

Soldaderas and the Making of Revolutionary Spaces

Junto a las grandes tropas de Francisco Villa, Emiliano Zapata y Venustiano Carranza, más de mil novecientos líderes lucharon en bandas rebeldes. Las soldaderas pululan en las fotografías. Multitud anónima, comparsas, al parecer telón de fondo, sólo hacen bulto, pero sin ellas los soldados no hubieran comido ni dormido ni peleado.

[Together with the great troops of Francisco Villa, Emiliano Zapata and Venustiano Carranza, more than one thousand nine hundred leaders fought in rebel bands. The soldaderas hovered in the photographs. An anonymous multitude, groups in the background, they only form a blurry shape, but without these women the soldiers would not have eaten, slept or fought].

—Elena Poniatowska, *Las soldaderas*

Elena Poniatowska chose this photograph (see Fig 1.1) as the cover of her important book on the participation of soldaderas, the thousands of women who accompanied troops of male soldiers and acted in a wide range of capacities, during the Mexican Revolution. Originally thought to have been taken between 1910 and 1914 by Agustín Casasola, it is one of the most widely disseminated portrayals of the soldaderas. Indeed, the image contains all the elements Roland Barthes might consider relevant for both a journalistic and posed photograph. In his book, *Camera Lucida*, Barthes suggests that for the photographer, the best picture would be taken when that subject is not aware of the camera, thus capturing the original and unaffected state of the subject (32).



FIGURE 1.1. "Soldaderas on the platform at the Buenavista train station," México City, D.F., April 1912.

It is clear that certain figures in this photograph are caught unaware, while other women are very much conscious that they are being photographed, and are in fact posing, or looking directly into the camera. The woman to the left, whose image alone has been cropped and reproduced innumerable times, is hanging from the train and wears a rather desperate expression on her face. Is she looking for her *soldado*? Is she simply a vendor looking to sell her wares, or is she looking for trouble? Her ambiguous expression, one that is simultaneously worried and reminiscent of the mischievous stereotype we see of the soldadera in so many texts, is emblematic of the very ambiguous nature of the soldadera herself. Unlike this random shot, the young pregnant woman to the right is very much aware of the photographer capturing her image. Barthes describes the process of posing and becoming an image as a self-constitutive act, claiming that "once I feel myself observed by the lens, everything changes: I constitute myself in the process of 'posing,' I instantaneously make another body for myself, I transform myself in advance into an image" (10). Although her head is slightly bent, she is looking directly at us, squinting as if the sun were in her eyes, or as if she were uncomfortable with being photographed. Is this timidity, like Poniatowska describes below, or annoyance? Behind her a woman with a *rebozo*¹ covering her head is

slightly out of focus, but likewise looks demurely into the camera, posing for what might be her single moment of anonymous immortality. The whole scene, though typical of those we have come to associate with the Mexican Revolution of 1910, is nonetheless missing some of the vital elements: soldiers, rifles, and horses.

Poniatowska describes these photographs as a contradiction to the kind of story told by the canonical authors of the Mexican Revolution. In the following passage from her book *Las soldaderas*, she remarks on the vision projected by Casasola's images and how they undermine archetypal figures like "La Pintada" provided by Mariano Azuela's classic revolutionary novel *Los de abajo* (1915), the model on which México's premier film diva María Félix's² character "La Cucaracha" (1959) was based:

En las fotografías de Agustín Casasola, las mujeres con sus enaguas de percal, sus blusas blancas, sus caritas lavadas, su mirada baja, para que no se les vea la vergüenza en los ojos, su candor [. . .] sus manos morenas deteniendo la bolsa del mandado o aprestándose para entregarle el máuser al compañero, no parecen las fieras malhabladas y vulgares que pintan los autores de la Revolución mexicana.

[In the photograph by Agustín Casasola, the women with their percale petticoats, their white blouses, scrubbed faces, lowered gaze hiding the shame in their eyes, their candor [. . .] their brown hands holding the money pouch or rushing to pass their partner his Mauser, do not seem like the foul-mouthed, vulgar beasts the authors of the Mexican Revolution would make them out to be]. (13)

This photograph reveals a fundamental ambiguity: we see the "caritas lavadas," "blusas blancas," "enaguas de percal," "mirada baja" and "candor" while we simultaneously observe what might be either the weariness of their dress or the deterioration of the image. We also notice that women are caught unaware as pieces of the revolutionary background, and in the foreground, as protagonists and subjects "becoming" images before the click of the camera shutter is completed.

