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⇒ Genaro García's *Leona Vicario, heroína insurgente* (1910). A Centennial Revision of the Mexican Woman's Place in the Public Sphere

As the centennial anniversary of Mexican independence, 1910 was not only a peak year for representations of Mexican national identity, but also for debates on feminism, the "Mexican woman," and the nature of her role in society (Cano 1998: 106). Concerns regarding feminism and nationalism dovetail in Genaro García's centennial biography of independence figure Leona Vicario, an exception to the standard publications emanating from the Mexican literate sectors between 1880 and 1911 in terms of its portrayal of women and nation. This largely unexamined biography sheds light on feminist Mexican thought, and viewed in conjunction with García's writings on women's legal rights in Mexico, stands out as a formidable re-writing of the position of woman in the Mexican nation.

Mexico's centennial celebrations reflected a "popular trend in Western Europe and its former colonies" (Gonzales 2007: 495) around the turn of the century, and fell during the last year of Porfirio Díaz's government, just before his fraudulent re-election provoked the popular unrest that led to the Mexican Revolution. On the eve of a decade that would redefine the nation, the Porfirian regime used the Independence centennial to affirm its political doctrines, as well as to cement the position of Díaz's Mexico among the modern nations and leaders of the Western world. It was a grand occasion for staking positions on Mexican history, manipulating historical symbols, and re-writing past events to foment public favor towards present-day political agenda.

While opposing extremes of the political spectrum participated in this struggle to lay claim to Mexico's history, each sought to disenfranchise substantive sectors of society in the effort to define the modern nation. The motor behind Mexico's program of modernization was the group of technocratic advisors to Díaz known as the *científicos*, adherents of the positivistic philosophies initiated by Europeans such as Auguste Comte and Herbert Spencer. This elite circle, who worked with Díaz to plan and execute the centennial celebrations, viewed the extant indigenous population as an obstacle to Mexico's

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possibilities for modernization and thus focused on their historical legacy while ignoring their actuality (Cano 1998: 107). The ambivalence with which the *porfiristas* faced the indigenous population contrasts with highly-charged discussions regarding the nature of woman's place within the nation in the years between the *Porfiriato* and the Mexican Revolution. At the same time as the indigenous population was omitted, women were made essential to the domestic sphere of the national project, a limitation made evident in the debates regarding the "Mexican woman" that proliferated during the *Porfiriato*. Influential positivistic thinkers such as Spencer and Comte theorized the primary female role as that of support to the male (Pickering 1996: 10, 29; Alvarado 1991: 11). Women were relegated to the private space of the home to uphold the model of domestic femininity that the Spanish writer María del Pilar Marco de Sinués popularized in 1859 as "el ángel del hogar," in a study of the same name.

Alternative models of Mexican femininity had begun to circulate in the work of journalists such as Laureana Wright de Kleinhans (1846-96) and the all-female editorial team of the monthly journal *Mujer mexicana. Revista científico-literaria consagrada a la evolución, progreso y perfeccionamiento de la mujer mexicana* (1904-1906). These new voices found some influence circa 1910, judging from the attacks that were launched against new feminist thought by prominent Mexican positivists such as Horacio Barreda and Andrés Ortega. In 1909 Barreda wrote a series of articles in the *Revista positivista* entitled "Estudios sobre el feminismo," in which he asserted that women could not have the same rights as men because their participation in the public sphere destroyed their femininity; Alvarado republished the series in 1991 as an example of representative mainstream thinking on women during the time of the *Porfiriato* (16).

Such intense interest in women did not translate into their inclusion in official centennial documents designed to celebrate the Mexican nation; in fact, women's presence barely penetrated the more than one thousand publications that went to print in 1910. Print publications, frequently commissioned by the President himself, played a key role in the promotion of official national identities in the centennial year. The selection of commemorative works published in 1910, however, reveals a notable absence of women and contemporary indigenous populations. Only four out of a thousand centennial publications are dedicated to female figures or issues of concern to women. These include a history of obstetrics practice in Mexico; a biography of Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz; a compendium of profiles of noteworthy Mexican women entitled *Mujeres notables mexicanas*; and a biography of the female independence figure, *Leona Vicario, heroína insurgente*.

Mujeres notables mexicanas was written by the aforementioned journalist Laureana Wright de Kleinhans, described by Cano as "in her time, the most brilliant and radical defender of women's emancipation" (1998: 112). In sum, Wright de Kleinhans had written brief biographies on more than a hundred Mexican women throughout her career, publishing many of them in periodicals such as the women's journal *Las violetas de Anahuac* (Alvarado 1991: 26) throughout the second half of the nineteenth century. These biographies were Wright de Kleinhans' attempt to correct the omission of female figures from the national historical canon under establishment throughout the nineteenth century.

The posthumous re-edition and publication of these biographies in 1910, under the auspices of Education Secretary Justo Sierra's Secretaría de Instrucción Pública y Bellas



Artes, can be read as an official acknowledgment of Wright de Kleinhaus' concern that female figures be incorporated into the historical narrative of the nation.

