

WRITING GENDER AND NATION;
EL ALBUM DE LA MUJER , 1883-1884

by

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Abstract

This thesis studies the intersection of print, nationalism, and gender in Porfirian Mexico. The primary source, *El Album de la Mujer*, was one of very few periodicals directed and written mainly by women during the 1880s in Mexico City. Political, legal, and cultural structures and assumptions during the Porfirian era significantly restricted access by women to the public world of print, politics, and national identity. But, *El Album de la Mujer*, entered into this sphere both in its form, as a public, written record, and in its content, devoted to venerating women and creating a space for them in the national community. The writers of *El Album* created and intertwined the history and destiny of women and nations. They expanded positivist and liberal ideas to portray women as worthy of national belonging, and as necessary to the progress of Mexico. In doing so, they challenged the gendered concepts of Mexican society and politics during the Porfiriato. Yet, they reimagined this public sphere, and created a national identity for women, as privileged members, in racial and class terms, of that society. Hence, along with studying the rethinking of gender and nation in the periodical, this thesis also considers how in its form and content, the periodical maintained and established social boundaries.

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In the thirteenth issue of the periodical, *El Album de la Mujer*, the director, Maria de Concepcion Gimeno de Flaquer, both created and lamented the history of women. She wrote, "Woman, who was once considered a thing, has since been considered only as a beautiful object; and woman cannot accept this sad condition, woman must be valued at what she is worth."¹ In another issue, she summarised this worth by proclaiming, "Woman is destined to be the grand figure of humanity...".² To retrieve and reposition women into the history and destiny of nations remained a constant theme in *El Album*, one of very few periodicals published by and for women in Mexico during the 1880s. In this journal, Gimeno de Flaquer and other contributing writers redirected contemporary ideas about morality, modernity, and nationhood, to focus on the virtues, capabilities, and importance of women in Porfirian Mexico. The very discourses that when used by politicians and male rhetoricians were meant to keep women quiet, as silent symbols or privately, modestly virtuous, in *El Album* provided a language with which to interpret, articulate, and participate in the public sphere of society and nation. Ultimately, they provided the language with which the identity of the Mexican woman was understood and constructed in the pages of the periodical.

¹ Gimeno de Flaquer, "La Mujer Hermosa," *El Album de la Mujer*, (hereafter *AM*), ano 1, num. 13, (2 de Diciembre de 1883), 195.

² Gimeno de Flaquer, "La Niña y la Madre," *AM*, año 2, núm.8, (24 de Febrero de 1884), 108.

Introduction: Gender, History, and Porfirian Mexico

The identity constructed in *El Album* can only be understood in relation to a larger national community, or in its political and social context. As a periodical for and by women, *El Album* was unusual on many levels. In both its form, as a permanent written record, and in its content, devoted to venerating and including women in terms of the nation, it transgressed popular ideas about the place of women in Porfirian Mexico. During the 1880s, the decade in which *El Album* was published, many discourses supported the separation of spheres, and, in effect, the enclosure and repression of women. In order to understand the social and historical significance of *El Album*, therefore, we need to more closely examine this historical setting.

Fundamental to the context of production of *El Album* was the politics of liberalism and modernization characteristic of the Porfirian era. While the specific ways concepts of gender underlay politics during the Porfiriato remain understudied, several feminist scholars, such as Carole Pateman, Joan Scott, and Joan Landes, continue to theorize a general relationship between liberalism, politics, and gender from their work in other geographical and temporal settings.³ They show how

³ Joan Wallach Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988).

Carole Pateman, *The Disorder of Women; Democracy, Feminism and Political Theory*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1989).

Joan B. Landes, *Women and the Public Sphere in the Age of the French Revolution*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988).

Western ideas about the “essential” or biological differences between men and women supported the exclusion of women from the public sphere of nation and politics. By the late nineteenth century, the rising domination of science supposedly gave new biological “proof” to the idea that women’s child-bearing capabilities destined them for a natural, maternal role. Tied to nature, her body, children, and the economic support of her husband or father, *woman* could never be the independent, rational, civilized, and free *man* essential to modern, democratic government. On the basis of their sex, therefore, women were excluded from the public sphere of the nation. Evidence of legal, economic, and cultural exclusion of women from this sphere during Porfirian Mexico supports not only the need for further examination of the intersection of liberalism and gender, but also provides sufficient evidence to apply these general insights about gender and liberalism to this period.

In Porfirian Mexico, positivism and theories of progress, (individual, national, and human), supported the exclusion of women from the public sphere. Drawing from the ideas of Spencer and Comte, Mexican positivists portrayed society as an organism moving along a natural path of progress towards an ideal of modern civilization (that much resembled the societies of northern Europe).⁴ Tension existed within positivist theory between inherent and acquired characteristics. Mexico, as a nation (the political body consummate with modernity), “had” civilization. And this

⁴ Carlos B. Gil, introduction to “Societies as Organisms” by Herbert Spencer,” *The Age of Porfirio Díaz; Selected Readings*, (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1977), 49.

civilization was measurable in both material and moral senses. Just as it had the material signs - a capitalist economy, a liberal government, the social, geographical and political frontiers, a history and a destiny, it also had national virtue. At the same time, however, while this civilization was inherent in Mexico, for the most part, it had yet to be uncovered. And since as one social unit, individuals, groups, and the nation could be interchanged, conflated, or separated, as convenience required, the most part usually meant most people. Mexico had not realized its destiny amongst the civilized because most people in Mexico as yet had not fulfilled their moral or material potential. But some had. Not surprisingly, according to their own theories, the positivists had. They were the specialists that would lead society up the road of progress.⁵ The public sphere of politics and nationhood was better left to those endowed for such pursuits. Given their undeveloped rational, material, and moral state, most men were excluded from this group. Given their nature, their sex, all women were excluded. Generally, the positivists agreed that the specialization of women was the moral condition of the nation, a morality that could be cultivated in the home. So a rhetoric that supported the ideals of oneness and nationhood, simultaneously promoted inequality.⁶ More important for the purposes of this thesis, it added to a discourse

⁵ William D. Raat, "Los intelectuales, el positivismo y la cuestion indígena," reprinted in *Cultura, Ideas y Mentalidades*, (México: El Colegio de México, 1992), 118.

⁶ Mary Kay Vaughan, *The State, Education, and Social Class in Mexico, 1880-1928*, (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1982), 32.

Vaughan shows how the educational policies of the Porfirian period reflected and supported inequality despite rhetoric of universal education. She examines race and class much more than gender bias, however.

that discounted women from participation in the public sphere of the nation.