Soldaderas constituted the "anonymous multitude" and "blurry shapes" that helped to make the Mexican Revolution of 1910 (which preceded both the Russian and Cuban Revolutions) a reality. Poniatowska lauds the role of photography in preserving the legacy of the soldaderas and laments that were it not for the work of Agustín Casasola, Jorge Guerra, and the "kilometers" of film shot by Salvador Toscano, the presence of these women would be lost because history has only denigrated them (21). She compiled many of

these photographs into a book which functions as a cultural and historical memoir, poetically splicing together bits and pieces from novels, corridos, history, and revolutionary chronicles in a disjointed and almost miscellaneous fashion, not unlike the haphazard way in which the soldadera traveled and has been remembered. She, like myself and many others, laments both the historical and cultural representation of these women as miserable camp followers who were not much more than prostitutes, troublemaking and vulgar “cucarachas,” or sweet-faced “adelitas” patiently waiting for their men to come home. These photographs, however, reveal something more than the histories related to us through revolutionary novels, chronicles, and films; they reveal a presence that has been effaced, misunderstood, maligned, and distorted, but that nevertheless *existed*.

Both Susan Sontag and Roland Barthes suggest one axiomatic truth: photography provides proof of what at one point existed at a moment in time. Barthes states that “[e]very photograph is a certificate of presence” (87) and Sontag claims that “[p]hotographs furnish evidence” (5). These blunt aphorisms become undeniably true in the case of the soldadera as they are almost the sole empirical testament to their existence; but more important, they are the closest approximations to what might have constituted their reality. This photograph is in fact witness to their multiple stories, to their roles in the background as what Poniatowska calls “bultitos de miseria” [bundles of misery] as well as in the foreground: as nurses, generals, warriors, spies, cooks, wives, mothers, daughters, lovers, prostitutes, and companions. It also speaks to the forced, improvised, or even arbitrary nature of their participation in addition to their willed and conscious involvement. By posing for photographs, they created images and constituted their subjectivity; by deflecting their gaze from the intrusiveness of the camera, they constituted themselves as part of the background.

This one image single-handedly emblemizes and obscures the legacy of the soldadera. As it turns out, this photograph has traveled through historical memory and was not even taken by Agustín Víctor Casasola at all, but, as John Mraz affirms in his book on the Casasola legacy in Mexican photography, by Gerónimo Hernández (*Photographing the Mexican Revolution* 240). It has been interpreted and misinterpreted as an icon of revolutionary womanhood in what Mraz calls a “condensed comedy of errors” (240). It first appeared on the cover of the newspaper *Nueva Era* on April 8, 1912, where the “cutline proclaimed, ‘I will defend my Juan’” (240). It subsequently disappeared only to reappear thirty years later in Gustavo Casasola’s (Agustín’s brother) compilation published in 1942, *Historia gráfica de la Revolución*, labeled as “Adelita-la-soldadera” accompanied by the following information: “The soldadera has seen all of Mexico, crossing from border to border” (240). Indeed, the conflicting hypotheses regarding the origin of this image abound. Mraz confirms that it couldn’t have been taken in 1910 because there were

very few troop movements that year, but rather, was shot in 1912, at the Buena Vista Station in México City where troops were preparing to travel north in order to quell the rebellion of Pasqual Orozco (240).

Now that we know the historical “truth,” the empirical fact that situates this photograph in a specific time and place, does it tell us anything more about what it was like to be a soldadera, or if indeed these women, whose image has traveled “throughout the Americas, Europe and Asia,” actually were soldaderas at all (240)? Like the crack in the original glass negative, this broken image, often cropped to leave the other women out, constitutes an historical fragment, a flicker of knowledge, an alternative *saber*³ that allows us to meet these women and surmise their history. “I will defend my Juan” sounds like a romantic line from a film we would all like to see, but hardly constitutes any historical truth because these women occupied the slippery spaces in between the cavalry and the *retaguardia* [rearguard], the immobile home and the ambulant hearth, the abnegating wife and the loose woman. With this image in mind, this chapter will argue that the mobile presence of the soldaderas affected women’s *place* in Mexican history, but also created, through the aleatory nature of a popular uprising, revolutionary *spaces* that led to a split from previous models of female behavior. I claim that this particular military intervention by the soldaderas, more than in previous wars, constituted a radically different ontological state marked by movement and the creation of a *habitus* in motion. That is, the oppositional tensions implicit in stasis and movement coincide with the mode in which the soldaderas *travel*.

