

RECLAIMING “LA MALA MUJER:” STRONG WOMEN IN SOR JUANA INÉS DE  
LA CRUZ, DORA CERVERA-MIRABAL, AND SANDRA CISNEROS’S WRITINGS

by

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## I. INTRODUCTION

### Finding MY Voice

I am a Latina, raised in the United States, who loves Victorian Literature. I immerse myself in the romantic stories of the Victorian heroines, swoon in all the right places, and ponder why it is impossible to find a man who speaks like Mr. Darcy. I lose myself in the romance, but I can find the outspoken woman in even the quietest character. However, when I analyze these female characters and their strengths, I diverge from traditional feminism as taught in American college classrooms. I believe a woman can fight against the institutionalized patriarchal system without having complete autonomy. Like other Third World/Space Feminists/Womanists such as Chela Sandoval, Gayatri Spivak, and Alice Walker, I do not accept the white-privileged view of women's roles.

For example, I find Elaine Showalter's stages of female tradition too limiting. In her book, *A Literature of Their Own*, Showalter divides the history of women writers into three stages:

1. Feminine Stage - involves "*imitation* of the prevailing modes of the dominant tradition" and "*internalization* of its standards." (13)
2. Feminist Stage - involves "*protest* against these standards and values and *advocacy* of minority rights." (13)
3. Female Stage - this is the "phase of *self-discovery*, a turning inwards freed from some of the dependency of opposition, a search for identity" (13)

Ideally, applying the three stages of Showalter's model to women's literature and female characters would allow documentation of the phases of development experienced by women. By applying the three stages of her model readers would be able to witness

women transforming from imitating men's role to creating a sense of identity and "self-discovery." Yet, not all women can identify with the Feminist phase in which women demand autonomy. Women of all races have advocated for women's rights, but it is important to note that not all groups have asked for complete autonomy in order to move from the Feminine Stage to the Feminist Stage.

I believe that while Mexican and Mexican American literature has been analyzed using this model, it is necessary to create a new model that encompasses the cultural differences that do not allow these women to fit perfectly into Showalter's model. Using a new model might empower more of the characters that have traditionally been seen as submissive (through the Showalter lens), allowing space for strong women who do not fit into the traditional form of feminism.

Showalter does not pretend to speak for women writers around the world, so I do not fault her model in itself. In fact, ostensibly, Mexican and Mexican American writers fit into Showalter's model given that they likewise have experienced and pushed against the oppressive nature of a patriarchal society, including a patriarchal church. However, my reaction to Showalter's stages of womanhood is very similar to the one I had when I read Elizabeth Cady Stanton's *Solitude of Self* and her grim perspective on a woman's journey through life. I felt alone and without hope of creating an identity as I interdepend on men regardless of my independence. Moreover, hybrid identities (Indigenous *and* Mexican; Mexican *and* American) complicate Showalter's model. Not only do these women experience additional sources of oppression (i.e. racism), but from that vantage point they also discover different forms of resistance. As Homi Bhabha notes in *The Location of Culture*, "the social articulation of difference requires a complex, on-going

negotiation” in order to legitimize “cultural hybridities that emerge in moments of historical transformation” (3).

It is difficult for people who have not been colonized to understand my perspective. White men and women have imposed their feminist views on Brown women without regards to their cultural beliefs and traditions, and Brown men and women have strived to find their places within this imposed identity. Adrienne Rich refers to this mentality as “white solipsism:” “not the consciously held *belief that* one race is inherently superior to all others, but a tunnel-vision which simply does not see nonwhite experience or existence as precious or significant” (qtd. in Levinson 78). The colonized thus occupy a liminal space – Indigenous/Mexican, Mexican/American, and Mexican American –that does not fit into the space created by the colonizer. The individuals who carry these titles are stuck in an intermediate state in which it is difficult to identify with either label while simultaneously identifying with both.

Rather than fall into the feminine, feminist, female stages created by Showalter, women in the Mexican and Mexican American literature I have chosen to study for my thesis fall into three stages of their own: Indigenous, Mexican, and Mexican American (see Figure 1).