Despite what would appear to be a fundamental relationship between concepts of gender and ideas of nationhood, politics and society during Porfirian Mexico, gender still receives relatively little attention in the historiography for this period. The relationship between notions of nationhood and concepts of gender continues to take a back seat to the influence of racism and classism on the political views of the small elite of male politicians under Díaz.⁷ Not only do historians need to look further at the gendered beliefs of the politicians, but, they need to look beyond this powerful group of men both for other expressions of national identity and different understandings of the intersection of gender and politics.

Scholars such as Jean Franco, Pablo Piccato, and William French have recently considered how ideas of modernity excluded women from the public sphere of politics and society.⁸ They have undertaken specific studies that consider the centrality of masculinity to conceptions of nationality in Porfirian Mexico. French, for example, revealed how middle class men, in attempting to carve out a social space consummate with their growing economic clout, portrayed themselves as the vanguards of

⁷ Charles A. Hale, *The Transformation of Liberalism in Late Nineteenth Century Mexico*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989).
William D. Raat, 111-126.

⁸ Jean Franco, *Plotting Women; Gender & Representation in Mexico*, (New York: Columbia University Press), 1989.

Pablo Piccato, " 'El Paso de Venus por el disco del Sol': Criminality and Alcoholism in the Late Porfiriato," *Mexican Studies* 11:2 (1995), 203-241.

William E. French, "Prostitutes and Guardian Angels: Women, Work, and the Family in Porfirian Mexico," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 72: 4 (1992), 529-553.

progress and the protectors of morality. In the process, they relegated women to the private sphere, as “mothers of the nation” in charge of the moral education of future citizens. These studies, along with a growing, but still too small, body of literature consider how the relationship between gender and nation excluded women from participating in the public sphere. They do not, however, consider the opportunities for challenge and reinterpretation of official discourses that have always existed.

As no political doctrine is monolithic and contained, spaces open up for reconsideration of the discourse of national identity. In *Peasant and Nation*, Florencia Mallon showed how those left out of or denigrated by official national politics reinterpreted and took on those very discourses.⁹ Whether oral or written, symbolic or direct, alternative voices existed in the past, and need to be retrieved. Periodicals such as *El Album de la Mujer* offer an important opportunity to reconsider both nationalism and gender as discourses made up of many voices, rather than ideologies to be inculcated, accepted, or rejected.

That *El Album*, as a periodical, does take written form is central to my understanding of both its social context and its project of identity construction. In *Imagined Communities*, Benedict Anderson accredited print capitalism with making nationalism possible. In his analysis of the historical changes that both allowed and necessitated the possibility of

⁹ Florencia Mallon, *Peasant and Nation: The Making of Postcolonial Mexico and Peru*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).

imagining ourselves as national citizens, he wrote,

Nothing perhaps more precipitated this search, nor made it more fruitful, than print-capitalism, which made it possible for rapidly growing numbers of people to think about themselves, and to relate themselves to others, in profoundly new ways.¹⁰

His attention to print capitalism in the process of imagining the national community reminds us of the importance the printed word has borne throughout history. The permanence and public nature of print signified authority, knowledge, and power. Not surprisingly, therefore, literacy has been jealously guarded and much sought after.

Indeed, during the Porfirian era, educators, politicians, and positivists argued over who should receive instruction and education in Mexico, (Justo Sierra and Gabino Barreda being two of the more well-known figures in this ongoing debate).¹¹ At the same time, the periodical press became a place to put forth and contest political visions. Diaz's move in 1890 to outlaw the oppositional press demonstrates all too clearly his perception of the power of print. While an educated public may have been a theoretical tenet of nationhood and a required step on the road of progress, the efforts to control the press reflected fears about the shaky boundaries of political power.

The supposed democratization of print paralleled the outward expansion of the public realm of politics and belonging. But, just as the

¹⁰ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities, Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, revised edition, (London: Verso, 1991), 36.

¹¹ Charles A. Hale, 226-231.

openness and accessibility of the nation in this period can be questioned, so too can that of its public, written record. By the nineteenth century, women in Mexico were largely excluded from the literate world of power, politics, and creation of a national history. Jean Franco has shown how access to the written narrative of the nation of Mexico was extremely limited to women. Politicians and rhetoricians were determined to maintain both print and politics as male domains. The laws and cultural assumptions against public women supported their exclusion from these male preserves. Franco suggested that even with the "cultural capital" to publish, women were limited by their knowledge that, "their intelligence could be put to only limited use, since their primary function was motherhood."¹² Her observations provide an integral context to understanding the social and historical meaning of *El Album*. Yet, far from being discouraged from publishing, Gimeno de Flaquer and the other contributors utilized their opportunity to make permanent and public the identity of the Mexican woman.

As the title suggests, *El Album* was a periodical for women. More than this, it was a periodical intended to create a space for women in public society. The ideas about gender in *El Album* derived their meaning from the national context. Similarly, the portrayal of Mexico was intrinsically connected to the position of the writers in the nation, as women. In the periodical, the contributors pursued and challenged

¹² Jean Franco, 82.

positivist and liberal ideas that, when used by others, were meant to separate and silence women. They took up ideas of morality, specialization, and progress that gave meaning to modernity, and also to gender. A primary objective of *El Album* was to rewrite the history of nations in general, and Mexico in particular, to include women as actors. At the same time, the contributors created a history of women. In the context of essentialist conceptions of gender, the fact that women had a history had been downplayed. Rhetoric in Mexico and Europe often portrayed women as “eternal” and “natural” mothers. The changes and progress consummate with history, with men, nations and civilization, therefore, did not apply to constant nature and unchanging women.¹³ By linking the progress and history of women to the nation, and the nation to women, *El Album* forced a reconsideration of the position of women in society. And this was their ultimate objective. The writers of *El Album* wanted to be valued members of their country. They wanted to be educated, to be specialists, and to be contributors to the nation beyond bearing its future citizens. In order to be so, however, they first needed to construct an identity for the Mexican woman.

But while the writers of *El Album* took womanhood as their fundamental identity, the way they experienced and envisioned their womanhood was inextricably tied to their own privileged position in society. As elite women, they had the resources, time, and education to

¹³ L.J. Jordanova, “Natural facts: a historical perspective on science and sexuality,” *Nature, Culture and Gender*, eds. Carol MacCormack and Marilyn Strathern, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 42-3.

consider and theorize their place in Mexican society. Moreover, in creating an identity for the "Mexican woman," they utilized ideas that discriminated, not only by gender, but also by race and class. The director, Gimeno de Flaquer, was a writer and publisher in Spain before she emigrated to Mexico in the late 1870s. She chose a medium, the periodical press, that still had very limited circulation in Mexico. She and the other contributors privileged the literate and the Spanish. Moreover, while their ideas of moral and material progress, of movement through time, of specialization and education, and of gender difference gave the writers access to national discourse, they simultaneously reinforced barriers against others. In its complicity, its challenges, and, at times, its ambiguity, *El Album* suggests the complexity, the possibilities and limitations, of national imagining in Porfirian Mexico.