Less examined among these few centenary publications on women has been historian Genaro García's biography of the independence heroine Leona Vicario. Though Ramos Escandón has recently foregrounded García as one of the great under-recognized feminists of nineteenth-century Mexico (2001: 88, footnote 3; 2007: 9, 18), there has been no in-depth study of the biography since it first appeared in 1910. When examined in conjunction with García's writings on women's legal rights, *Leona Vicario, heroína insurgente* stands out as a progressive and anomalous revision of the "Mexican woman" coming from within the highest ranks of the Porfirian intellectual world at a time of key debate regarding woman's role in Mexican society.

In his choice of Vicario as the subject of a full-length centennial monograph, García combines his interests in both historiographical innovation and the roles of women in society at a moment in which the intersection of femininity and nationality was hotly contested. Through what remains the most well-documented and original examination of Vicario to date, García shifts the symbolic emphasis of the female from *mujer-ornamento* towards *mujer-ciudadana*¹ in an effort that supercedes contemporary biographical representations of Vicario both in terms of historiography and progressive feminist content.

Genaro García (1867-1920), who was serving as director of the National Museum of Mexico at the time, was appointed by Díaz himself as the official chronicler of the centennial year's festivities. As such, García was responsible for assembling and directing a team of men to document the celebrations for posterity; the result was a deluxe album, *Crónica Oficial de las Fiestas del Primer Centenario de la Independencia de México*, published by the press of the National Museum in 1911. While García's training and experience prior to that prestigious position were typical of his Porfirian cohort, his intense, sustained interest in women's legal rights and pursuit of various subjects under-emphasized in Mexican cultural life distinguished him from his peers. An avid bibliophile and collector of obscure papers, García has been most recognized for bringing to light several unknown documents regarding the Conquest and Mexican Independence (Ramos Escandón 2007: 18-19), and kept files and collected documents regarding the personages of Mexican history of most interest to him. García's commemorative biography of Leona Vicario can be read as one piece of this broader historiographical project, an elaboration and correction of the *historia patria*. It also forms part of García's less-recognized work in defense of women's rights, significant essays in which the author argues for a shift in the position of women to become a more active part of the nation's citizenry.

García had shown an interest in the situation of the Mexican woman since 1891, when he defended his thesis on "La desigualdad de la mujer", a historicized examination of the systematic oppression of women in Western culture that climaxes in a critique of women's treatment in the Mexican Civil Codes of 1870 and 1887. In 1896, García disputes Herbert Spencer's views on women in an article titled "La condición jurídica de la

¹ Ramos Escandón coins these terms in her commentaries on García's representation of women in the official centennial album project that he directed (2001: 94). I have adopted them as shorthand for the concept of women's position as passive accessory of males ("mujer-ornamento") versus that of an active agent in her own right ("mujer-ciudadana").

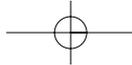
mujer según Herbert Spencer”. Though an admirer of Spencer’s work, there García examines the limitations of the Spencerian conception of liberty with regards to women, asking why liberties considered undeniable for a man are restricted for a woman, particularly in the arena of public political involvement. García argues instead for the increased involvement of women in the public sphere: “La concesión de los derechos políticos a las mujeres beneficiaría en alto grado la organización gubernativa” (2007: 68).

In this as well as other legal writings, García speaks to the importance of women’s liberation for the overall progress of the nation. For García, in fact, the state of a nation’s female population is a barometer of the advancement and well-being of the nation itself: “La historia nos demuestra... que [el] bienestar y [el] adelanto [de los pueblos] son mayores mientras menor es la desigualdad de la mujer” (2007: 55). He disputes the model of the *ángel del hogar* as “una condición de dependencia mitigada, condición en la que todavía permanecen estancados innumerables errores e injusticias” (54), thus taking on the sacred space of bourgeois matrimony in an effort to expand the rights of married women in particular: “la esposa es una mera esclava con disfraz de señora, una cosa para decirlo de una vez” (61). García exposes the difficulty of women’s liberation in a society in which both males and females alike tend to perceive women’s inferiority as a *natural* or god-given state of affairs, rather than as a result of society’s civil code (61-62). After discussing at length the reasons why the situation is in fact un-natural, García links the liberation and equality of women to general progress and the strengthening of Mexican civil society (63), proposing an active search for female role models that will revise the current conception of women in Mexican society (64), and advocating for women’s active involvement in the civic life of the nation as necessary and vital to the progress of Mexican society.² Vicario’s life story provides García with the opportunity to (re)present a *mexicana* whose activities in the public sphere are indisputably heroic, allowing him to further his anomalous argument that Mexico’s progress is linked to female action in the public sphere.

