant state.¹⁰ No doubt, large, demonstrable projections of power played a crucial role in cementing the regime's control. But, so were subtler, diffuse, everyday understandings of power, which divided the public and private spheres between the genders. It was these that imbricated and distorted the rules of the political game.

Gender, the Newsroom, and Journalist Culture in Mid-Century Mexico

Gender structured the division of labor and shaped the culture of mid-century Mexico's newspapers. Such differences had their roots in the nineteenth century, when acceptable public speech was intimately connected to masculine ideas of honor. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, women writers challenged these norms. But, two changes dampened and eventually suppressed such shifts. First, the Mexican newspaper industry grew exponentially. Increasing readership affected both sexes; by the middle of the twentieth century, women as well as men were keen readers of national and provincial dailies. Second, newspaper production became increasingly industrialized. This introduced and embedded a division of labor into the newsrooms based on these traditional gender norms. As a result, by the 1940s, gender roles still structured the profession of Mexican journalism. Men still dominated the "serious" sections of the broadsheets and tabloids, monopolizing news reporting, political columns, editorials, and the crime pages. Women were relegated to running the society pages. Crossing over from one to the other was a tough proposition and rarely achieved. Here, gender differences

¹⁰ For an introduction to these debates Benjamin T. Smith and Paul Gillingham, "Introduction: The Paradoxes of Revolution" in Benjamin T. Smith and Paul Gillingham (eds.), *Dictalanda: Politics, Work, and Culture in Mexico, 1938-1968* (Durham, 2014), 1-44.

were still reflected in the everyday language of Mexico's reporters. Furthermore, they were also cemented in the out-of-work culture of Mexican journalists, which took place in defiantly male spaces like the bar, the cantina, and the brothel and normally revolved around the male practice of heavy drinking.

The gendered division of labor in Mexico's newsrooms went back to the nineteenth century. During the 1860s and 1870s, intellectuals increasingly linked public speech and particularly newspaper journalism to masculine idea of honor. Honor gave the man of letters the right to speak in public on behalf of the public good; honor implicitly undergirded and gave weight to his words; and honor excluded the vast mass of the population from entering into such public debate.¹¹ As late as 1909, the Mexican positivist Horacio Barreda published a series of articles in which he argued that women could not have the same rights as men because any participation in the public sphere destroyed their femininity.¹² Women and political journalism simply did not mix.

During the same period, intellectuals not only established the boundaries of acceptable public discourse, but also set out the rules of its antithesis—gossip.¹³ Gossip directly inverted the processes of the public sphere. Whereas acceptable public discourse made private honor public, gossip publicized its inverse—private shame. Whereas acceptable public discourse demonstrated *libertad* (or freedom), gossip overstepped this freedom and drifted into *libertinaje* (or

¹¹ Pablo Piccato, *The Tyranny of Opinion, Honor in the Construction of the Mexican Public Sphere* (Durham, 2010).

¹² Nancy LaGreca, *Rewriting Womanhood, Feminism, Subjectivity, and the Angel of the House in the Latin American Novel, 1887-1903* (University Park, 2009), 45-9; Cristina Devereaux Ramírez, *Occupying our space: the mestiza rhetorics of Mexican women journalists and activists, 1875-1942* (Tucson, 2015), 3-32; For similar opinions expressed by the father of positivism, Auguste Comte, see Landes, *Women*, 170-89.

¹³ For a similar process see Sarah C. Chambers, *From Subjects to Citizens: Honor, Gender and Politics in Arequipa, Peru, 1780-1854*, (University Park, 1999) 92.

licentiousness) by delving into the private sphere.¹⁴ And while acceptable public discourse was deemed uniquely masculine, gossip was held to be an intrinsically female trait.¹⁵ Such a conception had long roots and was embedded in one of the Spanish words for gossip—*comadreo*—which came from the term *comadre* or godmother. By the end of the nineteenth century, gossip and femininity were so closely linked that writers started to employ pseudo-scientific explanations for the phenomenon—a sure sign of positivist opprobrium. One author declared that women were particularly susceptible to gossip because it “excite[d] neurosis and exercise[d] a seductive influence over the weak mind.”¹⁶

During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, gender norms shifted.¹⁷ These changes, in turn, affected women’s relationship to the public sphere. Some female journalists challenged the traditional boundaries of female journalism, starting their own newspapers, writing overtly about politics, and asserting their presence outside what Christina Devereaux terms the traditional female *puesto* (place or sphere) of the home.¹⁸ Between 1910 and 1920, they formed “the other *soldaderas*,” writing in support of the Mexican revolutionary armies and, in so

¹⁴ *El Contemporaneo*, Feb. 3, 1908.

¹⁵ For examples of the assertion see *El Tiempo*, Feb. 26, 1888; *La Familia*, 1 Jan. 1885; *El Despertador*, Feb. 19, 1896.

¹⁶ *Periódico Oficial del Estado de Campeche*, Oct. 11, 1895.

¹⁷ For a good overview see Mary Kay Vaughan, Gabriela Cano, Jocelyn Olcott (eds.), *Sex in Revolution: Gender, Politics, and Power in Modern Mexico* (Durham, 2006); Stephanie Mitchell and Patience Schell (eds.), *The Women's Revolution in Mexico, 1910-1953* (Lanham, 2007).

¹⁸ Devereaux Ramírez, *Occupying our space*; Lucretia Infante Vargas, “De Espíritus, mujeres e igualdad: Laureana Wright y el espiritismo Kardeciano en el México finisecular,” in Marcela Terrazas y Felipe Castro (eds.), *Disidencia y disidentes en la Historia de México*, (Mexico City, 2004); Lucretia Infante Vargas, “De lectoras y redactoras. Las publicaciones femeninas en México durante el siglo XIX” in Belem Clark de Lara y Elisa Speckman Guerra (eds.), *La República de las letras. Asomos a la Cultura Escrita del México decimonónico*, vol. II, (Mexico City 2005); Miriam López Hernández, *Letras Femininas en el Periodismo Mexicano* (Mexico City, 2010), 58-61; Elvira Hernández Carballido, “Periódicos Pioneros Fundados por Mujeres: Las Hijas de Anahuac, el Album de la Mujer, El Correo de las Señoras y Violetas del Anahuac (1873-1889),” *Derecho a Comunicar* 6, (Sept.-Dec. 2012), 1-20. For the first work on female journalists in the era see Fortino Ibarra de Anda, *Las mexicanas en el periodismo* (Mexico City, 1934).

doing, both bolstering and undermining patriarchal expectations.¹⁹ Others embraced the revolutionary state's cultural programs and took part in producing a slew of non-written cultural forms, including public celebrations, hero cults, theatre performances, murals, dance, music, comic books, radio, and film.²⁰ Finally, others started to produce written texts on certain acceptable subjects including motherhood, the home, and domesticity. They wrote in a new brand of female-focused magazines like *El Hogar*, *Revista Mensual de la Mujer*, *Femenil*, *Orquidea*, *Paquita*, *Hortensia*, *Decoración*, and *Claudia de Mexico*.²¹

Yet these shifts failed to alter radically the shape of Mexican journalism. Instead, by the 1940s two other changes, which started gradually but soon accelerated, served to engrave old gender norms with even greater force. The first was the rapid expansion of the market for the country's broadsheets and tabloids. This had multiple causes including increased education and prosperity, better communication, and comparatively low competition from other media. These factors encouraged a dramatic rise in newspaper readerships, especially of crime-heavy tabloids and provincial dailies.²² In Mexico City, daily sales of newspapers like *La Prensa*, *Ultimas*

¹⁹ Elvira Hernández Carballido, *Las otras soldaderas: Mujeres periodistas de la Revolución Mexicana, 1910-1917* (Mexico City, 2011).

²⁰ Some of the most important works include Gilbert Joseph and David Nugent, (eds.), *Everyday Forms of State Formation: revolution and the negotiation of rule in modern Mexico* (Durham, 1994); Mary Kay Vaughan, *Cultural Politics in Revolution: Teachers, Peasants, and Schools in Mexico, 1930-1940* (Tucson, 1997); Mary Kay Vaughan and Stephen Lewis (eds), *The Eagle and the Virgin: Nation and Cultural Revolution in Mexico, 1920-1940* (Durham, 2006).

²¹ Cecilia Alfaro Gómez, "Puericultura, higiene y control natal. La Visión de Esperanza Velázquez Bringas sobre el cuidado materno-infantil en México" *Revista Historia Autónoma*, 1 (2012): 107-121; Joel Bollinger Pouwells, *Political Journalism by Mexican Women During the Age of Revolution, 1876-1940* (E. Mellon Press, 2006), 123-6, 214-228; Anahí Ballent, "La publicidad de los ámbitos de la vida privada. Representaciones de la modernización del hogar en la prensa de los años cuarenta y cincuenta en México," *Alteridades*, 6:11 (1998): 53-74; Ann Blum, *Domestic Economies: Family, Work, and Welfare in Mexico City, 1884-1943* (Lincoln, 2009), 142-48; López Hernández, *Letras Femeninas*, 52-53.