The primary object of this thesis is to reveal and give meaning to the creation of a national identity for women in *El Album de la Mujer*. I have divided my study to follow the history, present, and destiny for women and for Mexico created in the periodical, since it was with this line through time and space that the contributors ultimately constructed an identity. First, I reconstruct the gendered history of Mexico and a national history of women as established over many issues of the journal. I try to give meaning to this history in terms of the political project of identity construction, and also by connecting it to the cultural assumptions and political context of the Porfiriato. I then look at how

this history inevitably opened up a vision of the future, a future in which women were educated, moral, and active. And finally, I consider the tension created between a universal and gendered vision, (of the past and the future), and the ideal created by *El Album* for women and for Mexico that only a few as yet had access. In other words, I consider how the subject position of the women of *El Album* constructed and limited their viewpoint. In doing so, I hope to come closer to an understanding of *El Album* in its cultural context. In the process, the inseparability of gender and national imagining in the periodical, during the Porfiriato, and as a fundamental category of construction and analysis becomes apparent.

I. Writing history

The director of *El Album*, María de Concepcion Gimeno de Flaquer, opened the first issue of her periodical with an address to her intended audience, "Las Señoras." To them she pledged that

The objective of my life is to sing your merits and virtues, to make known your intellectual faculties, to report your multiple heroisms, to place your beautiful figure on the highest pedestal. I name the periodical I offer you *El Album de la Mujer* because the album is a monument devoted to the *bello sexo*, in which all notable artists, all illustrious travellers and all eminent literary persons, leave their signature as an homage of their respectful admiration.¹⁴

This dedication outlines the objectives of *El Album*. In the periodical, Gimeno and the writers who contributed espoused a universal womanhood.

¹⁴ Gimeno de Flaquer, "Saludo," *AM*, año 1, núm. 1, (8 de Setiembre de 1883), p. 2.

Moreover, they assumed their own ability to discern what made this woman. Sharing essentialist ideas about gender, the female director and writers of *El Album* claimed a special knowledge and authority about all women. After all, “few, very few men know what a woman is.”¹⁵ Given their knowledge, to record a veneration of women in print became a personal duty.

It also represented a national imperative. Because women had different qualities than men, “if only men write, the manifestation of the human spirit is only half-given: only half of the thought and feelings of our heritage will be known.”¹⁶ This statement reflected the assumption that the historical record both marked modernity and defined a nation. It challenged assumptions, however, by suggesting that the role of women was integral to this history. Not content to simply suggest this connection, almost every page of *El Album* in some way substantiated either that women had a history, measurable in time and place, or that the history of nations must include women.

The iconography that adorned *El Album* contributed to the inclusion of women in history. Every issue featured a woman deemed worthy of acclaim. With their portraits on the title page, and their biographies following, Safo, Joan of Arc, Queen Isabel, Sor Juana Ines de la Cruz were only a few of the queens, writers, biblical figures, and others highlighted. Because of its espousal of a universal woman, *El Album* freely jumped

¹⁵ Gimeno de Flaquer, “La Mujer y el Album,” *AM*, año 1, núm. 4, (30 de Setiembre de 1883), 50.

¹⁶ Juan Valera, “La Mujer Debe Escribir,” *AM*, año 1, núm.4, (30 de Setiembre de 1883), 52.

political boundaries to promote the idea that woman could affect the history of her society. These women were proof of the potential women held within. They were also ideals, each encompassing a value consistent with the desires of Gimeno and her contributors. The women portrayed were political, active, literate, and moral. Also, they were almost all European, which was, in *El Album*, itself an ideal characteristic.

According to the universal womanhood espoused by these writers, all women had the same potential. But, the list of women stood out as ideals because they were different from the majority of women. Also, they were great women, but not obviously great mothers. What, then, of the rest of women?

The contributors to *El Album* linked the fate and condition of women to her historical time and place. In several issues, a column appeared entitled "Situacion de la Mujer en Diferentes Períodos Históricos." In it, the author, Daniel de Zuloaga y Santos, compared the conditions of women at various points and places through time. The role of women was associated with the needs and conditions of society at particular levels of civilization. For example, according to Zuloaga y Santos, Rome, a war society, necessitated that women completely bow to the needs of male soldiers; they were, therefore, virtual slaves to omnipotent fathers.¹⁷ In the ancient Orient, women existed in a state of slavery. Unfortunately, the author lamented, these traditions still haunted the less progressive

¹⁷ Daniel de Zuloaga y Santos, "Situacion de la Mujer en Diferentes Períodos Históricos," *AM*, año 2, núm. 7, (17 de Febrero de 1884), 95.

Orient. He invoked the symbol of tradition and barbarousness so popular with British philanthropists, the female destiny of the funeral pyre in India, to prove the correlation between backwards societies and horrific conditions for women.¹⁸ At the other end of the scale, of course, were Europeans and Americans. In these countries, widely acknowledged amongst the Porfirian elite to be the most advanced nations, women were better educated and had more access to the public sphere. One column listed the female doctors, lawyers, journalists, and other professionals in the United States. Well-educated and knowledgeable, American women would not fall prey to vice. They could reach their moral, as well as their material, potential. All this led to the conclusion that "To know the moral and political condition of a nation, look at the place that women hold in it."¹⁹ Hence, the writers of *El Album* created a line of progress through space and time. In the process, gender and national history became inseparable.

The writers established this path in order to construct the identity of the Mexican woman. In the process, they incorporated and challenged cultural assumptions about women, progress, and nationhood. As was common in Porfirian Mexico, in *El Album* progress was not only material,

¹⁸ Zuloaga y Santos, "Situación de la Mujer en Diferentes Períodos Históricos," *AM*, año 2, núm. 8, (24 de Febrero de 1884), 111.

Edward Said helped call attention to the role an Oriental East helped define the West as modern in *Orientalism*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1979).

Antoinette M. Burton, "The White Woman's Burden: British Feminists and the Indian Woman, 1865-1915," *Women's Studies International Forum* 13.4 (1990), 295-308.

¹⁹ Titania, "La Instrucción de la Mujer en los Estados Unidos," *AM*, año 2, núm. 2, (13 de Enero de 1884), 23.

it was moral. A column to mark the new year of 1884 acknowledged that a single year brought, "one more step on the road of progress....the accomplishment of grand material, as well as moral and social achievements."²⁰ From a barbarous past, to colonialism, to nationhood, Mexico's relatively new status as a nation was itself a material condition. To have a nation was to have modernity. Moreover, the transition from colony to nation was accompanied by the rhetoric of national virtue. Theoretically, every person within the geographical boundaries of Mexico enjoyed this new virtuous and national status. Gimeno and the other contributors devoted *El Album* to determining what this status as nation meant for women. The creation of a history that intertwined women and their society necessitated that the progress of Mexico was dependent on and reflected the moral and material condition of women. Status as nation required a change in the position of women. Utilizing this logic, *El Album* questioned the popular place assigned to women, that is, virtuous motherhood.