The most basic and indisputable elements of Leona Vicario’s life (1789-1842) are as follows. A wealthy, educated, only daughter of *criollo* parents, Vicario was orphaned at the age of eighteen (1807), and used a significant portion of her inheritance to fund early insurgent activity radiating from Mexico City (circa 1808 to 1813). When her illegal activities were discovered by the Spanish authorities in 1813, she fled with servants but was eventually captured and made to appear before a court of law. After defending herself under oath without revealing her co-conspirators, Vicario was rescued by the insurgents before undergoing her final trial. She escaped with them into the countryside, later partnering with fellow insurgent Andrés de Quintana Roo and bearing their child in 1817. She remained in the field from 1813 until 1819, living a life of penury and sacrifice. The couple was able to return to the capital circa 1820; from the time that Independence was consolidated, until her death in 1842, Vicario remained a prominent figure in Mexico City.

García’s additions to this basic story are grounded in extensive research in primary documents that allow him to break out of the mold of past representations of his subject.

² García is vehement on this point: “No obstante y que nuestra Constitución no se opone, según hemos visto, a que las mujeres lleguen a obtener puestos públicos, [...] No se comprende, en verdad, cómo la opinión y la costumbre que permiten la entrada a los puestos públicos, aun a los hombres más rudos e ignorantes, han podido vedársela aun a las mujeres más inteligentes e ilustradas” (2007: 69).



It is clear from the start that he is concerned with historiographical innovation, as he opens the biography's *Advertencia* with an open criticism of methods used in previous biographies: a 1842 obituary by Vicario's lifelong friend, Carlos María de Bustamante; a four-page entry in Francisco Sosa's collection of noteworthy historical figures, *Mexicanos distinguidos* (1884); and a more contemporary eight-page article by Jacobo Sánchez de la Barquera (1894/1900). (García does not mention Wright de Kleinhan's entry on Leona Vicario in *Mujeres notables mexicanas*, as it went to press in the same year as his own biography.) In his critique of the aforementioned works, García cites the necessity of correcting a common tendency toward repetition and recycling of sources in the general writing of the *historia patria*:

Comúnmente nuestros historiógrafos no han hecho más que reproducir los trabajos ya impresos, similares á los suyos, sin introducir en ellos modificación substancia, por falta de tiempo ó de voluntad para emprender nuevas investigaciones, inevitablemente lentas y penosas: á causa de esto, la historia patria presenta aún los mismos errores y deficiencias de que adolecía cuando comenzó a escribirse (1910: 6).

He further cites the importance of rigor and precision in the historian's work, referring in particular to the existing biographies on Vicario: "Desgraciadamente ninguno de esos estudios encierra una investigación amplia y seria [...]," limiting themselves to describing Leona's activities "a grandes rasgos y no fielmente" (5).

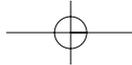
García's biography is a clear attempt to correct these methodological errors, providing a rigorous and well-documented examination of its subject unparalleled to this day. He breaks ground using extensive testimony from Vicario's trial, as well as a register of her belongings and expenses, to factually embellish her story. The result is a full-length work of over two hundred pages grounded in extensive documentation: footnotes providing precise bibliographical sources, appendices, photos, lithographs, maps, portraits, reproductions of Vicario's manuscripts and transcriptions of her correspondence.

Though García laments his own work's shortcomings in the same *Advertencia*, his auto-critique reveals his high standards of documentation and methodological rigor:

[...] muy ajenos estamos de pensar que hemos corregido todos los errores y llenado todas deficiencias de los estudios susodichos [...] pues no obstante nuestras pacientes pesquisas, fueron tan incompletos los documentos que pudimos coleccionar, que frecuentemente nada nos dijeron respecto a largo lustros y nos obligaron á inferir, de aquellos inventarios y de aquellas cuentas, sentimientos, ideas, hechos y costumbres de Leona, no teniendo absolutamente ninguna otra fuente de donde sacarlos [...] (6)

García's interest as a historian is to correct the historiographical errors of the genre of biography: instead of reconstructing the past using the imagination and ideology of the biographer (revelation), the historian reconstructs the past using documentable data, found in primary sources, in a process based trial-and-error, logic and inference (experimentation). Ramos Escandón has remarked on his use of the same technique—the use of history as a source of "empirical" proof for his arguments about society—in García's writings on legal rights:

Dado que en las ciencias sociales el empiricismo no puede llevarse a cabo de modo experimental, la manera de confirmar la veracidad, la efectividad de unas ideas de una situación



determinada, consiste en la comprobación histórica... Al respecto García señala que la vigencia de una idea, su popularidad no necesariamente justifica su veracidad, su corrección. En este sentido la exploración histórica que García lleva a cabo es un instrumento que realmente confirma o no la veracidad de una idea y la justicia de una situación. El origen, pues, de la desigualdad femenina está en la historia, y el positivismo resulta para García la metodología adecuada para este análisis. Según García, apoyado en Laffite, “el carácter fundamental del positivismo es fundar la política sobre la historia” (Ramos Escandón 2007: 31-32, citing García “Carácter de la conquista” 3, footnote 53).