²² This rise had started in the late nineteenth century, but really gathered pace in the 1940s. Robert Buffington, *A Sentimental Education for the Working Man* (Durham, 2015), 9-14.

Noticias and *Ovaciones* increased from under 50,000 copies during the early 1940s to nearly 200,000 by the end of the 1960s. Sales of provincial newspapers witnessed similar rises, and by the late 1960s, the vast majority of urban Mexicans read the press.²³ Large-scale U.S. surveys backed up such findings. In 1958, the U.S. government estimated that that 77% of Aguascalientes citizens read newspapers regularly; nine years later, they found that 79% of urban Mexicans from 30 different cities did the same. As readerships of newspapers increased, it crossed gender divides. Though the same two U.S. surveys discovered that both class and education levels shaped reading conventions, sex did not. In Aguascalientes, 76% per cent of women read the press as opposed to 77% of men. In the 30 cities examined in 1967, an equal proportion of men and women read daily newspapers.²⁴

The second was the industrialization of newspaper production. Like the rise in readership, this had roots in the late nineteenth century. In 1896 the Mexican editor, Rafael Reyes Spíndola, released the first industrially-produced newspaper, *El Imparcial*. The paper cost just a centavo, appealed to a cross-class audience of Mexico City workers, and reached a readership of around 100,000.²⁵ Over the next forty years, the number of industrially-produced newspapers in Mexico increased gradually. Mexico City broadsheets, like *Excélsior* (1917) and *El Universal* (1916) were joined by Mexico City tabloids, like *La Prensa* (1928), *Novedades* (1935) and *Ultimas Noticias* (1936), and then by large provincial papers, like *El Siglo de Torreón* (1922), *El Norte*

²³ The total number of current affairs and news publications increased from 244 in 1940 to 1249 in 1970. *Anuario Estadístico Compendiado* (Mexico City, 1942-1974). For assertions about the high readerships of provincial newspapers see *Directorio de Medios* (Aug. 1967).

²⁴ National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) Record Group (RG) 306, IRI-Mex-17, IRA, A Study of Newspaper Readership in Aguascalientes, 1958; NARA, RG306 MX-6702, Effectiveness of Newspaper Supplement, 1967, Vols I-VI.

²⁵ Claudia Guadalupe García, *El Imparcial: Primer periódico moderno de México* (Mexico City, 2003).

(1938) and the *Sol* chain (1943 onwards).²⁶ These increasingly cut into the readerships of more artisanal newspapers, either forcing them to industrialize or sell up. These new industrial newspapers also relied on a complex division of labor.²⁷ Papers now not only employed journalists but also administrators, salesmen, lawyers, and print workers.²⁸ By the mid-century, big papers like *Excélsior* and *El Universal* retained nearly a thousand workers of which well over a hundred were journalists. As a result, newsrooms themselves were divided up into diverse different *fuentes* or beats.²⁹ These included editorials, politics, crime, sport, culture, economy, and society. As many journalists noted, industrialization changed the game. Speaking at the Mexican Association of Journalists (Asociación Mexicana de Periodistas, AMP) in 1954, the author Rubén Salazar Mallén lamented that days of the “old, bohemian, romantic period of making newspapers” were over. Now newspapers were “large organizations, with extensive capital and an administrative staff that outnumber the newsroom.”³⁰

The combination of rising readerships and new forms of internal organization inscribed traditional gender divisions with greater force. Women writers were needed; nearly half the

²⁶ Burkholder de la Rosa, “La Red de los Espejos”; Michael Leslie, *Mass Media in Revolutionary Societies: A Case Study of El Universal of Mexico during the Oil Expropriation Crisis of 1938*, Unpubl. Ph.D, University of Washington, 1983; Pablo Piccato, *A History of Infamy: Crime, Truth and Justice in Mexico* (Oakland, CA, 2017), 63-107; Robert Thomas Armistead, *The History of Novedades* Unpubl. Phd., University of Texas Press, 1964; José Luis Martínez S. *La Vieja Guardia, Proteganistas del periodismo mexicano* (Mexico City, 2005), 266-9; José Luis Esquivel Hernández, *El Norte, Lider Sin Competencia* (Monterrey, 2003); Enrique Cordero y Torres, “Nacimiento de la “Cadena García Valseca” (1943-1968),” in María del Carmen Ruiz Castañeda, Luis Reed Torres, Enrique Cordero y Torres, *El Periodismo en México, 450 años de historia* (Mexico City, 1974), 285-332.

²⁷ For an introduction to the changes wrought by the industrialization of newspaper production see John Nerone, *The Media and Public Life, A History* (Cambridge, 2015).

²⁸ For a good if skewed introduction to the workings of an industrial newspaper in Mexico see Héctor Minués Moreno, *Los cooperativistas. El Caso Excélsior* (Mexico City, 1987). For a description of an industrial paper at the provincial level, see Rodolfo Junco de la Vega, *The Problems of A Mexican Provincial Editor* (Austin, 1964).

²⁹ For figures on employees see E.H. Erlandson “The Press of Mexico with Special Consideration of Economic Factors.” Ph.D diss., Northwestern University, 1963; AGN, Secretaría de Comercio y Fomento Industrial, Dirección General de Fomento Cooperativo (SCFI/DGFC), Caja 4.

³⁰ AGN, Presidentes Adolfo Ruiz Cortines, (ARC), 120/2050, Conferencia de Rubén Salazar Mallén, Jan. 9, 1954,

readership of mid-century newspapers was female. But, the rules of writing were even harder to break. Women were no longer simply implicitly expected to keep out of political reporting; they were hived away in different sections of the offices. The days when female journalists could slip between domestic, cultural, and political writing were over; the newsrooms of the industrial newspaper of the 1940s ran along gender lines. Men dominated the “serious” sections of the newspapers and monopolized the production of news reporting, editorials, political columns and crime news in major Mexico City broadsheets and tabloids as well as smaller regional papers. The press pack was not called the “chicos de la prensa” or “boys of the press” for nothing. Somewhat unscientific surveys of newspaper by-lines bear this out. Between 1950 and 1960, only two women had registered by-lines on a surveyed selection of front pages of Mexico’s four biggest papers, *La Prensa*, *El Universal*, *Excelsior*, and *Novedades*. They were Elvira Vargas, who had managed to secure a column in *Novedades*, and the extraordinary satirist and tabloid muck-raker, Magdalena Mondragón (about whom more later). In comparison, the papers employed over forty different male journalists to write front-page news.³¹ So do newspaper employment records. In the late 1950s, *El Universal* employed over 140 journalists. Only fifteen were women; none wrote news, and none were granted access to the journalists’ union.³²

Outside the world of the big nationals, newsrooms were similarly divided. Men dominated the production of news dailies and political weeklies and in most states female reporters were rare or non-existent. From the 1940s until the 1970s, Arcelia Yañiz was Oaxaca City’s sole female news journalist, and she admitted she was often forced to specialize on softer,

³¹ Survey of front pages of *La Prensa*, *El Universal*, *Excelsior*, and *Novedades* for the first of every month, 1950-1960.

³² AGN, ARC, 432/220, Sindicato Nacional de Redactores de la Prensa to Ruiz Cortines, Dec. 5, 1957.

non-news subjects.³³ In the relatively progressive and competitive newspaper hub of Ciudad Juárez, the first female news journalist only managed to secure a job in the late 1960s.³⁴ Even the left-wing magazines of the 1960s failed to overcome this binary division of labor. Manuel Marcué Pardiñas's *Política* employed one female reporter, the Argentine leftist, Raquel Tibol.³⁵ When Cristina Pacheco entered the *Siempre!* offices in the late 1970s, editor José Pagés Llergo warned her it was “a mess of men.”³⁶ In fact, women were held to be so incapable of political or news journalism that Nidia Marín remembers the *Gráfica* editor removing her by-line from her stories about the 1968 Tlatelolco massacre.³⁷ Female reporters joked uncomfortably about such misogynist assumptions. The famous society journalist, Rosario Sansores used to tell her fellow female writers that after she had covered a fire by focusing on a “beautiful woman on the balcony with blonde hair and a dress of sea blue screaming ‘help, help’”; she concluded ironically that “we are not, nor will we ever be good crime reporters.”³⁸

If women were excluded from the production of serious political news, they were permitted two spaces within the country's newspapers. The first were the pages devoted to the home and issues of motherhood. Here, they could use their reason to discuss domestic matters

³³ Arcelia Yañiz, *Oaxaca de mis amores, Cosas, Casos y Personajes* (Oaxaca, 2012).

³⁴ Emilio Gutierrez de Alba, *Tric trac, vieja guardia* (Ciudad Juarez, 2009).