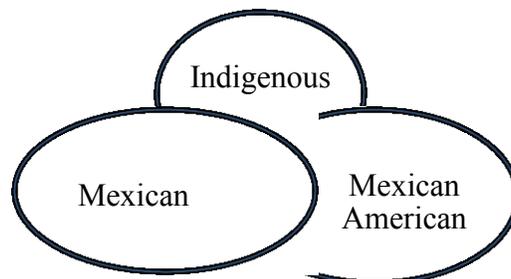


Figure 1. “Buena Mujer Model”

I chose to title this grouping the “Buena Mujer Model” as these liminal positions enabled the women in the Mexican and Mexican American literature I chose to challenge the Spaniard belief that autonomy made indigenous women “La Mala Mujer” (Nieto-Gómez 50). I separate these three historical stages as follows:

1. Indigenous phase –women wrote in order to separate themselves from the Spanish image of “La Mala Mujer,” advocate women’s rights, and protest colonization.
2. Mexican phase –women wrote to advocate for women’s rights, to protest U.S cultural imperialism, and to incorporate a new form of feminism that allowed them to honor their cultural beliefs and practices.
3. Mexican American phase –women wrote to advocate for the rights of women of color, to protest colonization, and to find a connection with their past.

In the Indigenous phase, women wrote to separate themselves from imposed patriarchal dominance as well as the negative descriptor of “La Mala Mujer” used by the Spaniards to describe the self-sufficient women of the indigenous communities. The next generation of women (Mexican) continued the Indigenous phase while simultaneously writing against the promulgation of U.S. cultural imperialism. In the process, they set the stage for a separate form of feminism than that advocated by the white feminists. In the Mexican American phase, women continued to fight for their rights, both as women and as minorities, and tried to create a connection with the women who occupied the Indigenous space in order to create a connection with their past and help shape their identity.

To represent these three stages, I chose to concentrate on three Latina authors: Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz (1651-1695), Dora Cervera-Mirabal (1914-1979), and Sandra

Cisneros (1954–). These women not only fought the identity crisis that came with being subjugated by men, but also the duality that came with being female and colonized.

In Chapter One, I explore the life of Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz. In the 1600s, Sor Juana Inés fought for women's education, especially in the Catholic Church, even while she was limited by her role as a woman. She protested the restrictive lifestyles imposed on women, regardless of their background, most notably in her "Respuesta a Sor Filotea."

While Sor Juana Inés was of half Spanish, half *criollo* descent she was raised in Mexico and surrounded by the indigenous culture. This allowed her to develop a great respect for the people and drove her to protest the suppressive conditions forced upon the indigenous people by the Spanish colonizers. However, she also protested Spanish colonization. In her play *The Divine Narcissus*, Sor Juana Inés casts the indigenous American and Occident as heroes and questions the intentions of Spanish Zeal.

According to Frances Kennet's "The Theology of *The Divine Narcissus*:"

Sor Juana searches for the roots of a nation's "Christian spirit" in their former rites, more positively – through their creation myths, not through their sacrifices. Sor Juana gives dignity to indigenous beliefs in a gentle, quite humorous exchange between America, West World, and Religion. (66-7)

As a mere woman, even a nun, she did not have a voice, but as the author of *The Divine Narcissus* Sor Juana Inés educated the population about political issues and gave "dignity to indigenous beliefs" (Kennet 67). Sor Juana Inés wrote to expose gender inequalities as well as the damage of colonization, fitting into the first stage of the "Buena Mujer Model."

Three hundred and ten years later, while Mexican men fought a repressive government during La Revolución, the Mexican *soldaderas* were fighting a battle of their own against the suppressive culture. As these women began to form an identity within a Mexican government that was not ready for their forward thinking, they began to seek refuge in the United States where they were allowed a voice. In newspapers such as *El Obrero*, *La Voz de la Mujer*, *Pluma Roja*, and *La Cronica*, these women printed messages “directed specifically at women, who were encouraged to break their chains through the acquisition of knowledge” (Lomas 62).

Chapter Two has as its focus Dora Cervera-Mirabal’s writing<sup>1</sup>. Mirabal was the product of a long line of women fighting against the loss of identity within a world that silenced them based on their gender and color. She was aware of the white feminist movement and also derived much of her inspiration from women such as Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz. Correspondingly, she was aware of the war that American women fought during the ‘20s in order to have voting rights.