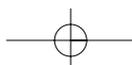
Thus we find that the biography *Leona Vicario* is less rhetorical and bombastic, less reliant than its predecessors on the superimposition of thoughts and feelings onto its subject, due in part to a greater reliance on primary documents. As such it serves as a model for a more rigorously researched and impartially-written biographical style that departs from the tendencies of the former century.

García’s innovative treatment of Vicario lies not only in his approach to historiography, but also in his progressive portrayal of woman’s place in society. The two are, in fact, linked: in recycling secondary material, Vicario’s previous biographers tend to repeat the same tropes and information amongst themselves, introducing slight but non-substantive changes. Each emphasizes the importance of Vicario’s role as ideal consort to her patriotic husband, and most stress the exceptional nature of woman’s contribution to civic life, thus propagating the tradition of woman as “*mujer-ornamento*” as opposed to “*mujer-ciudadana*... como agentes de actividades y rituales cívicos” (Ramos Escandón 2001: 94). García, however, offers innovations in documentation that allow him to break free of such tropes, and to offer a revolutionary and substantiated portrait of the heroine.

To better appreciate García’s shift of the well-embedded paradigm of *mujer-ornamento* to *mujer-ciudadana*, we must first examine some depictions in the biographies that preceded his. Sosa, for example, opens with some striking assertions on the female’s role in the public sphere. Following a prologue that defines the national hero in entirely male terms (“*varones*” [1884: vi, viii]), Sosa begins his entry on Vicario as a figure anomalous to her sex: “En los grandes momentos históricos aparecen en las naciones algunos seres que, apartándose de la comun [sic] corriente, acometen empresas que en la vida normal son del todo ajenas á su carácter y aun á su sexo” (1069). When Vicario shows the wherewithal in court not to betray her conspirators, for example, she is described by Sosa as showing “*varonil entereza*” (1071; emphasis mine), strength and integrity becoming of man, but unusual in woman. Sosa goes on to reveal the societal approbation that a politicized woman will receive for going against her seemingly god-given nature:

La mujer que se mezcla en las luchas é intrigas de la política, lejos de conquistar la simpatía y la admiración del pueblo, atrae sobre sí las censuras de la sociedad, porque ésta no comprende á la mujer lejos del hogar, sino al lado del esposo y de los hijos, llenando la misión de amor y de paz á que el cielo parece haberla destinado... *esa abnegación que la caracteriza y ayuda al hombre* [...] (1069; emphasis mine).

Sosa then exposes the thin line that the female walks in her involvement in the public sphere:





Politicistras son llamadas las mujeres cuyo nombre resuena en las discordias intestinas, para demostrar qué desden, qué poca estima merecen las que asisten á conciliábulos en que se trata de perturbar la tranquilidad pública por ruines cuestiones de partido. Heroínas se llama á las que desafían los peligros..., por acudir al llamamiento de la patria cuando ésta reclama el esfuerzo de sus hijos todos para conseguir su independencia y autonomía (1070).

If all of her biographers agree that Vicario was indeed a *heroína*, and not a *politicistra*, none fails to emphasize the exceptional nature of female heroism and the specific set of qualities that distinguish a heroine's behavior from that of a hero. This distinction is particularly evident in the Sánchez de la Barquera, who first defines Vicario's heroism as "nobles proezas y femeniles virtudes" (1900: 1). He goes on to imply that the *mexicano's* response to revolutionary events was innate, while his female "companion's" interest was instead unusual:

Tales actos eran una lumbrera terrible y palpable que señalaba á los hijos del país, que innatamente abrigaban el conato de buscar su libertad, en que *aún la misma mujer sensible y avisada y compañera del hombre*, no podía ser extraña en su natural amor patrio [...] (2; emphasis mine).

Sánchez de la Barquera describes Leona's interest as incited by the spell of male heroes, *caudillos* and *sacerdotes* so attractive to the "delicate sex":

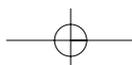
Nuestra heroína que entonces tenía vientiún [*sic*] años, *aunque perteneciente al sexo delicado, tenía al fin un corazón mexicano*, y vemos que no le eran indiferentes los sucesos de su patria, así es que proclamada la independencia nacional por sus valientes y esforzados caudillos... sucumbiendo allí venerables y apreciables sacerdotes mexicanos, *tan respetables para el misticismo natural de la mujer que además contemplaba bajo el prisma del amor patrio*, le hacía juzgar tal pretensión como digna y justa [...] (2; emphasis mine).