The writers of *El Album* agreed both that women were inherently moral and that the ultimate expression of female virtue was motherhood. Gimeno exclaimed, "Mother!...The name we wear written on our soul with indelible characters...that is not lost in adventure, that does not disappear amidst the loud commotion of pain or pleasure."²¹ But, if women always

²⁰ Francisco de Paula Flaquer, "El Año Nuevo," *AM*, año 2, núm.1, (6 de Enero de 1884), 2.

²¹ Gimeno de Flaquer, "La Niña y La Madre," *AM*, año 2, núm. 7, (17 de Febrero de 1884), 93.

had been mothers and if they were also inherently moral, how then would nationhood affect womanhood? How to improve, to civilize motherhood? *El Album* combined and pushed liberal and positivist ideas to come up with two answers: first, to make motherhood more accessible; and secondly, to make it more rational, specialized, and scientific.

II. Civilizing motherhood and nationalizing womanhood

Although in other hands, the combination of positivism and liberalism served to exclude women from the public sphere of politics and nation in Porfirian Mexico, in *El Album*, Gimeno and the other writers turned these doctrines against themselves to prove women worthy of, indeed integral to, the public sphere. Premised on the idea that women had and could act in the interest of their society, *El Album* maintained that, while different, women were not inferior to men. They could be active, rational, and independent, (the liberal qualities of citizenry), while, and by, fulfilling their special destiny as the moral sex. Since it was incumbent upon the nation to allow all women to fulfil their moral possibility in order that the country itself could continue on the road to modernity and civilization, Mexico needed to devote more attention to the condition of all women. *El Album* established itself as a forum to promote and determine the morality of women, and, in turn, of Mexico. It did so by creating a vision of the future that focused on women as the measurement

of progress.

According to the rhetoric of nationhood, all women within the political boundaries of the nation theoretically shared a virtuous nature. One need only look around, however, to see that all women were not equally virtuous. This inequality could be explained by attaching the moral to the material. While *El Album* agreed that women's bodies were the primary material condition of their lives, they rejected the claim that it was the only one. By establishing the relationship between women and society in their construction of history, *El Album* opened the way for emphasizing the role of society in determining and limiting the capabilities of women. Thus, the difference between women was in the material conditions of their lives. In order to improve their morality, therefore, their material surroundings needed improvement.

El Album positioned itself to redeem those women often considered on the fringe of, or a betrayal of, the category of woman. Gimeno, for example, did not condemn immoral women. Instead, she reproached society for betraying such women. In one column, she reiterated sexual standards of virtue by pointing out the vice of the coquette, who was selfish and vain. But, in this column, the coquette shared the category of the depraved with two companions, the irrational woman and the "fake mother."²² The three types of women all had in common a neglect of their female potential. They were excessive; and, they were "fakes." In *El Album*, therefore, morality was neither just

²² Gimeno de Flaquer, "El Enemigo del Hogar," *AM*, año 1, núm.15, (16 de Diciembre de 1883), 227.

sexual or only associated with the public sphere. Hence, it did not necessitate the enclosure and protection of women from the public sphere. Instead, the home actually could contribute to immorality. By regularly including advice on how to create a healthy space for women both inside and outside the home, *El Album* strove to fight this immorality and to redeem women.

By maintaining that circumstances created morality, Gimeno put the onus on society for the morality of women. The above women were fakes because their social situations denied them access to morality. To the suggestion that the moral role of women translated into a "career of marriage", Gimeno responded, "What nonsense."²³ On the contrary, she reasoned, forcing women into marriage could often lead to immorality. Women who must marry for "bread and not love," who, because of the limits society placed on her, must choose marriage, would wither, her "heart will freeze." She concluded an article, "La Obrera Mexicana," by pointing out that "misery and ignorance are bad counsellors."²⁴ Gimeno reasoned that women needed other options; they needed access to education and well-paying jobs if they were to fulfil their moral and material potential. She sent out numerous pleas to this effect;

philosophers, moralists, legislators and bureaucrats,
create places for women, and centres of learning to
teach them. Only this will contribute to the perfection
of society! Give women instruction and well-recompensed

²³ Gimeno de Flaquer, "La Obrera Mexicana," *AM*, año 2, núm. 1, (6 de Enero de 1884), 4.

²⁴ Gimeno de Flaquer, "La Obrera Mexicana," 4.

work, improve customs, because instruction moralises.²⁵

Since they comprised half of the population of Mexico, to deny women their potential not only would lead to individual immorality and waste, but also prevent the nation from fulfilling its highest destiny.

III. Educating *las moralistas*

In *El Album*, education was fundamental to the identity of the Mexican woman. Gimeno, in particular, returned often to the issue of education for women. Her focus entered her into a discussion that had been going on for centuries about the necessity of and the appropriate level of education for women. By the Porfirian period, women still received limited education. Since their primary role was motherhood, women were excluded from the level and diversity of education reserved for (mostly elite) men. Mexican historian, Silvia Arrom, ended her study of education for women in the first half of the nineteenth century by postulating that, "the next generation would demand the right to enter the universities and practice the professions- a far cry from the kind of education that women needed to exercise a beneficent maternal influence on society."²⁶ Yet, Luís E. Ruíz, (a prominent educator during the Porfirian period), reinforced the correlation between motherhood and education for women in 1884 in

²⁵ Gimeno de Flaquer, "La Obrera Mexicana," 3.

²⁶ Silvia Marina Arrom, *The Women of Mexico City, 1790-1857*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1985), 26.

El Correo de las Señoras . He wrote,

...each section of humanity has a well-defined object. The role of women is so fundamentally important in the sanctuary of the home, that whatever other activity that she wishes to devote herself to (...)would be small and miserable in comparison to her grandiose domestic duties. ... We must improve, by all means possible, the education of women, but without forgetting the end, in order to put in accordance with this, the means employed.²⁷

The biological difference of the female sex still determined her role in the specialized world of Porfirian Mexico.

The reasoning pervaded *El Album* as well. Gimeno, (a member of the "next generation" of Arrom's study) agreed that women were mothers first. Yet, she also maintained that this role necessitated an education equal to that of men. A woman's maternal role could manifest itself in public or in private, but it was always of national importance. Limiting the learning of women to basic domestic instruction did not improve her moral state or help her fulfil her female destiny of motherhood. Nor did it further the interests of a modernizing state. On the contrary, an ignorant woman was a threat to herself, her family, and her nation.²⁸ Ideas about education in *El Album* , therefore, did not contradict, but rather supported the ideal of domesticity. Gimeno maintained that,

That the family needs the perfection of education

²⁷ Luís E. Ruíz, "La educacion de la mujer," *El Correo de las Señoras*, (1884), 630-1, reprinted in *El Album de la Mujer, Antología ilustrada de las mexicanas, vol. IV/El porfiriato y la Revolución*, ed. Martha Eva Rocha, (México: Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, 1991), 140.