³⁵ Renata Keller, “Testing the Limits of Censorship? *Política* Magazine and Mexico's Perfect Dictatorship” in Paul Gillingham, Michael Lettieri, Benjamin T. Smith, (eds.), *Journalism, Satire and Censorship in Modern Mexico* (Albuquerque, forthcoming 2019); Juan Carlos Sanchez Sierra, “Periodismo heroico, moral y virilidad revolucionaria: la juventud y la mujer en la revista *Por Qué?* 1968-1974, *Secuencia* 94 (enero-abril 2016): 240-72.

³⁶ Linda Egan, “Entrevistas con periodistas mujeres sobre la prensa Mexicana,” *Mexican Studies/Estudios Mexicanos*, 9.2 (1993): 275-94, 285.

³⁷ Eduardo Cruz Vázquez, *1968-2008, Los Silencios de la Democracia* (Mexico City, 2008), 120.

³⁸ Berta Hidalgo, *Entre Periodistas, Anécdotas, sucesidos notables y hechos graciosos de una profesion apasionante* (Mexico City, 1995), 62.

and childcare.³⁹ Occasionally, this shifted to broader discussions of public education and social services policy.⁴⁰ The second were the society pages or *notas sociales*. To my knowledge, there are still no studies of this section of Mexico's press—perhaps evidence of the lack of seriousness with which the form is still perceived. The form emerged in the late nineteenth century with the publication of the country's first industrially produced paper, *El Imparcial*. By the 1920s, they had become a common feature of major nationals like *Excelsior* and *El Universal*; and two decades later, they took up two or three pages in most national and major regional newspapers.⁴¹ During the Alemán presidency (1946-1952), they gained particular influence as they recounted the everyday pastimes and extravagant wealth of Mexico's new breed of mass media celebrities. Publishers even released stand-alone society news publications, like the magazine *Social*.⁴²

Though fashions changed and subject matter shifted over time and from place to place, the *notas sociales* generally comprised the social calendar of the haute bourgeoisie. In the nationals, they focused on the births, baptisms, marriages, and lavish parties of film stars, business leaders, and politicians. In the regionals, they provided more underwhelming news on the *quinceañeras* [fifteenth-birthday parties] and nuptials of local dignitaries. Most were photo-heavy and displayed a fawning sympathy to their wealthy subjects. In fact, in September 1968, high-up official Mario Moya Palencia wrote to the minister of the interior that *El Sol de México* and *El Heraldo's* *notas sociales* were “underlining and amplifying bourgeois fiestas and celebrations” to such an extent that he suggested asking them to “lower the tone.” Three months

³⁹ Ballent, “La publicidad”; López Hernández, *Letras Femeninas*, 60-1.

⁴⁰ Gómez, “Puericultura.”

⁴¹ García, *El Imparcial*; María del Carmen Collado Herrera, “El espejo de la élite social (1920-1940), in Aurelio de los Reyes, (coord.), *Historia de la vida cotidiana, Siglo XX, Campo y Ciudad, Vol. V*, (Mexico City, 2006), 89-126.

⁴² Jose Agustin, *Tragicomedia Mexicana, Vol 1* (Mexico City, 1990), 40.

later, Moya remained concerned. “Every day they acclaim exaggeratedly bourgeois attitudes and treat certain sectors of Mexican and foreign society like nobility.” He worried that such sections “damaged the real image of Mexican society, magnifying the dazzling leisure activities of a minority, which thinks of itself anachronistically as a plutocracy.” “If they published the communist manifesto... it would do less damage.”⁴³

Notas sociales were the inverse of proper news journalism. They examined the private lives and spaces of public individuals. They were, in essence, gossip. Admittedly they were sanitized, socially tolerable, industrially-produced gossip, designed to refine the customs and pique the fancy of Mexico’s new middle class. But, they were gossip, nonetheless. As a result, they were considered appropriate spaces in which women could write. Women dominated the production of society pages. Almost all the graduates of the journalism course at the Universidad Feminina de México were funneled towards the society news sections of the capital’s papers.⁴⁴ By 1957, five of *El Universal*’s six *notas sociales* correspondents were women.⁴⁵ And three years later, five of *Novedades* seven society correspondents were women.⁴⁶ Most of the female writers, who eventually broke into news reporting in the 1970s, started on the society desk. They included Elena Poniatowska who began as a *notas sociales* correspondent for *Excélsior*, noted feminist, Esperanza Brito de Martí, who started as a *Novedades* society journalist, Berta Hidalgo, who tried her hand at crime journalism, hated it, and instead concentrated on the social engagements of Mexico’s first ladies and Mercedes Padres, who remembered that as a society

⁴³ AGN, Dirección General de Investigaciones Políticas y Sociales (DGIPS), Caja 2944A, Mario Moya Palencia to Luis Echeverría, 10 Sept 68; Mario Moya Palencia to Luis Echeverría, Nov. 5, 1968.

⁴⁴ Hidalgo, *op.cit.*, 25; Teodoro Rentería Arróyave, *Mi vida son mis amigos, una historia de los noticiarios en México* (Puebla: UAP, nd), 20.

⁴⁵ AGN, ARC, 432/220 Sindicato Nacional de Redactores de la Prensa to Ruiz Cortines, Dec. 5, 1957.

⁴⁶ Mercedes Padres, *El Diario de Una Periodista: La Luz de Bengala* (Mexico City, 1998), 14.

journalist for *Novedades* she was “always dressed in a cocktail dress” and did the rounds of the “most relevant residencies and embassies, the picture galleries and the conference halls.”⁴⁷

Such binary attitudes made breaking into the world of news journalism for women extremely tough. The handful of female journalists, who did manage to insert themselves into this exclusively male space during the 1940s and 1950s, faced repeated struggles and acquired a kind of semi-mythical status. Magdalena Mondragón was a case in point. Though she came from a relatively middle-class background, she left school in Coahuila at the age of fifteen and joined Torreón’s *El Siglo* before moving to Mexico City. Here, she joined courses at the UNAM and managed to gain a place as a crime correspondent at *La Prensa*. Editors, keen to sideline her, often demanded what was not asked of her male peers. In the late 1930s, José Pagés Llergo, the editor of *Hoy*, gave her three supposedly impossible tasks—to explain the underlying causes of the Cedillo rebellion, to interview Porfirio Díaz’s famously close-lipped widow, and to investigate who was funding Mexicans travelling to Republican Spain.⁴⁸ After completing these tasks successfully, she kept her job.

Ciudad Juárez journalist, María Elena Carpio, told a similar story. She grew up in a sheltered home in the border city and was only allowed to go to secondary school after going on hunger strike. Here, she read the papers and decided to become a reporter. “I started in journalism not by chance but with a definite aim, for a desire for knowledge that had been forbidden all my life.” Training opportunities were few, and all the local papers refused to take her on as an apprentice. Instead, she signed up for a correspondence course for aspiring journalists run out of Buenos Aires. After completing this, she got a job as a society journalist at

⁴⁷ Hidalgo, *op.cit*; Padres, *op.cit*, 5-6; Elena Poniatowska, “Adios Manuel” in *Los Dias de Manuel Buendia* (Mexico City, 1984), 120-134; López Hernández, *Letras Femininas*, 54-5.

⁴⁸ José Luis Martínez S. *La Vieja Guardia, Protagonistas del periodismo mexicano* (Mexico City, 2005), 213-26.

the local newspaper, *El Correo*. After a few months, she started to resent the tedious rounds of provincial parties and asked the director to move her to the crime beat. “No, my daughter, that is a job for men; and what is worse, you are a young girl,” was the response she received. Eventually her persistence paid off and she was teamed up with the paper’s top *nota roja* [crime news] reporter, Armando Escobar Ortega. He, however, was furious with the director’s decision and refused to work with her. So, Carpio was forced to strike out on her own, learning the ropes of crime reporting by talking to the local police.⁴⁹

The gendered division of labor bled into and was sustained by the culture of journalists outside the newsroom. Reporters’ memoirs, though often couched in a hyper-masculine style, openly reveal this.⁵⁰ Politicians, public relations specialists and reporters shared rumors, exchanged cash-stuffed envelopes, and forged friendships in exclusively male spaces. In Mexico City, these included bars like the high-class *Ambassadeur* restaurant, located next to the offices of *Excélsior*. Here, the *Excélsior* editor, Rodrigo de Llano, entertained politicians, celebrities and other journalists, who paid 50 pesos (a worker’s daily wage) for lunch or 15 pesos for a small scotch.⁵¹ Such spaces further included down at heel cantinas like El Morro next to the National Lottery where left-wing satirist Renato Leduc, editorialist José Alvarado, and six-times married cartoonist Antonio Arias Bernal chatted up Sinaloa waitresses.⁵² They included private parties like newspaper mogul José García Valseca’s legendary bashes where statesmen, writers, and

⁴⁹ Gutierrez, *Tric Trac*, 131-5.

⁵⁰ See particularly the works of Roberto Blanco Moheno. Roberto Blanco Moheno, *Memorias de un reportero* (Mexico City, 1965); Roberto Blanco Moheno, *La Noticia Detrás de la Noticia*, (Mexico City, 1966).