Mirabal also understood the experiences of the Mexican American woman who protested against the “male standards” that harmed the female identity but who wanted a relationship with *la familia* that would strengthen, not hinder, her growth as an individual, which included acquiring a scholarly education. She proposed a place for the colonized women who did not fit perfectly into Showalter’s model, but she did not force

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<sup>1</sup>I found Dora Cervera-Mirabal in the same classroom in which I developed my distaste for mainstream feminism. My rhetoric professor, Dr. Etheridge, mentioned Mirabal’s contribution to Corpus Christi’s history and the many pieces she had published. The topics she wrote about caught my attention, and I immediately headed towards the archives and began to read her editorials. I fell in love with her pieces. I had finally found a woman who didn’t want to mold me into someone else. Rather, her words encouraged me to continue being myself and look forward to the day that I married and created a strong relationship with my husband. She made me feel no shame for being an educated woman who looked forward to spending her life beside a man.

them to choose between an education and *la familia*, between autonomy and their relationships, between their customs and forward thinking. This forward thinking places Mirabal in phase two of the “Buena Mujer Model.” This new Mexican American woman fully developed during the Chicana Movement when Mexican and Mexican American women began fighting against suppression by the white culture, as well as Chicanos. Mexican and Mexican American women, such as Sandra Cisneros, fought to create an identity that allowed them to incorporate and adapt cultural rules and expectations into their own form of feminism.

To further my analysis of Mirabal’s works, I present and analyze five of Mirabal’s writings that I have translated from Spanish to English. These published pieces have never been translated and allow for her works to be read by a wider population. These translations can be found in Appendix A.

In Chapter Three, I analyze Sandra Cisneros’s *Caramelo*. Cisneros’s insight into the female, Mexican American lifestyle further complicates models such as Showalter’s three phases. I use the “Buena Mujer Model” to analyze the changes and growth that occurs with the characters of Soledad, Zoila, and Celaya, placing Cisneros within the third stage. I explore how this model fits the Chicana’s roles better than Showalter’s model.

Beginning with Sor Juana Inés, I analyze the three stages of a Mexican American heritage: the indigenous ancestors, the Mexican history, and the journey to the United States. With each subsequent generation, the women examined in this thesis became aware of their rightful position in society, the voices ranging from a muffled protest to, eventually, a clear and distinct sense of self.

The literature I have analyzed has given me an insight into both the cultural changes that have occurred with time, as well as the changes that occur with movement across nations. It has also allowed me to understand the history of the Mexican and Mexican American hybridization as well as join the ranks of women, such as Gloria Anzaldúa, who have taken pride in their hybrid identity. Anzaldúa acknowledges women who are stuck “between *los intersticios*, the spaces between the different worlds she inhabits” (20). Adding the concept of hybridity and colonization to Showalter’s model further complicates the space that women of color would fit within each phase as more factors are introduced into each female identity.

Along the way I am able to reclaim an important U.S. author whose work has yet to be given its due and to reveal how Dora Cervera-Mirabal’s writings foreshadowed a new form of feminism. The translation of her editorials will uncover her writings to a new audience, and it will begin a much-needed conversation on the views of feminism expressed by Mirabal through her writings. I hope to provide material for a critical engagement concerning the writings of a Latina who until now has gone largely unheard. In doing this I hope to expose and preserve Mirabal’s struggles against “social injustices,” as well as explore select Mexican and Mexican American literature to find a space for the women—Indigenous, Mexican, and Mexican American—who for centuries have been left out of mainstream feminism.

## II. SOR JUANA INÉS DE LA CRUZ: LAND OF IN-BETWEEN

### My Mexican Voice

My mother alternated between school in the U.S. and Mexico and stopped attending school in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade. She recently admitted that she never thought Mexican history would ever again be of use to her, and that she was too busy working to teach it to me when I was younger. Personally, I never questioned my lack of awareness of Mexico's (and thus my ancestral) history as it was rarely present in my U.S. history books. I only became conscious of my lack of identity when a friend commented on my ignorance regarding anything Mexican. Only when I checked out books with Latino/a names on the spine did I realize just how much I was missing.