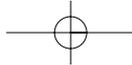
In Sánchez de la Barquera's descriptions, the passive woman is activated by men; the woman is "naturally" susceptible to mysticism and love. Rampant emotion, as opposed to reasoned political ideology, is her greatest motivation in aiding the *patria*. It is under the influence of such emotion, claims Sánchez de la Barquera, that Vicario enters the revolutionary fray,

no perdonando medio ni recurso alguno para satisfacer su arriesgado propósito, *sobreponiéndose á inmensas dificultades propias de su sexo* y de su edad, en que nos sorprenden los grandes esfuerzos y sacrificios infinitos á que se exponía [...] (2).

These generalizations also emerge as well in Sánchez de la Barquera's depiction of husband and wife in their respective roles, Quintana Roo as the virile fury, Vicario as the maternal angel:

La Sra. Vicario siempre afable, siempre serena y solícita, saludaba cariñosa á los soldados, los confortaba é impartía el alimento [...] curándoles ella misma sus heridas con ternura y afán como un ángel de caridad, como un genio benéfico y consolador [...] mientras el esposo con su mente de fuego y el animado y esforzado sentimiento de su patriótico corazón, estampaba por la prensa [...] sus numerosas y eruditas elucubraciones, empuñando á la vez las armas para entrar al combate [...] (5).





If the feminist Wright de Kleinhans' brief biography of Vicario (1910) does not fall into such blatant generalizations, it does step closely in line with prior works due in part to her reliance on the same secondary sources. Kleinhans, for example, also offers the influence of Vicario's admiration for Quintana Roo, early on in her article, as a strong motivating influence for her involvement with the insurgents. Here she cites a secondary party's opinion without offering a source or context for such speculations:

Respecto á este amor [...] dice con exactitud lo siguiente el reputado periodista Sr. Luis G. Iza: "Las ideas políticas de Quintana, expresadas con el fuego sagrado del patriotismo; sus conceptos elevadísimos [...] cautivaron bien pronto el corazón de la joven, quien no solo le amó con la más ardiente de las pasiones, sino que le admiró como á un profeta y á un genio. Tan pronto como Quintana tuvo que abandonar la ciudad para ingerirse en la gloriosa lucha, Leona, lejos de sentir el dolor agudo [...] sintió palpar en su corazón de alegría, brilló en sus ojos el divino relámpago... y de sus labios puros y suaves como los de un ángel, se depredieron palabras de amor, de patriotismo y de esperanza [...]" (1910: 256).

Other related emphases in the Vicario story, repeated by multiple biographers in succession, involve Leona's married life after the consolidation of independence. Her husband becomes the actor and protagonist, while she in turn serves in the (appropriate) role of support. She continues to cultivate her intelligence, but now under the tutelage of her husband's brilliant intellect; also, in alignment with the proper code of conduct for a female, she begins to donate to charity and the Catholic church (Sosa 1884: 1071-1072); Wright de Kleinhans 1910: 268). While Wright de Kleinhans de-emphasizes these tropes somewhat, she like others closes her piece with a citation of the *Diario de Gobierno's* lapidary inscription—the final words that sealed Vicario's tomb as well as her memory in the minds of Mexicans: "dignísima consorte del Sr. D. Andrés Quintana Roo, integérrimo magistrado del Supremo Tribunal de Justicia; muy esclarecida, así por su ilustre prosapia, como por sus virtudes públicas y domésticas; cuyo nombre aun gozando de la vida, por sus distinguidos servicios superiores á su sexo [...]" (Wright de Kleinhans 1910: 269).

García, in contrast, focuses his attention on Leona as an autonomous figure, providing documentation for her often defiant stance towards status-quo expectations and male authority figures. While his choice of a female was already extraordinary for a full-length centennial monograph, García tells Vicario's story in a way that further emphasizes the deviation of her behavior from the norms of stereotypical female, and presents her independence of thought and action as a desirable model for Mexican women. Leona Vicario appears within the pages of the biography as a dynamic female protagonist, an adventurer who fearlessly traveled the most remote of roads, both figuratively and literally. García includes several maps that outline her routes through the Mexican countryside (84, 122-23, 129), systematically subverting patriarchal efforts to control her. Vicario's biography thus challenges two fundamental tenets of woman's prescribed role as immobile "domestic angel" during the *Porfiriato*: her relative seclusion in the home and her obedience to the male head-of-household.

Chapter Three is the first to significantly break away from previous biographical efforts, providing an innovative exploration of Vicario's early years after her parents' death that relies on documents at García's disposal related to her 1813 court process: when Vicario fled the city with her female servants, her house and its contents were catalogued, and





a complete catalogue of her spending was provided by her uncle and guardian, Agustín Pomposo, for the purposes of her trial. In examining these documents and relating their content, García emphasizes Leona's extraordinary freedom of choice, and how she exercised an unusual amount of autonomy for a young woman of that time. He also foregrounds her early financial independence, citing her ownership and management of property.