⁵¹ Victor Alba, *Sísifo y su tiempo: memroias de un cabreado, 1916-1996* (Barcelona, 1996), 47.

⁵² Oralba Castillo Nájera, *Renato Leduc y sus amigos*, (Mexico City, 1987), 258.

business leaders danced and snorted cocaine with a mass of movie extras and aspiring starlets.⁵³ And inevitably, they also included cabarets and brothels like the infamous Casa de la Bandida. Here the owner, Graciela Olmeos, split her time between entertaining journalists like muck-raker Roberto Blanco Moheno with witty songs in one half of the establishment (*Currucucu/Chingue a su madre Moscu/Esos bandidos/Chingue a su madre Estados Unidos* [Currucucu/Fuck your mother Moscow/Those bandits/Fuck your mother United States) and running a prostitution racket in the other.⁵⁴

As the examples suggest, certain shared leisure activities lubricated the world of Mexico City's male journalists. Most focused on the culturally acceptable masculine habit of heavy drinking. Pagés Llergo was "one of the worst drunks, not so hammered that you would know it, but he always had a bottle of vodka there.... He drunk two or three bottles and did it every day."⁵⁵ Rodrigo de Llano aka el Skipper was drunk twice a day, "once at 3pm and once again at night." De Llano "drank until the limit of drunkenness."⁵⁶ Fellow *Excelsior* writer Bernardo Ponce often missed deadlines because he was "in a state of drunkenness from Friday to Wednesday." Though he often claimed a chronic illness, de Llano replied that his only sickness "was from drunkenness."⁵⁷ Drinking exploits added to journalists' reputations. Julio Manuel Morales Ferrón would arrive half-cut at a vaudeville performance every Friday night and give a

⁵³ Manuel Sánchez Pontón, *El Olor a Tinta*, (Mexico City, 1985), 97-100; Blanco Moheno, *Memorias*, 125.

⁵⁴ Blanco Moheno, *La Noticia*, 147.

⁵⁵ Castillo Nájera, *Renato Leduc*, 302.

⁵⁶ Julio Scherer García, *La Terca Memoria* (Mexico City, 2007), 88.

⁵⁷ Secretaria de Comercio y Fomento Industrial, Dirección General de Fomento Cooperativo, Serie Distrito Federal ,Caja 8, Las extrañas enfermedades del Lic. Bernardo Ponce.

five-minute condensed version of a contemporary book in front a jeering, beery audience.⁵⁸ Journalists' memoirs are replete with references to the daily meetings at the cantina where they would share stories and notes.⁵⁹ Drinking even overran the newsroom itself. Confronted with a poor article, tabloid editor Miguel Ordorica gave the offending journalist five pesos, ordered him to swig three drinks and write the story again. The journalist obeyed; "you write much better when you're drunk," Ordorica complimented him.⁶⁰

Outside Mexico City spaces of sociability were, if anything, even more male-oriented. Perhaps more so than in the capital—where there was a strong café culture - cantinas provided the space for fraternizing among provincial journalists. Miguel Angel Millán Peraza remembered downing tequilas at the La Corona bar in downtown Tijuana with his fellow journalists before moving on to the city's brothels. "The drinking," he admitted "was prodigious."⁶¹ When Gregorio Marín moved to the *Sol de San Luis* in 1952, he recalled hanging out at the bars across the road from the paper's offices with his colleagues including the popular political writer, Salvador Cavada. "We were all generals in the cantina, but Cavada had four stars." When Cavada keeled over during one particularly intense session, Marín remarked that he had "died doing his duty."⁶² Such exploits cemented the very male atmosphere of the journalistic world. Arcelia Yañiz, Oaxaca City's sole female journalist, remembered celebrating her editor Eduardo Pimentel's birthday in the early 1950s. They ended up outside a brothel where Pimentel said,

⁵⁸ Carlos Moncada, *30 años en esto: autobiografía poeriodística* (Hermosilla, 1984), 90.

⁵⁹ Luis Suárez, *Puente Sin Fin: Testigo activo de la historia* (Mexico City: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales de Habana, 2002), 10.

⁶⁰ Hidalgo, *Entre Periodistas*, 75.

⁶¹ Miguel Angel Millán Peraza, *A Tijuana! Nosotoros Las Gringas* (Tijuana,1992), 12.

⁶² Gregorio Marín Rodríguez, *Tiempo de Hablar, Otra Cara del Periodismo* (Mexico City, 1988).

“You are a lady; you can’t go in.” Indicating the manner by which she forged a career in such a masculine world, she ignored him and entered anyway.⁶³

No doubt, journalists in many countries shared in what Roberto Blanco Moheno termed the “camaraderie of drink and the distributing of centavos.”⁶⁴ But in Mexico, this heavily masculine culture also shaped the value system and language of the mid-century press. Good journalism was repeatedly described as virile or manly. *Excelsior* editor, Rodrigo de Llano was fond of saying that “the journalist should never sign anything that a gentleman cannot sign.”⁶⁵ When *La Prensa* appeared in 1929, it promised a daily of “true virile energies.”⁶⁶ As Paul Gillingham suggests, such a gendered appreciation of truth-telling was even more common in the provinces. In southern Veracruz, *Adelante—el Periódico de los Tuxtlas*, promised that it “could virilely express the free thought of this zone with bravery, decisiveness and an unbreakable faith in the importance of nobles causes.” And the editor of the *Diario de Xalapa* promised to “tell the truth with all his virility” and denounce profiteers “in a sincere but virile manner.”⁶⁷ In contrast, poor journalism was often delineated as emasculated or feminine. For the swaggering muck-raker Blanco Moheno, bad journalists were “pathetic,” “degenerates,” “womanly” and “mariconcitos” or “young gay men.”⁶⁸ For the editors of the Oaxaca City satirical weekly, *El*

⁶³ Yañiz, *Oaxaca*, 115.

⁶⁴ Blanco Moheno, *Memorias*, 69. The two classic novels of mid-century UK journalism, Evelyn Waugh’s *Scoop* (1938) and Michael Fryn’s *Towards the End of the Morning* (1967) both contain a lot of drinking. So does the classic French takedown of journalists, Honoré de Balzac’s *Illusions perdues*.

⁶⁵ Scherer García, *La Terca*, 24.

⁶⁶ Piccato, *A History of Infamy*.

⁶⁷ Paul Gillingham, “How Much News was Fit to Print” in Paul Gillingham, Michael Lettieri, Benjamin T. Smith, (eds.), *Journalism, Satire and Censorship in Modern Mexico* (Albuquerque, forthcoming 2018).

⁶⁸ Roberto Blanco Moheno, *Pero Contentos: Periodismo, 1968-1975* (Mexico City, 1976).

Chapulín, they were “dishonorable,” “amoral” and “castrated.” Even President Echeverría expressed his ideas on journalism in this way, confessing to the new *Excélsior* editor Julio Scherer that too much censorship “thins the blood, weakens the juices, and makes a real man a eunuch.”⁶⁹ Such values were probably best summed up in the notorious figure of *Excélsior* columnist, Carlos Denegri, who—despite his proclivity for alcohol and wife-beating—was considered Mexico’s best, and thus “most virile,” journalist during the period. (In 1970, as gender roles in the public sphere were starting to change, his wife finally shot him in the head. Legal regulations, however, were slow to catch up; despite the prolonged abuse that she suffered, she received a long prison sentence.)⁷⁰

From the 1940s onwards, the Mexican newspaper industry grew exponentially. Urban women became keen readers of this growing press and formed part of the work force of the new industrial newspapers. Yet, gender still divided the Mexican newsroom. Men dominated the public sphere and the “serious news” of politics and crime. In contrast, female journalism dealt with the private sphere. Their writing was contained in the domestic or society pages. Such ideas were sustained by the culture of Mexican newspapers and the value system of Mexican newspapers. Good news writing was “virile” and “manly”; poor journalism was “womanly.” As the next section argues, such conceptions did not only mold the workplace, they also distorted the very way that politics was reported. The imagined divisions between the private and public spheres both policed newspaper content and suggested spaces for subverting the norms of communication.

Corruption, the Public Sphere, and Gender Politics

⁶⁹ Scherer García, *La Terca Memoria*, 45.

⁷⁰ Manuel Mejido, *Con la máquina al hombre* (Mexico City, 2011); Scherer García, *La Terca Memoria*, 47-8; Linda M. de Denegri and Adela C. Irigoyen, *Mate yo a Carlos Denegri* (Mexico City, 1975)

The social conventions of the mid-century Mexican press had broad socio-economic and cultural effects, limiting women's opportunities and reinforcing widely-held assumptions about proper gender roles. But the same rules also had far-reaching political consequences. In particular, the continuing division between acceptable journalism and rumormongering militated against the publication of exposés of corruption. According to this logic, if corruption was the private use of public funds, its revelation was the display of private shame in public. Such writing was the obverse of good journalism or what many Mexicans deemed gossip. When combined with financial inducements and increasingly sophisticated public relations strategies, such ideas structured the writing of political news. This became increasingly closed, arcane, and incomprehensible. At the same time, these same ideas also shaped the attempts to break these unwritten rules of writing. Male journalists who wished to reveal corruption often assumed female voices or co-opted female discourses to do so. By the 1960s, a handful of female journalists had also started to politicize the society news, imbricating the usual stories of births and festivities with politics. The gendered division of the public sphere bred suppression, but paradoxically could also shape subversion.