Once I started researching Mexican women, my primary interest became understanding who they really were, moving beyond the stereotypical Mexican woman in the kitchen, wearing her apron, braided hair intact, making tortillas while carrying a child on her hip. Adaljiza Sosa Riddell critiques the “externally-imposed stereotypes” in “Chicanas and El Movimiento,” stating that many stereotypes have been equated with aspects of Mexican-Chicano culture. For example, social scientists describe la Chicana as “ideally submissive, unworldly, and chaste,” or “at the command of the husband who [keeps] her as he would a coveted thing, free from the contacts of the world, subject to his passions, ignorant of life” (93).

Unfortunately, this stereotype continues to represent the ideal Latino woman: submissive, chaste, and obedient to her husband. Indeed, the traits of La Virgen de Guadalupe are still highly valued, and even today women are revered as the mother of the

home. These types of women are treasured, but mainly to serve their husbands and care for their families. Outside of the home their value drops.

Thus far, my description of the Mexican and Mexican American woman is reminiscent of the plight of the English and American woman. In fact, Virginia Woolf describes the irony of men placing imaginary women on a pedestal and viewing real women as less than human. In *A Room of One's Own* she writes,

Imaginatively she is of the highest importance; practically she is completely insignificant. She pervades poetry from cover to cover; she is all but absent from history. She dominates the lives of kings and conquerors in fiction; in fact she was the slave of any boy whose parents forced a ring upon her finger. Some of the most inspired words, some of the most profound thoughts in literature fall from her lips; in real life she could hardly read, could scarcely spell, and was the property of her husband. (43)

Despite the parallels between Mexican, Mexican American, and other subjugated women worldwide, Mexican and Mexican American women do not neatly fall into the feminine, feminist, female stages created by Elaine Showalter. Rather, they fall into three stages of their own: Indigenous, Mexican, and Mexican American (see Figure 2). These women not only fight the identity crisis that comes with being subjugated to men, but also with the duality that comes with being female and colonized. Their writings express their distaste for the male subjugation as well as the confusion that comes with a lack of cultural identity.

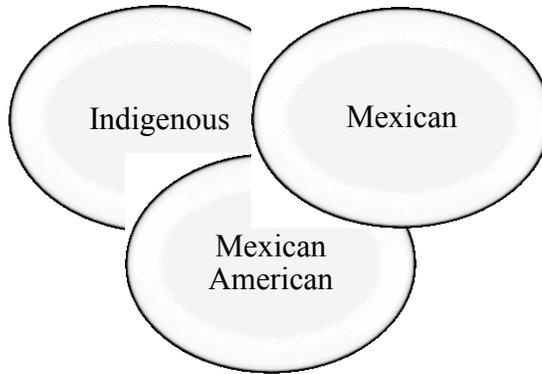


Figure 2. “Buena Mujer Model”

In this chapter I will discuss Sor Juana Inés De La Cruz and the impact she had on future generations, including the *soldaderas* of the Mexican Revolution, Dora Cervera-Mirabal, and Sandra Cisneros (who mentions Sor Juana Inés in the Introduction to *The House on Mango Street* as a Mexican writer who encouraged her to seek “*otro modo de ser*”). Sor Juana Inés exemplifies the Indigenous Stage in the “Buena Mujer Model” as she writes in order to separate herself from the Spanish image of “La Mala Mujer,” advocates women’s rights, and protests colonization. Sor Juana Inés’ work has helped mold Indigenous and Mexican feminists, allowing a space for future Latino “books to continue each other” (Woolf 84).

### **Sor Juana Inés De La Cruz: The Nun with a Voice**

Although history books document the Mexican Revolution as the instigator of women’s fight for civil rights, Mexican women had been writing about the need for gender equality as early as the 1600s. One such female activist was Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, born on November 12, 1651, in San Miguel Nepantla, México, under the birth name Juana Inés de Asbaje y Ramírez de Santillana. She was the illegitimate daughter of

a Spanish captain, and her *criollo* mother, Isabe Ramirez. Sor Juana Inés was raised in a land of the “in-between.”<sup>2</sup>

Much of what is known of Sor Juana Inés’ life stems from her own writing. Although one might question choosing a life of a nun in order to escape a life of entrapment, a position in a religious order, without the responsibility of a husband and children, afforded Sor Juana Inés an education she would not have otherwise had. In *Respuesta a Sor Filotea de la Cruz*, she explains why she chose a religious life,