This volume includes several excerpts in support of the education of women; most dating closer to the turn of the century.

²⁸ Gimeno de Flaquer, "El Enemigo del Hogar," *AM*, ano1, num. 15, (16 de Diciembre de 1883), 227.

of women, is so clear and logical,...However much men want to do away with women, they cannot renounce the family. The family is society, reduced to its most delicate essence, and that man is born to live in society is beyond question. So if the family is society in its most delicate expression, and man needs to live in and for the family, where does his ego advise that virtue will be more solid, more clear and intelligence more cultivated, if not in the domesticated home?²⁹

The advocates of specialization found in government and recorded in numerous treatises about both women and the destiny of Mexico, themselves agreed that women were to influence the moral condition of the nation by cultivating a virtuous home. *El Album* differed, however, in its portrayal of what the perfection of morality entailed. The writers of *El Album* maintained that the banal education then allotted to women was the cause, not the result of women's vice, frivolity, and irrationality. Thus far, women had been instructed and not educated. They had not been taught to think, thus they only identified with basic, material conditions. As a result, they appeared immoral and irrational. This did not afflict only women; men not truly educated suffered the same fate. The difference was that women, on the basis of their sex, only received instruction.³⁰ Thus it was the material conditions of their education and existence, not their nature, that prevented women from rational and moral thought. As the

²⁹ Sofia Tartilan, "La Educacion de la Mujer," *AM*, año 2, núm. 22, (1 de Junio de 1884), 319.

³⁰ Juan Tomás Salvany, "La Educacion y la Instruccion," *AM*, año 1, núm. 17, (30 de Diciembre de 1883), 259.

numerous female journalists, novelists, and great women that appeared in *El Album* demonstrated, women could achieve more.

In demonstrating the capabilities of women, *El Album* challenged contemporary discourses on several levels. First, Gimeno contested the idea that women were the “weaker sex.” She warned, “Men, take note that we do not challenge your physical strength; but we declare an equal moral strength as you.”³¹ Primarily through example, she showed that women were rational beings, different from, but not inferior to men. They should not be excluded, therefore from public society on the basis of their supposed weakness and irrationality.

In suggesting that women could not be considered weak or dependent on account of their biology, Gimeno pushed the logic of liberal ideas of the individual. She described the domestic role (one which Gimeno did not deny to women), as an occupation, “...the government of private life corresponds to women....Women need to enjoy complete liberty inside the home.”³² The independence of women was established in the home, a place usually associated with her dependence. She also extended the contemporary standard of evaluation of the worth of men to women, in maintaining that “each one is the child of her achievements.”³³ While all women may have had the potential to be good mothers, their value could not be measured by biology alone. “The primary obligation that both sexes should know is the

³¹ Gimeno de Flaquer, “No Hay Sexo Débil,” *AM*, año 1, núm. 2, (16 de Setiembre de 1883), 19.

³² Gimeno de Flaquer, “Esposa y Madre,” *AM*, año 1, núm. 9, (4 de Noviembre de 1883), 130.

³³ Gimeno de Flaquer, “La Mujer Modesta,” *AM*, año 1, núm. 6, (14 de Octubre de 1883), 83.

law of work: idleness is a crime.”³⁴ But an uneducated woman was frivolous and lazy. She could not possibly attain her potential. So, Gimeno envisioned a different “end” to be considered when evaluating the education of women than did Ruíz. She wrote, “Education should have as its end the complete and normal unravelling of the moral self, for reason and liberty.”³⁵

To achieve this end, *El Album* suggested that an appropriate education for women must include instruction in the arts and sciences, with special attention given to literacy. In order to teach their children to be good citizens, mothers needed “an abundance of knowledge.”³⁶ Since science was by the late nineteenth century, the means by which the Porfirian elite, (along with their European counterparts), preferred to understand their world,³⁷ “if the mother does not have some notion of the most common sciences, she will fill with errors the frail understanding of her child.”³⁸ In other words, motherhood was scientific. “A mother is obligated to know hygiene to preserve her child from a thousand illnesses.”³⁹

The special place of science did not displace the importance of art,

³⁴ Gimeno de Flaquer, “La Mision de la Mujer,” *AM*, año 1, núm. 3, (23 de Setiembre, 1883), 34.

³⁵ Gimeno de Flaquer, “La Mision de la Mujer,” 34.

³⁶ Gimeno de Flaquer, “Aptitud de la Mujer para las Ciencias,” *AM*, año 2, núm. 15, (13 de Abril de 1884), 220.

³⁷ Eli de Gortari, “Ciencia Positiva, Politica ‘Cientifica’,” reprinted in *Cultura, Ideas y Mentalidades*, 132.

³⁸ Gimeno de Flaquer, “Aptitud de la Mujer,” 220.

³⁹ Gimeno de Flaquer, “Aptitud de la Mujer,” 220.

however. On the contrary, according to *El Album*, women should be taught to appreciate art. "Do not be opposed to women cultivating the arts; if Christianity is the religion of the soul, art is the religion of the intelligence."⁴⁰ Women who understood the arts, understood culture and could appreciate the importance of civilization. Biographies of women such as Carolina Coronado, whose novel appears in segments through the 1883 issues of *El Album*, stressed how important female artists were to the glory of their nation. At the same time, the reader was reassured that a great artist would still fulfil her domestic duties. As in the case of Margarita Kleinhans, she attained great renown as a poet and professor, but, "the poet is always, before a poet, a mother."⁴¹

In order to learn the arts and sciences, to contemplate God and life, to participate fully in both public and private life, women needed to know how to read and write. Literacy was both fundamental to education, and, one of the biggest challenges *El Album* puts forth to Mexico. As suggested earlier, print was a medium generally reserved for the public sphere of politics, national belonging, and men. By intruding on this sphere with their publication of *El Album*, and by demanding right of access on the basis of their sex, Gimeno and the contributors brought to the fore and called into question the historical alliance between print, gender, and the nation.

⁴⁰ Gimeno de Flaquer, "La Mision de la Mujer," 35.

⁴¹ Vestina, "Crónica Mexicana," *AM*, año 1, núm. 7, (21 de Octubre de 1883), 108.

IV. Recording the widening road of progress

In *El Album*, Gimeno asserted the importance of print to the nation and to progress. She marked the printing press as the most important invention in the history of civilization. She described it as that discovery which, "transmits ideas with electrical speed and eternalizes the written word: the printing press, eradicator of error, propagator of light, banner of progress and dawn of civilization."⁴² Moreover, literate women were an imperative for progress. As was repeated often in *El Album*, if the level of civilization of a society could be measured by the place of women within it, and if the press was a marker of civilization, to exclude women from participating in this written forum would obviously not reflect well on the measure of Mexican society.