Art, in all its forms and figurations, has been instrumental to remembering these women at the same time it has deformed their legacy. The first part of this book will examine the way the female body becomes the site of a powerful tropological discourse in revolutionary and post-revolutionary México, leading to my theoretical queries: why does her body constitute the site of such discursive tension? Why is the image of this figure, bandoliers across her chest, carrying both child and *molcajete*⁴ in her *rebozo*, braids flowing, synonymous with the Mexican Revolution, yet discursively and hence historically erased in the same gesture? How does this figure point to the fissures in the nation’s historical memory with regard to its public women? Soldaderas mark the limits of the rhetoric of the nation-state and their very nomenclature debases the real worth of female participation in war. The contradictions in the photographic images foreground the very paradoxical nature of the soldaderas’ historical invisibility, and yet, figural ubiquity. I will first explore the movement of the soldaderas and the importance of the train in their peripatetic migrations outside of the domestic domain into the public sphere as a concrete example of how they created a veritable motile *habitus*, or as James Clifford has theorized, a “dwelling-in-travel.” By breaking from traditional notions of female behavior,

they created what Diana Taylor would call a performative “scenario.” This scenario—which is repeatable, prosaic yet multivalent—would brand their place in the imaginary of Mexicans for generations to come. The following section will unpack some of the concepts that the example of inhabiting the train makes manifest: the creation of a scenario, “dwelling-in-travel” through revolutionary practices and tactics, and divergent occupations of place and space. I will then present a brief herstory that will outline what little is known about the *soldaderas*, and conclude by returning to the image examined at the beginning. The contemplation of this image will allow us to reconsider the role of photography in preserving their memory vis-à-vis the cultural products that showcase them in the following chapter.

Y se les fue el tren . . .⁵

Throughout the Revolution all the rail workers contributed to the cause, because the Mexican Revolution was made on the train-tracks.⁶

—Guillermo Treviño in *Documentary* by John Mraz,
Hechos sobre los rieles [Made on Rails] (1987)



FIGURE 1.2. “Soldier and soldaderas on the roof of railcar,” México, 1914.

One of the most important instruments of the Mexican Revolution was the locomotive, and many believe, as emphasized by railroad union leader Guillermo Treviño in John Mraz's documentary about the trains in México, that the Revolution was literally "made on the rails." That is to say, that it revolutionized war practices by transporting the arms, cavalry and of course the soldaderas on its rooftops; any of a dozen films featuring the soldadera during the Revolution will showcase the train as practically a character in the revolutionary drama. The soldaderas had no official texts: the trains were one of their texts, their "practiced places," whose image now resonates as the icon of one of most important revolutions of the twentieth century. They certainly "got on" the trains (albeit in unconventional fashions) by climbing onto the rooftops; but they also got in the cars with the animals, and some even tied planks below, hanging perilously in the lurch if the train hit a sharp curve.

Regarding the risks of the train's mobility, Michel De Certeau, in *The Practice of Everyday Life*, pronounces the following dictum which we could use to consider the ways in which the soldadera occupied the locomotive: "[t]o get in [the train], as always, there was a price to be paid. The historical threshold of beatitude: history exists where there is a price to be paid" (113). The soldaderas inhabited the trains, made a space out of a transient, marginalized place, lived through movement, not stasis; they blurred and even obliterated the frontiers between private and public spheres, creating a humble home out of a what for De Certeau is a bourgeois vehicle. However, the making of a space for De Certeau is also the unmaking of stasis, of a "proper" (what De Certeau calls a place) and is actualized as a vortex of conflicting variables of time and energy:

A space exists when one takes into consideration vectors of direction, velocities, and time variables [. . .] It is in a sense actuated by the ensemble of movements deployed within it. Space occurs as the effect produced by the operations that orient it, situate it, temporalize it, and make it function in a polyvalent unity of conflictual programs or contractual proximities [. . .] In contradistinction to the place, it has thus none of the univocity or stability of a "proper." (117)

Somehow, the soldaderas paradoxically accomplished both. They made and unmade the train as a place by defying its "proper" function but also by simultaneously domesticating it; the train operates as multiple "phatic topoi." By claiming it as a place, they created their own "proper" and embodied space, undoing the "proper" grounded by hegemonic groups.