Entréme religiosa, porque aunque conocía que tenía el estado cosas (de las accesorias hablo, no de las formales), muchas repugnantes a mi genio, con todo, para la total negación que tenía al matrimonio, era lo menos desproporcionado y lo más decente que podía elegir en materia de la seguridad que deseaba de mi salvación; a cuyo primer respeto (como al fin más importante) cedieron y sujetaron la cerviz todas las impertinencillas de mi genio, que eran de querer vivir sola; de no querer tener ocupación obligatoria que embarazase la libertad de mi estudio, ni rumor de comunidad que impidiese el sosegado silencio de mis libros. (50)<sup>3</sup>

Her published works, such as “Poema 48: Respondiendo a un Caballero del Perú,” *Respuesta a Sor Filotea*, and *Villancicos*, likewise reveal her passion for women’s rights to a scholarly education. However, her feminist piece *Respuesta a Sor Filotea de la Cruz*, which she did not intend to make public, has remained her hallmark.

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<sup>2</sup> “Nepantla” is Nahuatl word meaning “in-between space” (Keating 8).

<sup>3</sup>I entered a religious order because, although I was aware that that lifestyle had certain things (I’m talking about incidental not official ones), or rather, many things that were abhorrent to my character—given my total rejection of marriage—it was the least objectionable and the most respectable one I could choose with regard to my desire to safeguard my salvation. In the face of this primary concern (surely it is the most important one) all the stubborn little impertinences of my nature gave way and bowed: that is, wanting to live alone; wanting not to have any obligatory duties that would hinder my freedom to study; being free from community noises that would interrupt the peace and quiet of my books. (43)

In an earlier writing entitled, *Carta Atenagorica*, Sor Juana Inés turned religion upon itself when she deconstructed a generally accepted concept, Christ's gift to humanity, delivered in a Jesuit's sermon. She broke apart the sermon and created her own interpretation, arguing that God gave humanity free will and did not exclude women from having this privilege. As was expected, Sor Juana Inés received adverse reactions to such public disagreements with a male church officer, and received criticism from the male population. She responded to the criticism with her letter *Respuesta a Sor Filotea de la Cruz* in which she spoke out against the restrictions that were placed upon women simply based on their gender, going against one of the most powerful institutions of her time, the Catholic Church. She defended her lifestyle choice and her love for learning in her letter:

Oh, how much damage would be avoided in our nation if old women were as educated as Leta and if they knew how to teach as St. Paul and my father St. Jerome command! On the contrary, in lieu of this approach and due to the extreme carelessness with which men have chosen to deal with our poor women, if some parents want to have their daughters educated beyond the basic catechism, necessity and the absence of trained older women force them to turn them over to male teachers to teach them reading, writing, arithmetic, music, and other skills. Not a little damage results from this. Every day we hear lamentable examples of such unevenly-matched pairings. (trans. Little 36)

In her letter, Sor Juana Inés delivers a message of rebellion, but as a religious woman trying to deliver a message of change, she had to write her responses in a way that was not offensive to the reigning powers.

In “Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz’s Rhetorical Conquest: As Mad-Woman and an-Other,” Natalie McManus explores how Sor Juana Inés used her mastery of language to deliver her message:

She repeatedly professes her lack of talent and of learning throughout the letter; demonstrating a supposed intellectual powerlessness. What she actually does, however, is use the various tropes to prove her intellectual prowess, command of the language, and also mask the anger with which she wrote. In order to address her issues with the institutional power that is her religion, she must delicately word her response in such a way that shows her concern for accepted practices while at the same time demanding change. (3)

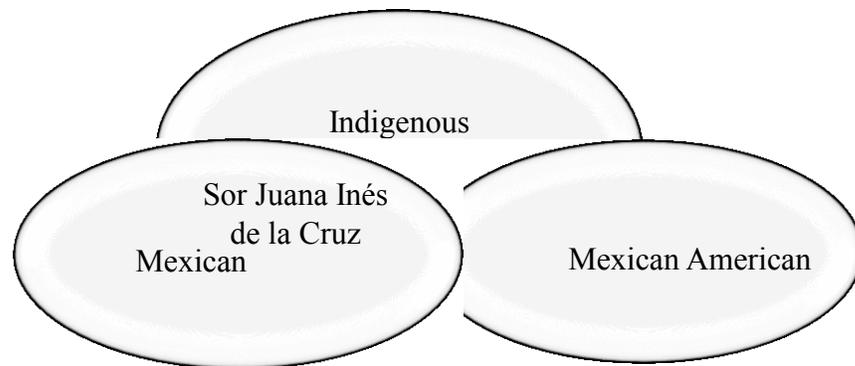
Sor Juana Inés threaded delicately around her audience by using figures of speech to say what was considered unorthodox. She used her knowledge of rhetoric to create an argument, cleansing her choice of lifestyle from the Spaniard’s imposed title of “La Mala Mujer.” In particular she used the religiosity of the audience to be closer to God and become a better Catholic. How could anyone deny another human that opportunity to save her soul? Nonetheless, even as she fought for educational equality between genders, her gender did not permit her to directly comment on the failures of the Church and the sexism present in the religious community.