According to normative, Western definitions, corruption in post-revolutionary Mexico was rife. Practices included nepotism, widespread petty fraud, and the overlap of state and business interests. The practice that caused most public outrage and was defined as corruption by most Mexicans was what development theorists term "grand corruption" or the large-scale larceny of public funds for politicians' private use.⁷¹ Examples were legion. During the early 1940s, the president's brother, Maximino Avila Camacho, was dubbed "Mr 15 per cent" because

⁷¹ For the best introduction see Alan Knight in Walter Little and Eduardo Posada Carbón, *Political Corruption in Europe and Latin America* (Basingstoke, 1996). For grand corruption, see Susan Rose-Ackerman, "Democracy and Grand Corruption," *International Social Science Journal*, 48.149 (Sept. 1996): 365-80.

of his habit of skimming off a share of contracts handed out by the ministry of communications and public works.⁷² During the final years of the decade, President Alemán's law school "amigos" [friends] made fortunes from similar schemes.⁷³ In the provinces, such practices were also commonplace. During the heyday of one party rule, countless governors were accused of sacking state treasuries to buy up rural farms, urban real estate, bijou nightclubs, fast cars, or fashionable jewelry.⁷⁴

Yet, such stories rarely reached the public sphere. There were many reasons for this, including increasing financial disbursements (both for newspapers and individual journalists), the growth of a relatively sophisticated state publicity machine, and broad, hegemonic assumptions over the overriding importance of economic growth, political stability, and anticommunism.⁷⁵ The absence of public revelations over corruption was also a consequence of the binary thinking over the proper role of journalism. To reveal corruption, a writer had to make public certain private aspects of politicians' lives (like where they lived, what cars they drove, what their wife wore, and where their "segunda casa" was located.) To do so was professionally frowned upon as poor journalism. By invading the private sphere, such writing was deemed gossip and culturally disparaged as feminine.⁷⁶

⁷² Alejandro Quintana, *Maximino Avila Camacho and the One-Party State: The Taming of Caudillismo and Caciquismo in Post-revolutionary Mexico* (Lexington, 2010), 112.

⁷³ Adolfo León Ossorio, *El Pantano (Apuntes para la historia), Un Libro Acusador* (Mexico City, 1954); Niblo, *Mexico in the 1940s*. 253-310.

⁷⁴ Niblo, *Mexico in the 1940s*, 258-9; Benjamin T. Smith, *Pistoleros and Popular Movements: The Politics of State Formation in Postrevolutionary Oaxaca* (Lincoln, 2009), 269-70.

⁷⁵ Rodríguez Munguía, *La Otra Guerra*; Benjamin T. Smith, *Stories from the Newsroom, Stories from the State: The Mexican Press, 1940-1976* (Chapel Hill, forthcoming 2018), Chapter 2; Mraz, *Looking for Mexico*, 153-200.

⁷⁶ For an extremely original take on the links between gendered thinking and corruption in Mexico see Sara Minerva Luna Elizarrás, "Enriquecimiento y Legitimidad Presidencial: Discusión Sobre Identidades Masculinas Duranga la Campaña Moralizadora de Adolfo Ruiz Cortinez," *Historia Mexicana*, LXIII: 3 2014, 1377-1422.

Such ideas that weighed against writing about the private lives of public figures and hence militated against the exposure of corruption were embedded in the legal framework governing the press. Though the 1917 Constitution guaranteed freedom of expression, the Law of the Press (*Ley de Imprenta*) introduced in the same year, immediately drew the boundaries of acceptable public speech. Given legislation was promulgated in the midst of the Revolution, some boundaries were obvious. The law prohibited writing which was an affront to morality or affected public peace. But, the principal crime did not concern political stability, but rather public reputation. It was the crime of causing “hatred, contempt, or ridicule or...discredit to the reputation” of individuals through “an affront before public opinion.” It was a law, in essence, against the public display of private shame. The law applied to a remarkably broad range of media including any expression “made verbally or by signals...by means of manuscript, print, drawing, photograph...letter, telegraph, telephone, radiotelegraph or message,” even incorporated legislation against subtle pokes or *indirectas*, and by 1929 was assimilated in the new penal code as “slander.”⁷⁷

Furthermore, during the 1940s, legal cases that used this aspect of the law to silence journalists’ accusations of corruption were frequent, especially in the provinces. When Reynosa’s *El Bravo* accused the authorities of dishing out bribes to favored journalists, the local judge locked up the editor for slander.⁷⁸ When Ciudad Guzmán’s *Vigia* accused military authorities of taking bribes to let rich kids off military service, the editor was also jailed.⁷⁹ When Vicente Villasana, published a piece, which accused San Luis Potosí’s forestry commission chief

⁷⁷ Raúl Trejo Delarbre, “Ley de Imprenta,” *Nexos*, Jul. 1 1999; Luis Castaño, *El regimen Legal de la Prensa en México* (Mexico City, 1958).

⁷⁸ AGN, ARC, 542.2/195, Raúl Escobedo Loya to President Ruiz Cortines, Dec. 19, 1953,

⁷⁹ AGN, MAC, 542.1/900, Procurador General to Esteban Cibrán, Nov. 12, 1945.

of taking backhanders, he was also dragged through the courts.⁸⁰ In Baja California Norte, the law was the authorities' go-to means of censorship. In 1943, they jailed a journalist from *El Cóndor* for claiming that police were illegally handing Mexican prisoners back over the border to U.S. policemen. The following year, they locked up journalists from *El Imparcial*, *El Cóndor*, and *Cine al Día* for revealing the links between state authorities and the Tijuana prostitution racket. In 1948, they detained another journalist for claiming that certain influential businessmen owed him money.⁸¹ In all cases, the articles were described as attacks on the private lives of those accused of malfeasance.

Despite the rash of prosecutions during the 1940s, legal measures, which delimited the reporting of corruption, were unnecessary most of the time. Most journalists, particularly in Mexico City, internalized these laws of proper writing. And rather than openly reveal sleaze, they adopted a series of guidelines and forms, which deliberately limited the ambit of the public sphere. First, they rarely personalized accusations. Alejandro Gómez Arias explained that even if he criticized officials, he never named names. He claimed, "names were not important, only the position," but such actions betrayed an internalized acceptance of the impropriety of attacking private citizens.⁸² Second, they dressed up any revelations in an arcane semi-ironic argot, which made the charges incomprehensible to most readers. Political columns in particular were only for the "initiated," those who understood their particular "brand of witchcraft." As the renegade journalist Carlos Ortega explained, politicians were described in a way that only top officials

⁸⁰ Casa Jurídica de San Luis Potosí, Caso Vicente Villasana, Aug. 3, 1945.

⁸¹ AGN, MAC, 542.1/835, Periodistas de Baja California to Governor Juan Felipe Rico, Aug. 2 1944.; *Detective Internacional*, Aug. 1944. See also Claudio Lomnitz, "Ritual, rumor y corrupción en la formación del espacio nacional en México," *Revista Mexicana de Sociología*, 58.2 (Apr-Jun 1996): 21-51. Castaño, *El regimen*, 144-8; *El Universal*, 7 Jul. 1944.

⁸² Alejandro Gómez Arias, *Memoria Personal de un País* (Mexico City, 1990), 264.

could decipher. “Discreto y eficiente” [discreet and efficient] meant a politician was happy to remain within the shadow of his patron, would never “roba camara” [to rob the camera or hog publicity] or make wayward declarations. “Talentoso y capaz” [talented and capable] actually denoted a politician “with few lights on” or thick. Columnists often described the agrarian head, Norberto Aguirre Palancares in this way although in official circles he was known as “the volcano” (because he was white on top and stone underneath). “Político madrugador” [an early rising politician] signified a bureaucrat who had started his campaign for office very early. While “tabasqueño” or “oaxaqueño” “por los cuatro costados” [Tabascan or Oaxacan through four grandparents] denoted a politician who was not actually born in the state but claimed to be so in order to be eligible for the governorship. Ignacio Morones Prieto, was born in San Luis Potosí but described as “nuevoleonse por los cuatro costados” when he became governor of Nuevo León.⁸³

The use of arcane language to describe the private world of politicians had broader effects beyond warping public discussion of corruption. In fact, it even generated a completely new and up-to-now completely unstudied journalistic subgenre, the *carta secreta* or “secret letter.” *Cartas secretas* were weekly or monthly newsheets, produced by journalists or out-of-work politicians. They started in the late 1940s with the publication of the *Buro de Investigación Política* by formal rural teacher turned reporter Horacio Quiñones and a group of Cardenista sympathizers. By the 1950s, they were joined by a host of other national news sheets including the leftist *Temas*, *Informe Semanal de la Política* and *Cartas de México*, the right-leaning *Foro Político*, and the more the *oficialistas Correo Privado* and *Semana Política*. The following decade, most states had their own *cartas secretas* like Tabasco’s *Informacion Especial*. By the

⁸³ *Por Qué?*, Sept. 10, 1970.

early 1970s, in Baja California there were “confidential flysheets everywhere.”⁸⁴ These publications specialized in deciphering the mysteries of political news. They often reprinted particularly knotty or unintelligible columns before helping the reader translate the nicknames and esoteric terminology.⁸⁵ They were not for public consumption. Instead they were distributed by subscription only and were accessible solely to a small group of explicitly invited political personnel.⁸⁶ As such, they replicated and reinforced the limited discussion of high politics in the public sphere. Knowledge of politicians’ private peccadillos (from what they owned to whom they were sleeping with) was reserved for the select few.