The train in motion creates a dynamic relationship between the inside and the outside, the relative stasis of the railroad car, closed in by the

windows, and the constantly changing field of vision: “The machine is the *primum mobile*, the solitary god from which all the action proceeds. It not only divides spectators and beings, but also connects them; it is a mobile sym-bol [sic] between them, a tireless shifter, producing changes in the relationships between immobile elements” (113). The train paradoxically divides and connects simultaneously. This relationship, for De Certeau, is negotiated through the chiasm of the windowpane or the rail because it inverts the immobility of the inside with the mobility of the outside (112). However, in our case this division is rendered ambivalent, as it is not always clear who the spectators are. For De Certeau, the spectator is located within, gazing out and observing the countryside from a privileged position of speed and isolation. But this neglects that beyond the windowpane people are gazing back *onto* the train; the visual image of the revolutionary train in México with its troops cooking on the roof or hanging perilously below must have been impressive, carving out a place, and new revolutionary space in the national imaginary. De Certeau reminds us that the railroad combines dreams with technology and is haunted by the speculative, constituting “[a] strange moment in which a society fabricates spectators and transgressors of spaces, with saints and blessed souls placed in the halos-holes (*aureoles-alvéoles*) of its railway cars” (113). The train in México and Latin America in general did



FIGURE 1.3. “Soldaderas prepare food on the roof of a railcar,” México City, D.F., 1914.

invoke the speculative; it combined dreams with technology by symbolizing, in nationalist discourse, progress and change. It also allowed for movement, initially just of goods, but during the Revolution it provided for the movement of people who had hitherto remained secluded by poverty to their villages. It provoked the movement of ideas—and hope.

Like the Nahua notion of *olin* (a deified movement), the soldadera also creates relationships between oppositional elements, between life and death, between home and elsewhere, between patriarchy and female subjectivity, between stasis and movement. However compelling De Certeau's notion of "space" is, in addition to his vision of the train as a vehicle of modernity, this vision is limited in scope. Although the train functions as an object of mobility and travel, as a transgressor of space and of a proper place, its articulation in De Certeau is marked by a profoundly bourgeois notion of travel. Falling within the purview of James Clifford's objections to traditional Western conceptions of "travel" and "travelers," De Certeau's idea of train travel invokes a specific form of travel and a specific kind of traveler. While the image of the train has been troped in Latin America as a symbol of modernity and progress, the separation between spectator and object put forth by De Certeau becomes problematic when we consider the ways in which soldaderas and the *soldados* occupied the spaces within the body of the train, its "halos" and "holes": the windowpane and the rail become obsolete partitions. For De Certeau it is the bourgeois machine par excellence, where the people interred are surrounded by glass and iron: "The incarceration-vacation is over [. . .] There comes to an end the Robinson Crusoe adventure of the traveling noble soul that could believe itself intact because it was surrounded by glass and iron" (114). This bourgeois vision is severely problematized by the soldaderas (and soldiers) riding, living, and reproducing on the train's rooftop. It did not occur to him that the spectator would be *outside* of the train traveling on its roof, or in a windowless car with the livestock, or underneath its bowels perilously tied to a plank. This is how the soldaderas embodied this moving place. He does not imagine that the "noble soul" would still be intact when surrounded by, rather than steel and glass, the rudeness of nature, by the velocity of the wind. Her "nobility" is constituted by her emancipation from the metal and glass cage, she is incarcerated only by the elements. Soldaderas simultaneously turned the *primum mobile* into a home, a proper place, but also one of the most important spaces of the early twentieth century; they revolutionized the *primum mobile* by transforming it into a living organism.