By emphasizing the right to and the necessity of literate women, the writers of *El Album* acknowledged print as consummate with national belonging. In print, as in the public sphere in general, the presence of women was necessary in order to create and elevate the moral standard of the nation, and, in the process, to make room for the achievement of an equivalent material progress. As the guest writer, Luís G. Iza, suggested, women, the embodiment of morality, "the spirit of peace and the inspiration for fraternity" should bring this spirit literally into public

⁴² Gimeno de Flaquer, "Mujeres de los Siglos XV y XVI," *AM*, año 1, núm. 10, (11 de Noviembre de 1883), 116.

space, they should be found amongst men. ⁴³ *El Album* promoted the dual nature of morality, as both a national and a gendered characteristic, to create a speaking position for women. Hence, when Gimeno, for one, undertook the task of publishing a magazine, she did so not with an understanding that her words were limited to the domestic realm, but with a self-imposed authority and responsibility to include the feminine and the domestic in the written and public realm of the nation.

Obviously, *El Album* was intended to bring women into this very forum. Indeed, placing an article on nursing next to a piece on education, included in the same issue with poems and a contemplation of the future prospects of Mexican society, confused the female and the male, the public and the private, the political and the domestic. Not only did the periodical make the domestic and the feminine public issues, but it challenged concepts of gender otherwise employed to keep women silent objects of public discourse. And it did so by using and challenging contemporary ideas about progress and nationhood. So when *El Album* declared that, "We always publish with lively satisfaction works from the pens of the authors of this beloved nation; but if those works are by women, our happiness is more complete,"⁴⁴ it demonstrated its mission to superimpose gender and nation onto one another. *El Album*, therefore, transgressed the boundaries implicit in the gendered discourse of nation in a number of ways.

⁴³ Luiz G. Iza, "Esquelas Confidenciales," *AM*, año 2, núm.3, (23 de Setiembre de 1884), 39.

⁴⁴ Vestina, "Crónica Mexicana," *AM*, año 1, núm. 8, (28 de Octubre de 1883), 125.

Yet, the combination of theorising and example that pervades *El Album* reveals another aspect of the periodical that must be considered in any evaluation of such a source. Access to the periodical, its lessons, and the identity constructed within it, was extremely limited.

The female artist or writer of our time, who has been born in a good crib, wants to be before anything else a lady, and to this she will sacrifice all, frequently imposing on herself the martyrdom of levelling herself with inferior intelligences, in order not to distinguish herself and bring against her unleashed hatred.⁴⁵

Whereas in the past, women writers did not know their limits, in Porfirian Mexico, they could reconcile their talent with their domestic and class duties. They were “completely feminine.”⁴⁶ Hence, while Gimeno declared that, “the aristocracy of talent is the true aristocracy of our century,” one cannot help but notice that in *El Album*, as with much other rhetoric of the Porfirian era, the aristocracy of talent paralleled nicely the social structure based on money and power.

V. The Ladies of *El Album*

While the writers of *El Album* used moral discourse to transgress and rethink categories, their own discussion reestablished or reflected other boundaries. Morality may have provided a language to include the

⁴⁵ Gimeno de Flaquer, “Aristocracia del Talento y de la Sangre,” *AM*, año 2, núm. 20, (18 de Mayo de 1884), 290.

⁴⁶ Gimeno de Flaquer, “Aristocracia del Talento y de la Sangre,” 290.

writers and women in the public realm of print and politics; yet, the women included were only those who had similar privileges of access and education. *El Album* as a publication could be read by a limited number of women. Even fewer could contribute to its content. Since the periodical combined theories about the importance of literate women with biographies of and living examples of these very types of women, the writers could claim to be the embodiment of the ideal Mexican woman.

Morality, while rhetorically a national characteristic, remained the preserve of a privileged few. Gimeno advocated education and wages so that poor women could achieve their moral potential, in the mean time, they had neither the material nor the moral characteristics required by Mexico or by "true" women. The slide between an inherent and an acquired characteristic meant that when Gimeno and others used morality as an inclusive category, they still differentiated between groups and individuals. And, they inevitably maintained a privileged position. With work, and with the guidance of people such as Gimeno, all individuals could achieve their own potential. In the process, they too would uncover their place in the nation. In the same process, women would fulfil and uncover their moral character, or, their femininity.

As members of an elite, it is not surprising that the women of *El Album* considered themselves the specialists of womanhood and morality. Yet, it was unusual for them to use this specialization to insert themselves in the public realm. Scholars such as William D. Raat and

Charles Hale have shown the diversity of theories and men that contributed to the combination of positivism and liberalism as (often conflicting) policies in Porfirian Mexico.⁴⁷ Hale also suggested that positivism held an appeal for the elite layman. But as their absence in his study suggests, no matter what the angle, women were rarely considered contributors to positivist or liberal ideas. If positivism and liberalism combined to honour specialization, then the speciality of women was modesty, morality, the home and silence. But as the above discussion demonstrates, *El Album* broke this gendered silence. It did not challenge the idea of specialization, however. Paradoxically, the pages of *El Album* acted simultaneously as a forum for equality and as a place for a small group of women to distinguish themselves from the majority of women.

The paradoxical quality of *El Album* as both inclusive and exclusive manifested itself in many ways. First, of course, the limited access to the periodical itself, a periodical named for and, on one level directed at, all women, remains as tangible evidence of this tension. The ideas, histories, and biographies that filled the periodical all contributed to creating a line through time that put the literate women of *El Album* at the "vanguard of progress."⁴⁸ The ideas they put forth as necessary for moral, contributing Mexican women were exemplified in the periodical itself. *El*

⁴⁷ William D. Raat, 111-126.
Charles A. Hale, 3-24.

⁴⁸ Gimeno de Flaquer, "Aristocracia del Talento y de la Sangre," 290.

Album included a hygiene column on a regular basis. In columns that addressed such topics as the circulation of air, the “unnaturalness” of denying breast milk to a child, and the importance of temperature, the writers established themselves as the experts on scientific motherhood. As well, *El Album* included reviews and discussions of the theatre, music, literature, and painting. Short columns were devoted to describing the arts at various points in history. In addition, stories, poems, and pictures, in which women, love, and *patria* received literary glorification, appeared in every issue. While the writers maintained that the Mexican woman should be cultivated in the arts, they simultaneously demonstrated their own appreciation for it. Hence, the writers of *El Album* constructed the identity of the Mexican woman as literate, educated, civilized, and moral while also establishing with their contribution to the periodical that they exemplified those very characteristics.