If gendered ideas of public discourse shaped the convention of not reporting corruption in the public sphere, it also molded attempts to break these rules. Male journalists who exposed political sleaze often adopted explicitly female discourses or pseudonyms. For example, in 1948 a group of renegade reporters including the columnists Jorge Piño Sandoval and Renato Leduc, the cartoonist Antonio Arias Bernal, and the dramatist and actor Tomas Perrín established the satirical magazine *Presente*.⁸⁷ The publication rode a wave of public discontent over monetary devaluation, rising prices, and official corruption, and it was phenomenally successful.⁸⁸ At its peak it was reputed to sell 182,000 copies or nine times the circulation of most political

⁸⁴ Milton Castellano Everardo, *Del Grijalva al Colorado, Recuerdos y vivencias de un político* (Mexico City, 1994), 102. AGN, DGIPS Caja 2917 A; AGN, Dirección Federal de Seguridad (DFS), Versión Pública, José Manuel Elizondo; AGN, DFS, Versión Pública, Sergio Novelo; AGN, Presidentes, Gustavo Díaz Ordaz (GDO), Caja 253; AGN, ARC, 704/259.

⁸⁵ See *Buro de Investigación Política*, Jan 28 1957, which interrogated *El Universal*’s front-page article on “The Future President.” The article discussed a “*madrugete*” by a mysterious “high figure” in Mexican politics.

⁸⁶ In fact the Buro de Investigación Política’s readership was so select, Horacio Quiñones would distribute hand-drawn Christmas cards to all subscribers.

⁸⁷ Mraz, *Looking for Mexico*, 153-200; Sara Minerva Luna Elizarrarás, *Corrupción, Legitimidad y Género en el México del “Milagro,” Discursos Públicos en Torno a la Figura del Presidente Adolfo Ruiz Cortinez*, Unpub. MA Thesis, 2012, 41-53.

⁸⁸ For the context see AGN, DGIPS, Caja 112, Exp. 2.

magazines. Key to the publication's success was a series of explicit revelations over the corrupt practices of President Alemán's "amigos."⁸⁹ Contrary to the national broadsheets, *Presente* named names. In Leduc's column, he made this break with expected practice clear. "There is a tendency in the press not to personalize issues, not to name names." In contrast in *Presente* "we will name names and we will personalize problems." Another article was even more explicit. "Presente and the people want to know NAMES," to do so, *Presente*'s journalists adopted and parodied that acceptable space for exposing private lives, the society pages. In doing so, they desanitized the *notas sociales* or politicized gossip.⁹⁰

For example, they published an exposé in July 1948 of treasury minister, Ramón Beteta's ill-gotten gains. The piece was presented as a dull pump piece on Beteta's new house, entitled "Como es el hermoso palacio de Beteta" [What is the beautiful palace of Beteta like?]. It was written by Piño Sandoval under one of his many pseudonyms, and it was adorned by an impressive picture of the residence. Like orthodox society pages, the article started by fawning over the house's conspicuous luxury. It was huge (484 square meters); it was expensive (at least 1.14 million pesos); and it contained eight bedrooms, a garage, a library, an office, a kitchen, a walk-in fridge, servants' quarters, and a white marble swimming pool imported from Italy. But unlike the inoffensive *notas sociales*, this article had bite. Piño overstepped the bounds of private life by explicitly revealing the location of the house (Zuñiga 205) and the source of Beteta's new-found wealth. According to the piece, Manuel Suárez, a close business associate of the president, had given the house to the treasury minister in a simulated sale. Suárez had also given Beteta's former boss, a similar property just outside the Morelos holiday retreat of Tepoztlán.

⁸⁹ Confidential U.S. State Department Central Files, Mexico,, Internal Affairs, 1945-49 Roll 32, Report on *Presente*, Sept. 10, 1948; *Presente*, Mar. 17, 1949.

⁹⁰ *Presente*, Aug. 18, 1948; *Presente*, Jul. 28, 1948.

Beteta was now so rich, he was doing the same, offering his secretary a 70,000 pesos house in return for her silence.⁹¹ The following week, Piño did a similar exposé of Alemán's law school friend and alleged pimp Enrique Parra. Again, it was a parody of the orthodox *notas sociales*. Piño published a picture of Parra's magnificent new residence and publicized its address (Hegel 315, Polanco), its price (3 million pesos), and its lavish furnishings. And again, he investigated the origins of Parra's wealth, linking him to land fraud in Mexico City, generous state-backed loans, and special official deals.⁹²

If *Presente's* exposés of official corruption subverted gender norms and embraced gossip, government censorship of the magazine sought to reinforce the rules of the game. Following the revelations, the capital's newspapers started to publish a rash of paid inserts by shadowy, probably fictional, groups variously calling themselves the National Orientation Centre and the Committee for Struggle Against Murmuración [Gossip]. These inserts were broadly similar. They defended the government against accusations of economic incompetence and corruption. They also went on the offensive, attacking a new figure in Mexican politics, whom they termed “el murmurador” or the gossip. They claimed that “the gossip” was taking advantage of economic problems to “go on to the street and spread slander and alarm.” He aimed not to help and improve the Mexican economy, but to undermine it. “He leaves his machine to gossip. He leaves an urgent meeting to gossip. He abandons his children and prefers the streets to spread his gossip. He who gossips never works, for gossip needs leisure.”⁹³ Newspaper columnists took up this trope. *La Prensa* ran an editorial entitled “Pro-Confidence and Against Gossip” which

⁹¹ *Presente*, Jul. 28, 1948.

⁹² *Presente*, Aug. 4, 1948.

⁹³ *Presente*, Aug. 11, 1948.

lauded the goals of this hurriedly assembled group. In another article, journalists claimed that those who did not receive a cañonazo [literally a cannon blast a term used to denote a pay-off] were indulging in a “subterranean campaign of gossip to attack the government.”⁹⁴

The anti-*murmuración* campaign made the gendered boundaries of the public sphere explicit. Like other words for gossip, *murmuración* had gendered connotations. *Murmuración* was practiced by women, in the home, at the well, or in the market. It mixed the private and the public, unsubstantiated rumors and well-known facts. As such, it stood in opposition to the public sphere, which was held to be objective, practiced by men, and transmitted by the printed word. Campaigners embedded these understandings in their propaganda. *Murmuración* was described, like “weeping and blasphemy” as “not the brave attitude of a man,” not the refrain of a “MAN OF THE STREET.”⁹⁵ By attacking *murmuración*, journalists and government propagandists not only attempted to denigrate the popular tales of government incompetence and corruption but shore up the boundaries of what should be treated as both appropriate male behavior and proper news. Poking around in officials’ private lives, revealing their private palaces and vast fortunes was neither.

Another means to expose government corruption was to adopt a female pseudonym. This was most evident in Oaxaca City’s satirical newspaper, *El Chapulín*.⁹⁶ *El Chapulín* was a scrappy, poorly printed weekly produced by a small gang of self-consciously bohemian intellectuals from 1937 until the late 1960s. It was directed by the taxi driver Alfredo “El Chapulín” Ramírez and written by the railway worker and aspiring poet Alfonso Saavedra and a

⁹⁴ *La Prensa*, Aug. 30, 1948; *La Prensa*, Aug 12, 1948; *La Prensa*, Aug. 14, 1948. AGN, DGIPS, 111/Exp.2, El Murmurador.

⁹⁵ *La Prensa*, Aug. 12, 1948.