The train, like the soldaderas, was utilized as a critical vehicle for making the Revolution a reality; she buckled under the weight of all her bundles, was at once a weapon, a way to move around and a home—or she was blown to bits. Indeed, by redefining and re-purposing the top of the train, they moved beyond the weight of a modernity that never came, and closer to an undefined,



FIGURE 1.4. "Federal soldiers and their families on the roof of the railcars," México City, D.F., 1914.

unimagined postmodernity. In a superbly written passage, Poniatowska utilizes the trope of the *soldadera* as a metaphor for understanding and appreciating the importance of the train as an icon in revolutionary México:

La locomotora es la gran heroína de la Revolución Mexicana. Soldadera ella misma, va confiada y resoplando, llega tarde, sí, pero es que viene muy cargada. Suelta todo el vapor y se asienta frente a los andenes para que vuelvan a penetrarla los hombres con el fusil en alto. Allí sube la tropa a sentársele encima. Ella aguanta todo, por eso las huestes enemigas quieren volarla por los aires

[The locomotive is the great heroine of the Mexican Revolution. A *soldadera* herself, she travels huffing and puffing but is confident; she arrives late, that is true, but she is quite burdened. She blows off steam and sits in front of the station when the men, with their rifles upright, penetrate her again. The troops climb up to sit themselves on top of her. She can support it all, even when the enemy army tries to blow her to smithereens]. (20)

In an interesting tropological triangulation, the train becomes figured as a soldadera, turning the sexualized trope of the train as phallic on its head by making it feminine. The train for Poniatowksa becomes another instantiation of the soldadera. Although the war took its toll, blew her to smithereens (“volarla por los aires”), she continued on, served as cover while her inhabitants patched her up, waited patiently while they laid more track in front of her.

Unlike De Certeau’s phallic notion of the train as a *primum mobile*, the train is more like a womb. As a vehicle of modernity, it returns to the most basic of functions. Denying the vanguard obsession with speed and technological progress, it is more like Poniwatoska’s trope: she straggles overburdened, moves slowly—*eppur si muove*—is monumental but mute, except when she screams her arrival or departure producing a frantic hysteria in her wake. For De Certeau, the train bears an almost god-like resemblance, huge and monumental; but it is a god undone when it is housed in the station and is “almost incongruous in its mute, idol-like inertia” (114). The train in revolutionary México is not undone by its temporary stasis; it respire, recovers, provides shade, and marks the landscape like a beautiful animal. The inertia of the idol does not undo her; it creates her. Like the soldadera who is incarcerated by her place in the cultural order, the train incarcerates its passengers, but then expels them like newborn children; each time the train stops its passengers are somewhere “else,” somewhere “new.” Like the soldadera, the train adapts itself to travel, to movement and change. Indeed, it domesticates this movement, becoming a place and space (what Guillermo Delgado L. would call a *sp/l/ace*) where the most quotidian actions take place: both the train and the soldadera revolutionized the Revolution. The train is a moving paradox: ancient and modern, dynamic and static. Like *olin*, it moves in and out of human, political and social dramas; like *olin*, its movement is necessary for the perseverance of human kind within an aleatory social revolution. This movement provides the precarious balance within the order of the cosmos.

My reading of the impact of the train in revolutionary México is manifest, for example, in the raw, documentary-style cinematic language of the film *La soldadera* (1967) by Mexican filmmaker José Bolaños. The film, which was inspired by John Reed’s chapter titled “Elizabetta” from his book *Insurgent Mexico* (which I will discuss at length in chapter 3), uses a neo-realist technique that purported to represent the “reality” of the Revolution with the train serving as a character alongside the soldadera. In multiple scenes when the train pulls into a station, we hear the diegetic sound of the steam engine as the only relevant sonic backdrop: the heavy breath of the train resembles the fatigued respiration of an animal, a beast of burden, and by

this token vivifies, and even humanizes, what was at one moment a symbol of man's technological progress. At another point in the film we witness the protagonist, the soldadera Lázara, give birth on top of the moving train, bringing new life into a home in flux. In yet another even more poignant moment, the soldaderas pray beneath a parked railcar, lighting candles for their soldiers who are engaged in battle. All the recognizable referents of daily life, which includes giving birth, praying, resting, and waiting, take place en route to somewhere else.

The way in which the soldaderas occupied the train provides us with a very concrete example of how they transformed the revolutionary landscape, and through revolutionary tactics and practices, dwelled and traveled simultaneously, unbinding traditional notions of domesticity and travel. This vibrant living in motion was not lost on the arts; as witnessed in Bolaños's movie, it is in all the films, novels and even corridos. The *mise-en-scène* presented to us in diverse forms of cultural production captures, however briefly, the radical nature of the new life forms that were in the midst of creating themselves. The trope of the soldadera slips in and out of focus, but its presence in the arts allows us as spectators, readers, and critics to appreciate what became



FIGURE 1.5. "Soldier and soldaderas in a train car," México, 1914.