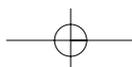
Chapters Four and Five (which focus on her religious and intellectual interests, respectively), paint an extensive portrait of Vicario as a thinker. In his efforts to do so, García does interject interpretation. This is notable in Chapter Four, when after a long description of the two virgins that Vicario was documented to have worshipped, García parlays this simultaneous support for Spanish as well as Mexican iconography (Chapter Four) into an interpretive example of Vicario's capacity for objective and broad thinking, describing hers as an intellect capable of going beyond petty spiritual anecdotes and the political manipulation of religious symbols to see the underlying common interests of humanity. García's central argument in this lengthy chapter is that Vicario's love of truth and reason, as opposed to blind adherence to poorly-founded rivalries, allow her to move beyond the apparent contradictions of her time, making her a visionary of sorts.

In Chapter Five, García highlights the depth of Vicario's intellectual interests through a detailed description of the particulars of her personal library. Here he draws attention to any unorthodox readings that may have influenced her political and scientific ideas, fields that were considered of little interest for women in that day. In showing his subject's penchant for scientific and political readings (36), García particularly emphasizes Leona's translations of Fénelon's *Les aventures de Télémaque*, a work that advocates the overthrow of despotism, and links her love of rationality to extensive readings of Feijoo.

It is only after providing this expansive intellectual profile that García embarks on any discussion, in Chapters Six and Seven, of Vicario's personal or emotional life. Even then, it is not the story of Leona's unerring love for Quintana Roo as motor for her early revolutionary activity, but instead the story of Leona's early *loves* that García details. In Chapter Six, he offers a biographical revelation not included in any of the former biographies, perhaps due to its somewhat scandalous nature in that day: in 1807, upon her mother's death, Leona was engaged to marry Octaviano Obregón (48) but broke off the engagement a year later (58). Here García steps in to defend a woman's right to annul her commitment, flying though it did in the face of conventional mores:

[...] su indiscutible moralidad jamás le habría permitido entregar á Andrés un corazón que tenía ya dueño. Ahora bien, no amando á don Octaviano, no debía casarse con él, tanto porque no estaba obligada legalmente a hacerlo, cuanto porque un matrimonio que deja de fundarse en el amor, resulta absurdo é inmoral (58).

In García's version of her story, Vicario's first loves parallel the tumultuous revolutionary events from 1808 until 1812, yet do not define her independent participation in them. Her personal life during the period is shown to be intimately tied to the country's political fortunes, in a way that made the link between love and insurgency quite irresistible for other biographers: her first betrothed leaves Mexico to avoid persecution for republican tendencies and to represent his country in the Spanish *Cortes*; during the time in which insurgent activity in Mexico City's capital is escalating, Leona meets Quintana Roo and annuls her former tie.





García, however, manages to present these facts of Vicario's personal life at the same time as he avoids connecting them causally to her insurgent activity, thus creating a space to highlight her independence of action for the remainder of the biography. He begins Chapter Eight, entitled "Leona Insurgente," with an emphasis on the longevity of her beliefs in the causes that led her to participate in the insurgency, taking pains to stress her independent decision-making and paraphrasing her own words, in an 1831 defense to Lucas Alamán:

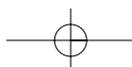
[...] su gran inteligencia, su ilustración sólida y su voluntad resuelta hacían innecesarias para ella las sugerencias extrañas, y la impulsaban á obrar siempre con total independencia (65).

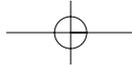
García also paraphrases his heroine's words when he stresses that "Leona puso siempre á la Patria sobre todas las cosas, aun sobre su mismo amor: por esto exigió á Andrés [...] que luchara en favor de la Independencia" (66), and instead emphasizes Leona's revolutionary influence over her future husband Quintana Roo.

Leaving the question of Vicario's motivations behind, García goes on to focus, in Chapters Eight through Twelve, on Leona's fearlessness, decisiveness, and initiative in her aid to the insurgent cause. He omits no details regarding her deception of and rebellion against paternal authority figures such as her powerful uncle Agustín Pomposo Fernández, prominent Mexico City lawyer, enthusiastic supporter of the Spanish crown, and Leona's legal guardian after the death of her parents (70-72). García illustrates Vicario's insistence on her beliefs despite persecution and ostracism, and reveals her orchestration of elaborate plans of escape and obfuscation of authorities, including those who attempted to tempt her with pardons during her exile in the countryside (76-78; 84; 104).

Neither does García shy away from portraying Leona's daring defiance, once in captivity, of the judge who interrogated her for crimes against the Spanish King and God (95-98): "A pesar de su acendrada religiosidad, Leona alentó siempre un espíritu sobremano avanzado" (103). García explicitly compares her courage with that of the most renowned male *caudillos*—Aldama, Allende, Morelos and even Hidalgo (99-101)—who, unlike Vicario, rescinded their involvement when the insurgent cause seemed lost. Vicario is shown, in clear contrast, to never back down (101-107). García paraphrases Vicario's sometimes witty, sometimes ironic, but always bold responses directly from the court records, in her skillful refusals—under oath—to reveal her co-conspirators: "Preciso es convenir en que Leona ocultó constantemente la verdad á su Juez, no porque le preocupara su propia salvación, sino tan solo para no comprometer á los demás" (103). García also includes a copy of the ciphers that Leona used to encode her messages to the insurgents (101-02). He closes this chapter with a claim that Vicario's qualities far exceeded those of the famed French heroine, Joan of Arc, whose heroism rose out of "frecuentes accesos de místico histerismo" (108); thus irrationally inspired, her strength crumbled and she capitulated on her cause. Leona Vicario, says García, instead acted consistently out of exquisite capacities for rational, analytical thinking, suffering her adversity to the end: "por esto vemos mayor heroísmo en su actitud que en la de Juana de Arco" (108).