⁹⁶ For another example, see Edward Wright Rios, *Searching for Madre Matiana, Prophecy and Popular Culture in Modern Mexico* (Albuquerque, 2014), 153-92.

former rural teacher named Guillermo Villa Casteñeda. For over thirty years, *El Chapulín* maintained a consistently anti-establishment tone, attacking corrupt local authorities, exposing inefficient public policies, and supporting a succession of belligerent civic movements. All tiers of society read the paper from bourgeois lawyers, through local students to artisans and workers. Like the Tlaxcala newspaper *Don Roque*, the publication had particularly strong links to its female readers, and in particular the female stall owners or *locatarias* who dominated the provincial center's markets. Ramírez admitted that he acquired much of the newspaper's content from conversations and rumors picked up at the local markets; female merchants carried copies of the weekly at their stalls; and the paper backed the stallholders' union in their periodic confrontations with local politicians and tax collectors. In fact, Ramírez was so popular among the *locatarias*, he visited the market every day and was provided with free food and drink.⁹⁷

Despite the strong female readership, Ramírez's strategies for presenting stories of official corruption were still shaped by gendered understandings of public writing. To escape charges of slander or *libertinaje* front-page stories avoided the direct naming of functionaries. Instead, they revealed the officials' identities through a jokey game of Guess Who? At times, nicknames sufficed. The 1950s mayor, who was a well-known protector of the city's brothels, was called "Burruchurtu," a play on "burro" [donkey] and the name of the Mexico City mayor, Ernesto Uruchurtu. Other times, the hints were opaquer. An overcharging merchant was described as "a man with a citric name." Was this Austreberto Aragon also known by his rhyming nickname "La Paleta Limón" [The lime popsicle]?⁹⁸ But, the most scandalous stories were reserved for the inside pages, and in particular the "Entre Comadres" or "Between

⁹⁷ On Oaxaca City's locatarios see Smith, *Pistoleros*, 271-3. On *El Chapulín* see *Oaxaca en México*, Apr. 1965; Interview with Gabriel Quintas, Jul 2012; Interview with Claudio Sánchez, Jul. 2012.

⁹⁸ *Carteles del Sur*, Oct. 4, 1966; *El Chapulín*, Feb. 22, 1956.

Godmothers” column. This was structured as an imagined conversation between two middle-aged women. Here, Ramírez overtly revealed the names, night-time pastimes, drunken escapades, and corrupt practices of the city’s officials. In doing so, he distanced himself from these accusations by placing them in the mouths of a couple of stereotypically gossipy women. In one of his rare interviews, Ramírez admitted that the front-page stories were light appetizers, the “Entre Comadres” column was the “main course.”⁹⁹

If male journalists sometimes used female discourses or pseudonyms to expose official corruption, women also developed other strategies for speaking in public. During the 1940s and 1950s, the most common approach was to use the crime pages or *nota roja*. Not only were the crime pages more open spaces than the front-page news or the political columns, but women could also harness masculine ideas about female vulnerability and weakness in those pages both to speak truth to power and to achieve tangible effects.¹⁰⁰ For example, on 20 November 1944, passing pedestrians found a teenage shop worker Elvira Anchondo dead in the back of a car. Suspicion immediately fell on Elvira’s boyfriend and the owner of the car, Hector Bailón Acosta. Unlike Elvira, he came from a respected and wealthy Ciudad Juárez family. According to the police who arrested him, he immediately confessed to the crime. He claimed that after drinking a few beers with Elvira at the Monte Carlo casino, he took her to a secluded spot by the agricultural college. Here he tried to rape her. She fought back; he beat, strangled, and killed her. The police chief claimed that there were bruises to her face, neck, and body. Her underwear had also been found outside the car. And Bailón repeated the confession in front of six witnesses at the local hospital. At this point, the murderer’s well-connected relatives got involved. One uncle,

⁹⁹ *Carteles del Sur*, Oct. 4, 1966; *El Momento*, Feb. 3, 1938; *El Chapulín*, Dec. 28, 1953.

¹⁰⁰ Pablo Piccato, “Murders of the Nota Roja: Truth and Justice in Mexican Crime News,” *Past and Present*, 223 (2014): 195-231. Pablo Piccato, *A History of Infamy*, p. 14.

a lawyer called Salomón Acosta Bailón took charge of his defense, arguing that police had fabricated the confession. He also claimed that his nephew was suffering from “mental paralysis” and should be moved to a private room in the psych wing of the hospital. Another uncle, a doctor called Salvador Acosta Bailón, called in medics to do a post-mortem examination of the body. They now claimed that there was no evidence of rape and Elvira had died from carbon monoxide poisoning.¹⁰¹

Over the next month, the local newspaper *El Fronterizo* made the Anchondo case a cause célèbre and harnessed class animosities to attack what it portrayed as a corrupt and elitist judicial system.¹⁰² They even gave Bailón a name “the Jackal.” But the paper’s coverage also played on the city’s shifting conceptions of gender and, by doing so, offered women a space to voice their concerns. On the one hand, they employed traditional tropes of female vulnerability to demand that the police and judges impart justice correctly. Standing before a crowd of other neighborhood women, they quoted Elvira’s mother as pleading that “the men of Juárez stand up and also punish this crime.”¹⁰³ But, on the other hand, the Anchondo case also provided space for journalists to emphasize the power and independence of the city’s women. They highlighted that Elvira came from a female-only household; they emphasized her mother’s coterie of supportive female friends; they ran stories on her female workmates; and they focused in on the story of the pistol wielding El Paso mother, who had first accused Bailón of attempted rape.¹⁰⁴ They also published dozens of letters by female readers, who sympathized with Elvira’s mother, told

¹⁰¹ *El Fronterizo*, Dec. 23, 1944; *El Fronterizo*, Dec. 24, 1944; *El Fronterizo*, Dec. 28, 1945.

¹⁰² *El Fronterizo*, Dec. 22, 1944; *El Fronterizo*, Dec. 23, 1944.

¹⁰³ *El Fronterizo*, Jan. 2, 1945.

¹⁰⁴ *El Fronterizo*, Dec. 22, 1944; *El Fronterizo*, Dec. 23, 1944.

similar tales of male violence, and made open accusations against politicians, the police, and the city elite.¹⁰⁵

If the *nota roja* provided an acceptable space for women to talk politics *en masse*, by the 1960s, a handful of individual female journalists had also started to reframe or remake the society pages. Perhaps the best example is the radical singer-songwriter and journalist Judith Reyes. Reyes was not your average middle-class, university educated *nota social* scribe. She was a single mother who came from a poor Tamaulipas family. During the 1960s she became a transient dancehall singer and a staunch supporter of Chihuahua's radical peasant. After promising a group of peasants to devote her career to exposing their problems, she found a job in the local Parral newspaper *El Monitor*.¹⁰⁶ Here, she was given the usual female task of society reporter and in August 1961, she started writing a column, "Ubicua y yo" [Ubiquitous and I]. At one level, the column contained traditional society fare. Topics included baptisms, weddings, *quinceañeras* and exclusive charity events. The tone was exaggerated flattery. Columns were designed to appease the upper classes and instruct non-elites in the subtle divisions of social hierarchy. Reyes filled this task well. "The radiant Irma Espinosa yesterday attended a hen party put on by her beautiful friends.... She will marry Efraín Prieto on 23 September. We note that those that attended included Yolanda Loya and Rosita Urquidi." Or "The arrival of a baby in the house is always good news. The birth of Salustio González will bring happiness and joy. Our congratulations." At another level, "Ubicua y yo" was no traditional society column. And

¹⁰⁵ *El Fronterizo*, Dec. 24 1944, *El Fronterizo*, Dec. 26, 1944, *El Fronterizo*, Dec 28, 1944, *El Fronterizo*, Jan. 6 1945, *El Fronterizo*, Jan. 8 1945. For another story of the way in which women could use the crime pages to voice their grievances, see the story of Ema Martínez, who shot a senator on the steps of the senate in 1959 to demonstrate against her sexual abuse. Pablo Piccato, "Pistoleros, Ley Fuga, and Uncertainty in Public Debates about Murder in Twentieth-Century Mexico" in Paul Gillingham and Benjamin T. Smith (eds.), *Dictablada: Politics, Work, and Culture in Mexico, 1938–1968* (Durham, 2014), 321-40.

¹⁰⁶ Liliana García Sánchez, *Judith Reyes, Una mujer de canto revolucionario* (Mexico City, 2007); Judith Reyes, *La Otra Cara de la Patria*, (Mexico City, 1974).

between this formulaic social news, Reyes regularly inserted items that revealed her more radical agenda. Some were extremely general. She wrote approvingly of the state's controversial free textbook plan; she applauded Fidel Castro's campaign to eliminate hunger, and she disapproved of the United States' recent nuclear tests. Others were small-scale exposés of local malpractice. In November 1961, she related the story of José María Labrado, a miner from the nearby town of Santa Barbara. He had worked for the US mining giant, ASARCO, for a decade and had recently been sacked without severance pay or benefits. The local union rep refused to stand up for him. So, Reyes used her column to start a collection for his food and medicine. The following month, she related the story of Aureliano Muñiz García, who was hospitalized after two men stabbed him. She asked why the local authorities were not investigating the crime and suggested that the attackers were relatives of the head of police. She also cast an ironic eye over broader political problems. "At last the PRI loses an election" she titled her take on the loss of the PRI candidate for Ciudad Juárez's carnival queen. "Perhaps we could make him ambassador?" she greeted news that a particularly corrupt governor was seeking asylum in the United States.¹⁰⁷

Reyes's politicization of the society pages was the prelude to broader changes within Mexico's newsrooms. The following year, Reyes herself would go on to found a radical pro-peasant fortnightly, *Acción*. Here, she embraced her transgressive role as a critical female journalist, entitling her new column—shorn of its dull society content—as "Taconazos" or blows from a high-heeled shoe. Throughout the decade, female journalists would use their curtailed spaces in order to talk politics. During the 1968 student movement, Elena Poniatowska used her column in the *Novedades*'s cultural section to applaud previous student uprisings, thus subtly subverting condemnatory government rhetoric. And Mercedes Padrés used the cover of

¹⁰⁷ *El Monitor*, Sept. 1, 1961; *El Monitor*, Sept. 8 1961; *El Monitor*, Nov. 6, 1961; *El Monitor*, Dec 8 ,1961; *El Monitor*, Dec. 15, 1961.