FIGURE 1.6. “Federal soldiers, soldaderas and the railway administrator on the platform of the train,” México City, D.F., April 1913.

a profound, albeit ephemeral, moment of social change that took place on the road.

Revolutionary Practices on the Road

From the migrations of the Chichimecas and their encounters with the Toltecas as narrated in the *Historia Tolteca-Chichimeca* in the sixteenth century, to the founding of Tenochtitlan in the mythical spot where the eagle was seen devouring a snake on a cactus, travel in México has been a primordial

part of its chorographic, social, historical, and ritual imaginary. The idea of travel, however, has been generally envisaged within a very specific set of terms ranging from adventure and proselytization to conquest. In his book *Routes*, James Clifford challenges traditional notions of travel within Western epistemological frameworks by addressing our perceptions as well as its effects in the construction of culture and knowledge. Clifford suggests travel “denotes a range of material, spatial practices that produce knowledges, stories, traditions, compartments, musics, books, diaries, and other cultural expressions,” and that even the most exploitative and impoverished conditions of travel do “not entirely quell resistance or the emergence of diasporic and migrant cultures” (35). The appearance of peasant and middle-class women in Mexican public spheres discussed by Elena Poniatowska, Carlos Monsiváis, and Debra Castillo is conditioned by this notion of travel. They broke out of their homes and native communities and into the national imaginary. They traveled the countryside, coming into contact (many for the first time) with other communities throughout México. Clifford not only nuances the notion of travel by revealing its ideologically constructed nature, he also expands who can be considered a traveler:

And in this perspective the notion that certain classes of people are cosmopolitan (travelers) while the rest are local (natives) appears as the ideology of one (very powerful) cultural localization, the making of ‘natives,’ which I criticized at the outset [. . .] Rather what is at stake is a comparative cultural studies approach to specific histories, tactics, everyday practices of dwelling and traveling: traveling-in-dwelling, dwelling-in-traveling. (36)

Traditionally, these movements by military troops have not been considered travel because travel was defined by a specific class-consciousness: poor people and women did not travel in the way conquistadors, explorers, anthropologists, diplomats, and upper-class bourgeoisie did. The *soldaderas'* task was itinerant in nature: when the troops moved, so did the women who supported them. Unlike traditional notions of domesticity, they traveled and dwelled simultaneously, creating images and practices that mutually constitute and disavow each other. Clifford's notion of “traveling-in-dwelling” is nowhere more applicable than to the *soldadera*. Her specific yet anonymous history, her “tactics” and “practices” of dwelling through travel all contributed the forging of a new language.

As implied by this notion of simultaneous dwelling and travel, meaning is not just discursively constructed; the body and its interaction with space are extremely important in determining the nature of social structures and environments. In *The Archive and the Repertoire*, Diana Taylor points to the

limits of discourse by highlighting the importance of the body and the material in the production of meaning: “Instead of privileging texts and narratives, we could also look at scenarios as meaning-making paradigms that structure social environments, behaviors, and potential outcomes” (28). Taylor contributes to my understanding of the impact of the soldadera through her contention that performance moves beyond the linguistic/discursive realm because metaphors do not operate solely on the level of language: they are also embodied performances. Furthermore, Taylor underscores the importance of place because *scenarios* become encoded, transient places that are reproduced in order to create meaning: “In other words, scenarios exist as culturally specific imaginaries—sets of possibilities, ways of conceiving conflict, crisis, or resolution—activated with more or less theatricality. Unlike trope, which is a figure of speech, theatricality does not rely on language to transmit a set pattern of behavior or action” (13). By dwelling and traveling simultaneously, the soldaderas created very specific and recognizable *scenarios*.

The notions of “place” and “space” are highly contested issues that have contributed to a vibrant debate regarding dwelling, belonging and displacement. De Certeau defines place as an “instantaneous configuration of



FIGURE 1.7. “Madero’s troops in the patio of Buenavista train station,” México City, D.F., 1910.