Chapters Eleven and Twelve illustrate the bold and daring nature of Vicario's escape from captivity (110; 114), the public interest that rose up around her feats (113), and the authorities' official accusation that she had "mocked" the law in her trial and her escape



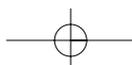
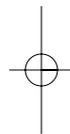
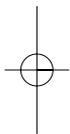


(123). They also relate the recognition and protection that Vicario received from the insurgents (117), her correspondence with Morelos (115), and the great difficulties she faced as she traveled from place to place with the *Supremo Congreso Nacional de América Septentrional* (129).

Of particular emphasis in Chapter Twelve is Vicario's repeated refusal to accept any of the numerous official pardons offered to her during her lengthy time in the field (1813-1817) – even after the birth of her child, in a remote insurgent outpost, in 1817 (127). García takes special care to stress that Vicario and Quintana Roo were among the very few insurgents from 1815 on who did not give in to this temptation as difficulties for the insurgent cause mounted: “Leona y su esposo pertenecían al reducido grupo de los abnegados patriotas que con ciega fe procuraban el triunfo final” (127). García is also the only biographer to relate the story of Leona's capture by realist forces in 1817, an event in which Quintana Roo took leave of his wife and child, leaving them with a handwritten request for pardon in order to escape his own death (128), and García is the only one to indicate that Vicario may have been abused and raped during her subsequent period of captivity.

But it is the biography's closing chapter, the story of Vicario's life after the victory of Independence, that is most key to the cementing of Vicario's figure as *mujer-ciudadana* versus *mujer-ornamento*. In the post-revolutionary period, Vicario continues to have a presence in the public sphere not fully recognized in other contemporary biographical attempts. García relates Vicario's personal efforts to have the value of her properties and belongings restituted by the national government, and how she independently manages her restituted assets during that period (writing letters to local landowners, for example, to defend her land; 143). García also shows the multiple recognitions and honors that were bestowed on Vicario in this period, such as the re-christening of a town in her name by the Honorable Congreso del Estado de Coahuila y Texas (136-137). And most importantly, unlike any other biographer, García relates the details in this chapter of the adult Vicario's spirited and skilled public self-defenses against allegations made by the president of the republic, Anastasio Bustamante, and the well-known intellectual, Lucas Alamán. García includes the text of these full-length documents in the biography's appendix.

This incident, and its aftermath, are essential to the portrait of Vicario as an independent agent so successfully conveyed by García's biography. On the evening of February 2, 1831, Leona went directly to the president of the Republic to seek help after four military guards visited her household, having first conducted an aggressive search for Quintana Roo in his offices at *El Federalista Mexicano*, allegedly for printing criticisms of the Bustamante government. Vicario had received them in Quintana Roo's absence, and out of fear for her husband's life, directed herself immediately afterwards (and then again the next day) to the governmental palace to demand an audience with the president himself (138). A report of this incident was later offered by Vicario in *El Federalista Mexicano*, from which García cites his account. García's selection of direct quotes from that account conveys the daring defense that Leona makes of her husband and her household in ironic comments to the nation's president regarding the state of Mexican civil society under his watch: “debía considerarse disuelta la sociedad y restituida á cada una la obligación de defenderse por sí [...] que, no siendo Sultán de Constantinopla, sino gefe de una república libre, no debía permitir que en su presencia se hiciese aquella burla



de las leyes” (139). News of the encounter circulated rapidly throughout the city, and it was not long before the governmental papers *El Sol* and *El Registro Oficial* began to comment upon the incident to Leona’s disfavor (140); by February 6, *El Sol* had referred to her as the “apoderada y esposa” of Quintana Roo, a reference that merited Leona’s immediate response.

On the following day, Leona sent the detailed account and defense of her encounter with the President for publication by the same paper, responding pointedly to the allegation that her husband had named her as his guardian, “porque no teniendo frenillo ni pepita en la lengua, que le impida defenderse, lo hará mayor que yo cuando le parezca oportuno, y á mí no me gusta defender á quien está en estado de poderlo hacer por sí mismo” (140). It was no doubt considered scandalous that a married woman would have visited the President directly to defend her household, unaccompanied by her husband, and no less scandalous that she would then attempt to defend her actions, publicly, in the forum of the newspapers. *El Sol* refused to publish the defense, prompting Vicario to publish it herself, two days later, in *El Federalista* [140]). This was not the end of a series of defenses and counter-defenses between Leona and government officials (141), which went on from February 6 until February 16 of 1831.