The social position of the women of *El Album* further affected and limited their portrayal of gender and national belonging. Given the openness to foreign influence and ideas that typified the Porfirian period, it does not seem surprising that one of the few periodicals from the period directed by a woman had a distinctly European slant. Moreover, the Spanish heritage of Gimeno and other writers affected their concepts of both gender and nationhood. The line through time drawn in *El Album* for Mexico began and ended with Spain. The writers acknowledged the indigenous, precolonial past of Mexico. But for them, Mexico’s history

really began in 1521. Spain's status as an imperial power was alleviated from the burdens of exploitation and abuse because of the nature of its colonial relationship with Mexico, one that they maintained was premised on mutual love, respect, and a politics of amalgamation. The contributors to *El Album* recounted a colonial history premised upon a linear vision of progress and destiny. Spain, a great nation in itself, benefited from the "discovery" of the New World. So too, however, did the Americas. Four hundred years of working together in an "amalgamation of grand moral and material interests" would continue into the future as the young Mexico continued to learn from and privilege Spain as the mother country.⁴⁹ And while, elsewhere, amalgamation could and did underlay nationalist discourses of mestizaje, in *El Album* it did not. Amalgamation was a step towards Europe.

True to its mission of intertwining gender and history, *El Album* conceived of the colonial past in gendered terms. Not only was Mexico "our second country," it is the "the dignified child of the mother country."⁵⁰ Thinking of Mexico as the young child of Spain conveyed the central role attributed to Spain in the past and future history of Mexico. Like any good parent, *El Album*'s Spain seemed both anxious and reluctant to grant independence and freedom to its most important child. At the same time, the imagery reinforced the centrality of, particularly Spanish,

⁴⁹ Francisco de Paula Flaquer, "Isabel la Católica," *AM*, año 1, núm. 2 (16 de Setiembre de 1883), 22.

⁵⁰ Francisco de Paula Flaquer, "El Año Nuevo," 2.
Francisco de Paula Flaquer, "Isabel la Católica," 22.

women in the past and future of the nation. Gimeno tried hard to make *El Album* a periodical for Mexicans and about Mexico, yet, her vision of Mexico always ended in Europe.

The iconography used to establish a history for women in *El Album* demonstrates the influence of the direction and intention of Gimeno's gaze. Every issue began with a portrait of a woman in some way important to her nation. Gone is the female image of the violated Indian woman or the Virgin of Guadalupe that Frederick Turner and David Brading have shown to be so central to creole nationalism.⁵¹ In *El Album*, nationality was not the central issue. The transnational characteristics of the women mattered more than their specific, distinctly national traits. These women should appeal to the readers of *El Album*, not because of their Mexicanness, but because they demonstrated their virtue in terms of and to the benefit of their nation. Since she considered Europe to epitomise civilization, both material and moral, Gimeno saw no problem in universalising European characteristics as the means to include women in the public sphere of nationhood. The irony of this reasoning is obvious when we recall Gimeno's formulation of morality, materiality, and nationality. People would belong to the national community, they would, in effect, become Mexican when they acquired European characteristics. Mexico would realize her nationhood by looking forward and northeast, not

⁵¹ Frederick C. Turner, *The Dynamic of Mexican Nationalism*, (Chapel Hill, The University of North Carolina Press, 1968), 18.

David A. Brading, *The First America; The Spanish monarchy, Creole patriots and the Liberal state, 1492-1867*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 361.

by looking into the past and within the confines of her national boundaries.

The version of the national myth of La Malinche that is found in *El Album* provides a revealing example of how the Spanish heritage of the writers interacted with ideas about nationhood and their concern for gender. Over three successive issues, Alfredo Chavero, a noted historian and politician, proved the portrayal of Doña Marina as a traitor to be a vile lie. He suggested that her race betrayed her, selling her as a slave to Cortés. Her position in the entourage of Cortes allowed her to fulfil her female moral destiny of love and public importance for the first time. She should not be condemned for her betrayal, but celebrated for giving birth to the Mexican people. In this telling, a woman's place was simultaneously public, moral, and maternal. She was integral to the nation and to its travel through time. The arrival of the Spanish did not mean conquest; it was not the end of a civilization; it was birth and generation. It was an integral step towards modernity.⁵²

Although the story of Doña Marina historically has had much to do with issues of race, in *El Album*, a Mexican people was born without touching on issues of mestizaje. This omission is reflective of the general absence of the Indian or the campesina in the periodical. Even with its attention to improving the material and moral conditions of the population, *El Album* skipped over the peasant, without a doubt the category under which the majority of people living on Mexican soil would

⁵² Alfredo Chavero, "La Tumba de Doña Marina," *AM*, año 1, núm. 5, (7 de Octubre de 1883), 68.

fall. When the masses did appear, it was generally as a remnant of the past. Popular culture could be differentiated from the events that made up modern, cosmopolitan society. The clothing of the Salamancans, the myth of Quétzacoatl, the enslavement of Doña Marina, and the public Carnaval all gave readers the sense of time gone past and people left behind.⁵³ This perspective reveals the limits of the Mexican nation in *El Album*, it was still up to the elite, male or female, to determine who belonged to the national community.

The inclusion of society columns, name-dropping, and style pages in the periodical proved that indeed, the women of *El Album* were part of the national community moving along the international road of progress. In a regular column, entitled "Crónica Mexicana," the social events of the last week were recounted for all to read. They were told in such a way that the importance of women in and to this elite was unmistakable.

Through the eyes of the "mysterious" Vestina, the reader witnessed the "jeunesse dorée" and the "beau monde," betting at the Jockey Club,⁵⁴ and "la crème" of society at the Tivoli de San Cosme.⁵⁵ She could watch the elite parade on the Paseo de la Reforma and see the "high life" at the Hippodrome. The degree of civilization of Mexican society was measured

⁵³ see for example, Vestina, "Costumbres Mexicanas; El Fandango," *AM*, año 2, núm. 22, (1 de Junio de 1884), 329.

or, Josefa Estevez de G. del Canto, "La Artesana Salmantina," *AM*, año 2, núm. 9, (2 de Marzo de 1884), 128.

⁵⁴ Vestina, "Crónica Mexicana," *AM*, ano 1, num. 7, (21 de Octubre de 1883), 109.

⁵⁵ Vestina, "Crónica Mexicana," *AM*, ano 1, num. 8, (28 de Octubre de 1883), 125.

by their applause at the theatre, their clothing style, their musical taste, and the parties they throw. The clothing and manners of especially notorious individuals was meticulously transcribed. Vestina always noted which illustrious men graced an event with their presence or when Carmen Ramos Rubio appeared. The "Crónica" was very much a name-dropping exercise. Not only did Vestina attend the same functions as the most progressive of social elites, she could identify the major components, the people and customs, of civilization.