FIGURE 1.8. “Soldiers and their families watching an opera,” México City, D.F., October 10, 1921.

positions,” which “implies an indication of stability” (117). No two things can be in the same location, or place (117). Conversely, when considering the traditional notion of place as “static,” John Agnew refers us to a more radical understanding that unbinds the reified notions of place, defining it instead in terms of a mobility that is “disruptive of place” and that “does not necessarily require long histories of sedentary habitation”—such as the case of migrant itineraries and commuting paths (327).⁷ Place, likewise, can be conceived of as a “locale,” such as a shopping mall or a vehicle (326). Agnew further questions traditional notions of “place” by pointing to humanist theorists who consider human agency as primary in the constitution of place and space: “places are woven together through space by movement and the network ties that produce places as changing constellations of human commitments, capacities, and strategies” (325). Furthermore, David Harvey claims that the strength of the classic Lefebvrian notion of place construction is that it “refuses to see materiality, representation and imagination as separate worlds [. . .] while simultaneously insisting that it is only in the social practices of daily life that the ultimate significance of all forms of activity is registered” (“From space to place and back again” 23). However, feminists de-emphasize human agency as central because “[p]lace is seen as

constituted out of space-spanning relationships, place-specific social forms, and a sense of place associated with the relative well-being, disruption, and experience of living somewhere” (Agnew 325). Finally, Guillermo Delgado L. makes a provocative suggestion that might circle this impasse, seeking to invoke indigeneity as a way in which Native people imagine space and place. He claims place and space, in the indigenous imaginary, do not lie in discrete opposition. He uses Andean languages as an example, and in particular focuses on the word “pacha”—a term that constitutes “one fused concept amidst several similar expressions, *sp/l/ace*” (1). That is, both place and space become mutually constitutive terms that are part of an effort to re-member the land, belonging, history, and knowledge.

Indeed, there has been much debate regarding the importance of place and space, but we can appreciate that both human agency and movement in the more radical considerations of place have blurred the boundaries between the two. Delgado’s neologism, *sp/l/ace*, pushes it one step forward (and back) through an incursion in indigeneity as a way to destabilize the place/space dialectic in order to consider other ways of conceiving of land, home, occupation and identity. Both Delgado and José Rabasa have pointed to indigenous cartography—where ritual migrations, important human occupations and sacred locations (both real and mythical) are part of identifying the land—as a way to unfetter Western notions of place and space as well as appreciate alternatives.



FIGURE 1.9. “Soldaderas at a military camp,” México City, D.F., 1914.

These debates about place and space make evident that *where* the “scenario” unfolds becomes critical, because despite the itinerancy of the actors, and the inconstant nature of the place (on top of a train, around a campfire, in the barracks, in a burnt-out hacienda, on the side of the road, in a ditch, under a tree), the scenario is recognizable. For this reason Taylor describes her notion of scenario as an “act of transfer, as a paradigm that is formulaic [. . .] and often banal because it leaves out complexity, reduces conflict to its stock elements, and encourages fantasies of participation” (54). However, this lack of complexity does not mean that the scenario will not “conjure up multiple deep-seated fears and fantasies” (54). What makes these scenarios so commanding is that they require embodiment, yet, “[t]he body in the scenario, however, has space to maneuver because it is not scripted [. . .] the scenario more fully allows us to keep both the social actor and the role in view simultaneously and thus recognize the uneasy fits and areas of tension” (55). It is these “uneasy fits” that create the possibilities for the soldaderas to inseminate change into the cultural economy that regulates their behavior and interprets their acts. We can appreciate, then, the way in which the *scenario* created by the soldadera is both formulaic and recognizable, yet open to changes. As we will see in the following chapters, soldaderas actively practiced an alternative language through the embodied reproduction of these scenarios, but also through the small changes inherent to each iteration of these new sp/l/aces.