García takes care to point out that in the same period, the Bustamante government killed an important opposition figure in Vicente Guerrero, but that Leona “jamás había retrocedido ante ningún peligro, y tampoco retrocedió en esta ocasión” (141). She published her most vociferous self-defense in the February 16 edition of *El Federalista*, affirming that “Nadie [...] me ha conocido deslenguada y atrevida, ni podrá discernir un solo linamiento del original en el injurioso retrato que de mí hace el editor del ‘Registro Oficial,’ convertido en libelista con desdoro de la dignidad del Gobierno, en cuyo nombre habla” (142). Though that letter stopped the debate temporarily, an article published one month later in *El Registro Nacional* (March 14) attacked Leona’s very status as a patriot, alleging that she had unjustly received “casas y haciendas [...] merced á cierto heroísmo romanesco, que el que sepa algo del influjo de las pasiones, sobre todo en el bello sezo, aunque no haya leído á Madame de Stael, podrá tribuir a otro principio menos patriótico” (142); the author of the article was widely recognized, at the time, as Lucas Alamán.

Leona answered the accusation immediately, at the same time as she forwarded, directly to Alamán, documents intended to completely destroy any allegation of romantic interest (142) for publication in *El Registro*;³ when they were not, Leona again published her own self-defense in *El Federalista*. Thus Leona appeared in a public forum several times to defend herself: first, for having the audacity to approach the republic’s highest official in direct representation of her household; second, against allegations that romantic interest was the principal motivation behind her support of the insurgent cause. Each time, her argument was entirely autonomous. These bold defenses, omitted from prior biographies, are narrated by Genaro García in painstaking detail.

García closes the work, not with the oft-repeated words of the Vicario lapidary, but instead with a pointed observation that the National Congress, sixty-seven years after

³ García expresses his dismay at being unable to find this vindication or said documents after intense investigation (1910: footnote 3; 142).



Vicario's death, had not yet declared her "benemérita de la patria" or proposed a monument to commemorate her patriotic services. The final words of his definitive biography read as a critical plea to the Mexican nation regarding Vicario's proper legacy:

¿[A] caso todos los mexicanos habrán pensado que [los miembros del Supremo Congreso Insurgente, del Soberano Congreso Constituyente y de la Honorable Legislatura del Estado de Coahuila y Texas] se ofuscaron cuando concedieron recompensas y honores á Leona, y que, por lo contrario, el Ministro de Relaciones de don Anastasio Bustamante [Lucas Alamán] tuvo razón para decir que el heroísmo de Leona fué meramente un sentimiento "romanesco"? (145).

This closing reference to the unfounded accusations of Vicario's romantic motivations provide García's closing thoughts on that lingering trope, and reveal one of the ultimate purposes of this biography: to revise Vicario's legacy from that of a sentimentally-motivated and thus secondary (female) patriot, to that of an intellectually- and ideologically-motivated primary patriot. With this subtle shift, García exhorts contemporary Mexicans to commemorate Vicario's actions in the public sphere as those of *mujer-ciudadana*, not *ornamento*, and thus grant her a rightful place within Mexico's traditionally male patriotic pantheon.

In its considerably impartial tone, in its vast documentation (and thus, relative objectivity), and in its overarching ideological purpose, García's work on Vicario forms part of a body of feminist scholarship that finds no equal, in Mexico, in its day.⁴ As director of the National Museum and its press, as well as of the official Centennial Celebration chronicles, García wrote this deluxe commemorative edition—on a female figure who played a groundbreaking role as a female in Mexican society—from a position of power and privilege. His interest in Vicario stands out as a significant departure from period thinking on women, unique coming from a leading intellectual within a regime that customarily excluded the female and the indigenous population not only from the public sphere but from some of the basic rights of full citizenship. García instead advocates for women's active involvement in the political life of the nation as necessary and vital to the progress of Mexican society, using his depiction of Vicario as a progressive example for contemporary Mexican women to follow. In addition to serving as an innovation to the existing standards of historiography in the Mexican biographical genre, Genaro García's *Leona Vicario, heroína insurgente* (1910) is a prominent and anomalous centennial-year revision of the Mexican woman's place in the public sphere. As such, it further establishes García himself, alongside his outspoken heroine, as a fascinating figure for future study in the nineteenth-century cultural field, and as the most prominent of anomalies in the feminist debates of turn-of-the-century Mexico.

⁴ In her comments focused on his judicial work, Ramos Escandón has already made the claim that in García "se trató de un comentarista lúcido y feminista, lo cual resulta una voz en el desierto del decimonónico en México y cuya originalidad le hizo destacar como único en su propio momento histórico" (2001: 107).



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