The ladies who attended the races or the theatre were also "the women of the upper class putting education in style."⁵⁶ Coverage of the opening of new asylums for beggars and the insane filled the same columns as a synopsis of the literary achievement of a Mexican woman. In the *Cronica*, literary women were not only moral, they were social women. Manuel Gutierrez Nájera, despite the fact that he considered himself to be "inept" at such an "imaginative" task, honoured his debt to Gimeno and wrote the "Crónica Mexicana" one week.⁵⁷ While he obviously tried to distance himself from such a "feminine" undertaking as a society page, Gutierrez nonetheless filled three pages with events from the past week.

The circumstances of his debt are particularly noteworthy. He and Gimeno were next to one another at the Hippodrome. Gimeno called the winning horse while Gutierrez insisted another would win. Evidently, they made a light and friendly bet between themselves. In payment, Gutierrez

⁵⁶ Gimeno de Flaquer, "Aptitud de la Mujer para las Ciencias," 221.

⁵⁷ Manuel Gutierrez Nájera, "Crónica Mexicana," *AM*, año 2, núm. 20, (18 de Mayo de 1884), 298-9.

owed Gimeno a column. William Beezley has pointed out how the nonchalance of betting money at the races signified to the Porfirians their status as part of a fast-paced, consumer, modern elite.⁵⁸ Gimeno's bet made her an active and competent participant in this male-oriented social setting. At the same time, by getting a man to write the column on a bet, the boundaries between male and female, society and social page were confused. She belonged at the Hippodrome and the Hippodrome was part of the culture of *El Album*.

Page 311, issue 21, year 2 of *El Album*, highlights the significance of and construction of social belonging in the periodical. On this page appeared the signatures of fourteen "illustrious Mexican generals."⁵⁹ The list included, among others, Porfirio Díaz, Carlos Diez Gutierrez, Vicente Riva Palacio, and Ignacio R. Alatorre. The generals agreed, when pressed by Gimeno, to sign their names to their personal responses to the question, "What is it that most defeats a man?" Their answers were such qualities as vice, weakness, vanity, and slavery. These were all issues that *El Album* constantly brought forward as important to women and to Mexico. When looking at the page, it is hard not to create an image of Gimeno, notebook and pen in hand, circulating amongst the generals, pressing for their reluctant, but forthcoming answers. With their signatures, the generals, the personification of power, authorized the presence and

⁵⁸ William Beezley, "El estilo porfiriano: deportes y diversiones de fin de siglo," reprinted in *Culturas, Ideas y Mentalidades*, 226.

⁵⁹ "Una pregunta dirigida por una dama española a ilustres generales mexicanos," *AM*, año 2, núm. 21, (25 de Mayo de 1884), 311.

importance of Gimeno, literary women, and *El Album* in Mexican society. Conversely, their names would ever appear in a journal dedicated to the veneration of the female sex. In an instant, they confirmed social belonging. One writer in *El Album* believed that the event "will be considered in the social world and in literary circles as very important," and that it stands as a testament to the high esteem with which Mexican society holds the director of *El Album*, María de Concepcion Gimeno de Flaquer."⁶⁰ Social belonging was confirmed while the dissolution of boundaries between the domestic and the public, the female and the male, the weak and the strong gained strength from its official support. At least, it appeared that way for a small group of women in the late nineteenth century.

Conclusion: Making history

When Gimeno and the writers of *El Album* wanted to assert female authority, to create a position, and an identity, for the Mexican woman, they did so as members of a society both gendered and privileged. As a result, tension existed between asserting a potentially revolutionary rethinking of the relationship between gender and nation, and therefore a reconfiguration of political power, while wanting to maintain the status quo, one that valued the authority and power of men. As feminist

⁶⁰ Juan Espinosa, "Crónica Mexicana: Memorias de un Desocupado," *AM*, año 2, núm.21, (25 de Mayo de 1884), 313.

theoreticians have shown, nations were premised on the exclusion of women on the basis of their sex. Hence, when Gimeno and the other writers of *El Album* tried to construct an identity for women in terms of the nation, they were rethinking concepts that were not meant to go together. While they spoke for half of humanity, they were very much concerned with belonging to a particular national community. Therefore, the writers struggled with including women into the public, national sphere that was otherwise conceived of in masculine terms.

By publishing *El Album*, they asserted their right to female space in the public discourse of print, as well as in the public spheres of nation and society. Gimeno consciously named her periodical, *El Album*, because, according to her, "an album is a monument dedicated to the *bello sexo*."⁶¹ It resembled the soul of a woman. Both were innocent and blank until they were imprinted. Both could be corrupted by the imprint of a vain man and could benefit from the attention of intelligent women.⁶² But, describing the periodical as a monument not only dedicated it to women, it also signified a lasting tribute to and symbol of the nation. During Porfirian Mexico, as elsewhere, politicians used monuments to create and immortalize the history and the progress of their nation.⁶³ As a

⁶¹ Gimeno de Flaquer, "Saludo," 2.

⁶² Gimeno de Flaquer, "La Mujer y el Album," 50.
Gimeno de Flaquer, "La Mision de la Mujer," 34.

⁶³ Barbara A. Tenenbaum, "Streetwise History: The Paseo de la Reforma and the Porfirian State, 1876-1910," *Rituals of Rule, Rituals of Resistance; Public Celebrations and Popular Culture in Mexico*, eds. W.H.Beezley, C.E. Martin, and W.E. French, (Wilmington: Scholarly Resources Inc., 1994), 127-150.

literary monument, therefore, *El Album*, encapsulated the possibility of a female, national space.

This space, nonetheless, was the creation of a small group of elite women. Morality, specialization, and progress provided a language with which to create a female identity. But the contributors were not just women; they had a race and a class. It was difficult to address a national community when its boundaries were loose and often overflowed to Europe at the expense of those within its frontiers. Also, it was difficult to speak of equality when inequity pervaded all aspects of society. The writers of *El Album* could lead the way for women, but, inevitably, some got left behind. Poor women only appeared as objects of philanthropy. Rural culture only provided quaint reminders of passing customs and lagging traditions. Hence, it is neither surprising nor inconsequential that the same language, that of morality, Gimeno and her writers used to write themselves into the nation also excluded others from that community.

Gimeno's position in history as a literate, Spanish woman in nineteenth century Mexico both opened and limited her vision. *El Album* is both representative of Porfirian Mexico and the product of a personal vision. In its challenges and in its complicity, therefore, it allows us to come closer to understanding the possibilities and limitations implicit in a social position both exceptional and common. Moreover, in its attention to gender in the forming of nations and the writing of history, the

periodical hints at the pervasiveness of this relationship in other sources and other visions. By insisting on their inclusion, *El Album* uncovered the normative exclusion of women. The line through history that makes the myth of the nation has never been singular or stable. *El Album de la Mujer* demonstrates both how individual, and how embedded in a specific historical moment, that line can be.

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