In a similar gesture, De Certeau illumines the importance of occupying space by using the structures of trope in rhetoric, denominating these practices a “residing rhetoric” that must be, in Clifford’s words “discursively mapped and corporeally practiced [. . .] It must be worked, turned into a discrete social space, by embodied practices of interactive travel” (54). While for Hayden White “troping is the soul of discourse”—the mechanism which makes discursive expression and meaning possible—De Certeau employs the rhetoric of language in order to understand the syntax of daily life (*Tropics of Discourse* 2). Metaphors can be embodied and De Certeau uses the rhetorical operations of language as a hermeneutic for interpreting the quotidian. He links the performative with the tropological in a way that makes the praxis of daily life its own self-constitutive language, which like discourse, is full of its own metaphors. For this reason De Certeau claims that the practice of cooking or walking, for example, can be understood rhetorically because “[t]he art of ‘turning phrases’ finds an equivalent in an art of composing a path (tourner un parcours)” (100). Although his theorization of walking as a spatial practice is located within the context of the city (and not the countryside or the battleground as is the case with the soldaderas), I find it particularly enlightening with respect to the consumptive practices that, as with language, function tropologically. He claims that walking can be understood

through synecdoche and asyndeton: “Synecdoche expands a spatial element in order to make it play the role of a ‘more’ [. . .] and take its place [. . .] Asyndeton, by elision, creates a ‘less,’ opens gaps in the spatial continuum and retains only selected parts of it that amount almost to relics” (101). In this sense, the soldaderas “trudge” behind their juanes and the cavalry, carrying children on their backs, cooking beans over the fires, dragging along their bundles with things they often picked off the dead. These movements synecdochally become the dense details that replace the totality, transforming the singular bodies into one ambulant mass that “[w]alk[s], which alternately follows a path and has followers, creates a mobile organicity in the environment, a sequence of phatic topoi” (99).

Asyndeton cuts out the other aspects—joy, heroism, ferocity, dignity—and consequently it “undoes continuity and undercuts its plausibility” (101). In diverse cultural products we witness them trudging, suffering nobly, whining, cowering, skulking, and scheming, but we do not see them walking firmly to the *paredón* (firing wall), holding the rifle high, gently nursing a newborn child or wounded soldier. We are missing the “conjunctive loci” and consequently, “the figures of pedestrian rhetoric substitute trajectories



FIGURE 1.10. “Soldaderas departing from the ‘Piedad’ Barracks of the 180th Battalion with carts and artillery,” México City, D.F., 1914.

that have a mythical structure, at least if one understands by 'myth' [. . .] an allusive and fragmentary story whose gaps mesh with the social practices it symbolizes" (102). The ellipses in the gait of the soldaderas and the dust that billowed from their heavy footsteps shrouded them in myth, a reality which has been harshly inveighed by some scholars and cultural critics. These ellipses became the basis of a social injustice that not only misrepresented them; it marginalized them within the very social revolution they helped to effect. Deprived of political rights and military remuneration, they were also denied their place in the making of the Revolution and were not included in what is considered one of the most progressive (but unpracticed) constitutions of the twentieth century.

De Certeau maintains that "to walk is to lack a place" (103). Although it appears he privileges space-making over place, he underscores the very important act of embodiment, of occupying "static" places (cities, buildings, streets) through the dynamic practices of movement, walking, and inhabiting. While they walked, the soldaderas scavenged for food, cooked, cleaned, and reproduced. But they also sang, danced, nursed, spied, and fought valiantly. They left their "proper" homes and walked the countryside, the battlegrounds, the provincial villages, and the big cities. Lacking a "place" they were paradoxically omnipresent, consequently creating new "places" through movement, such as the tops of trains, burnt-out haciendas and itinerant campgrounds. They also forged new spaces, both figurative and real, by revising traditional female behavior (and the concomitant places which they traditionally occupied). The aesthetic realm, in its reproduction of this ambulant phenomenon, hints at this agency, highlights its urgency in the midst of wartime imperatives, delights in female valor and subsequent abjection, but only permits glimmers of alternative spaces while not naming them as such. In the end, unrecognized and unsung, the soldaderas "trudged" their way into history, and sadly right out of it, living and dying on the road.

Women and the Revolution—A Brief Herstory

Who was the soldadera? What was her actual role in the Revolution of 1910? The truth is we don't know much. Many are familiar with her *image* in a *rebozo*, bandoliers crisscrossing her chest, trudging along in the dust; this is the image that has been figured time and again in all forms of cultural production. Many would say they were wives, others servants, lovers, or prostitutes, but most commonly they are referred to as camp followers. Regardless of their official title, their participation in the Revolution became a means for them to travel, work independently as well as have different sexual partners. As their soldiers, or "juanés," perished, they were free to find new mates