Sucesos's human-interest stories to explore the lives of the low-income workers, cabaret servers, and women forced into prostitution and to reveal the political structures than made such exploitation possible.¹⁰⁸ Such subversions undermined the traditional newsroom divisions. By the 1970s, many women started to join newspapers as news reporters, political writers, and columnists. By the end of the decade, as many as a third of Mexico's journalists were women—although many were still employed in acceptable spaces such as lifestyle, romance, fashion, and TV gossip sections.¹⁰⁹

Conclusion and Epilogue

During the Porfiriato, ideas about gender roles shaped the public sphere. Acceptable public discourse and journalism were inextricably linked to masculine honor. Unacceptable public speech infringed the private sphere, was termed gossip, and was connected to ideas of femininity. By the 1940s, such ideas still shaped the division of labor in the newsroom. Men wrote about serious news, crime, and political journalism, while women were relegated to the domestic and society pages. Such ideas even helped limit the ambit of political writing. Keen to avoid accusations of interfering in the private sphere, political journalists avoided naming names and exposing corruption and instead developed a private, semi-ironic political jargon that was inaccessible to most readers. Ideas of gender also shaped the ways in which journalists were able to subvert acceptable political writing. Some male writers parodied the society pages in order to show the link between private wealth and public corruption. Others adopted female voices in order distance themselves from gossipy accusations of dishonesty or sleaze. And by the 1960s,

¹⁰⁸ Claire Brewster, *Responding to Crisis in Contemporary Mexico, The Political Writings of Paz, Fuentes, Monsiváis and Poniatowska* (Tucson, 2005), 87; Padres, *El Diario*, 163.

¹⁰⁹ John Spicer Nichols, *Coyotes of the Press: Professionalization of Mexican Journalists*, Unpubl. Ph.D Thesis, University of Minnesota, 1979, 74; Egan, "Entrevistas con periodistas mujeres"; López Hernández, *Letras Femeninas*, 64-6.

some women had started to undermine traditional female sections, like the society pages, and intersperse dull everyday stories with stronger political content.

In more theoretical terms, the article demonstrates the utility of harnessing gendered thinking about the public sphere to study the bonds linking politics, public speech, and society in countries, where both elites and foreigners have played down the force and importance of the printed word.¹¹⁰ Mexican officials and commentators developed their own culturally-bound rules of the game. These relied on distinct ideas of public and private space, which in turn were enshrined in a self-enforcing matrix of sociabilities, values, and language. But, patterns and divisions, similar to those highlighted by scholars of Europe and the United States, excluded groups, shaped accepted discourse, and molded its destabilization. If the article tells us something about the public sphere, it also reveals something about gender dynamics. The public/private dichotomy structured relations between men and women. But, this did not remain static. As a semiotic construction, it was continually challenged by writing in the press. Here, women hijacked acceptable forums for public speech (like the *nota roja* and the society pages), demanded that their voices were heard, and in doing so started to adjust the boundaries between public and private.

Furthermore, though gender divisions no longer structure Mexican newsrooms and many women are now editors, political writers, and news reporters, such presumptions still cast their

¹¹⁰ Historians from these countries have obviously been taking journalism seriously for a long time. (See, in Mexico, for example the path-breaking work of Celia del Palacio Montiel, (ed.) *Rompecabezas de Papel: La Prensa y el Periodismo desde las Regiones de México, Siglos XIX y XX* (Guadalajara, 2006); Celia del Palacio Montiel, (ed.) *Siete Regiones de la Prensa en México, 1792–1950*, (Guadalajara: 2006); Celia del Palacio Montiel, (ed.) *Violencia y Periodismo Regional en México* (Mexico City, 2015). Yet, this has only recently translated into extensive English-language studies. For the shift in media studies see James Curran and Myung-Jin Park, (eds.) *De-Westernizing Media Studies* (London, 2000). For good examples of recent historical literature see Amelia Bonea, *The News of Empire: Telegraphy, Journalism, and the Politics of Reporting in Colonial India, c. 1830–1900* (New York: OUP, 2016); James Cane, *The Fourth Enemy: Journalism and Power in the Making of Peronist Argentina, 1930–1955* (University Park, 2011).

shadow over Mexican journalism. On the one hand, the boozy world of heavy drinking, bar-room friendships, and cantina chats still links politicians and journalists. These are still the places where deals are made and official publicity plans and cash-filled envelopes are exchanged.¹¹¹ Yet, now many female journalists have managed to use their exclusion from these spaces to their advantage. In fact, Mexico's three most candid and outspoken reporters—Lydia Cacho, Anabel Hernández, and Carmen Aristegui—are women who stake their claims to independence on not being part of the *oficialista* journalist world. Notions of the boundaries between acceptable journalism and gossip continue to frame Mexico's high-profile problems with the violent censorship of the press. Over the past decade, politicians and drug traffickers have murdered over 100 reporters. Mexico is the most dangerous country to be a journalist outside the Middle East and is currently ranked 149th in Reporters Without Borders World Press Freedom Index.¹¹² Some of these murders are pragmatic hits designed to prevent harmful news hitting the newsstands. Others are themselves forms of communication, designed to signal assertions of political power. Yet, others still are visceral emotional reactions to perceived infringements of journalistic norms. Politicians and criminals murder writers in revenge for what they see as reporters overstepping the boundaries of private life, denigrating their honor, and indulging in gossip.¹¹³ Women are at the frontline of such censorship. Attacks on female journalists have

¹¹¹ The following leaked video showed the head of La Familia Michoacana, Servando Gómez Martínez aka “La Tuta,” handing over money to two journalists. “VIDEO exhibe a dos periodistas, de Televisa y agencia Esquema, recibiendo dinero de “La Tuta”” *SinEmbargo*, Sept 22, 2014, <http://www.sinembargo.mx/22-09-2014/1123842> Consulted Jun. 2017. Consulted Jun. 2017; In 2015 gunmen shot a leading Zeta who was meeting the journalist, Juan Heriberto Santos Cabrera in a nightclub/bar. Lourdes López, Cesan a periodistas por nexus con zetas, *Excélsior*, Aug. 14, 2015, <http://www.excelsior.com.mx/nacional/2015/08/14/1039987> Consulted Jun. 2017.

¹¹² “Reporters without Borders: Ranking,” <https://rsf.org/en/ranking#>. Consulted Jun. 2017.

¹¹³ For a shocking recent example, see the murder of the Sinaloa comedian, Juan Luis Laguna Rosale, “El Pirata,” allegedly killed for mocking the head of the Cartel Jalisco Nueva Generación. Chivis Martínez, “Who was “El Pirata de Culiacán“ and why was he murdered?” *Borderland Beat*, Dec. 19, 2017. <http://www.borderlandbeat.com/2017/12/who-was-el-pirata-de-culiacan-and-why.html> Consulted Jan. 14, 2018.

increased by a staggering 2200 per cent between 2002 and 2013. And many of the men who have been killed have been dismissed as “chismoso” or gossipy.¹¹⁴ Norms of public speech, forged in the nineteenth century, redirected during the post-revolutionary period, and partially overturned during the 1970s, still cast a long shadow.

Endnotes

¹¹⁴ Mark Browne, Mexico “One of The World’s Most Dangerous Places for Journalists,” CNSNews, May 12, 2016, <http://www.cnsnews.com/news/article/mark-browne/journalists-threatened-authorities-often-implicated-mexico-one-worlds-most>; Paul Imison, “How Veracruz Became the Most Dangerous State in Mexico for Journalists,” *Vice Magazine*, Aug. 17, 2015, <https://news.vice.com/article/how-veracruz-became-the-most-dangerous-state-in-mexico-for-journalists>; “La Foto de Rubén Espinosa que Encabronó al Gobernador de Veracruz,” *SinEmbargo*, Aug. 2, 2015, <http://www.sinembargo.mx/02-08-2015/1436027>, <http://desarmadorpolitico.blogspot.co.uk/2015/01/a-los-periodistas-los-matan-por.html>. Consulted Jun. 2017.