Sor Juana Inés is an influential figure in Mexican history as it is argued that “her open hostility toward the gender-based stratification of her time rightly makes her the precursor of feminist consciousness,” and organizations, such as El Closet de Sor Juana, continue to use her name to fight for women’s rights and gay liberation (Pablos 39; Rodríguez 7). Through the veil of religion Sor Juana Inés fought against institutionalized

powers that were working together to relegate women and the colonized indigenous people to second hand citizenship. While Sor Juana Inés did not overtly go against the societal norms present during her life, her work spoke out against a society that imposed rules favoring the male population. Women suffered from these imposed expectations, but Sor Juana Inés believed that everyone, including women, should be able to make their own life choices.

### **Sor Juana Inés and the Indigenous Phase**

In addition to living as a woman in a male-dominated world, Sor Juana Inés *also* lived in a liminal space based on her choice to relate to the indigenous people whom she had been surrounded by her entire life (see Figure 3). Thus, she was doubly oppressed. Ultimately, Sor Juana Inés created a powerful identity and delivered a strong message against colonization and sexism by owning her hybrid identity. Rather than allow the colonizer to hold the power, she used the merging of the indigenous and Mexican culture to protest the cultural norms that were inadequate within each group.



*Figure 3. Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz's Space within the "Buena Mujer Model"*

Growing up in Mexico, as a woman of Spanish descent, Sor Juana Inés was able to view first-hand the challenges and limitations experienced by women and the indigenous people. Even while she was raised by a strong, independent woman, she was

able to recognize the struggles experienced by the women stuck between the transitioning nation and its changing population. What she wrote defended the rights of women and her appreciation for the past. She criticized the faltering society that did not understand women's needs for equality and progress. Poems such as "Hombres Necios" expose her frustration with "los hombres que en las mujeres acusan lo que causan<sup>4</sup>," but plays such as *El Divino Narciso* explore the mutilation and loss of identity that comes with colonization.

*El Divino Narciso* was commissioned as an *auto-sacramental*, a play put together to "educate Catholics and fortify their beliefs" (Gonzalez 12). Sor Juana Inés went against the norm by introducing the play with a *loa* that commented on the effects of colonization and male power. While the Spaniards worked to cleanse the indigenous people of their idolatrous traditions and beliefs, Sor Juana Inés cleverly incorporated these same beliefs into her play to reveal the parallels between the indigenous "god of seeds" and Catholic "Religion." She commented on the indigenous religion as a predecessor when she wrote, "So help me God, what rough outlines or sample hints, or even clues our most holy sacred truths purport to hide in these designs?" (qtd. in Kenneth 64).

By making her characters of Occident and American *indios* and representing Zeal as the Spanish military force, Sor Juana Inés indirectly protested the Spanish colonization of the indigenous religion. Directly she challenged the Spanish military whose intentions were not Christian but rather driven by a desire for power and wealth. After receiving resistance from los *indios* towards the new religion Zeal asks of Religion, "But you have

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<sup>4</sup> "Men [wrongly] accuse women of what they cause" (my translation)

seen the stubbornness / with which these blind ones still abhor / your creed; is it not better far / that they all die?" (*Loa* 3.218-21). Religion convinces Zeal that the *indios'* deaths are not necessary and through the use of the *Divine Narcissus* goes on to teach the *indios* about Christianity, but not before Sor Juana Inés makes the audience aware of the damage of colonization. By mixing aspects of both the Spaniard and Mexican culture within her *loa*, Sor Juana Inés reminded the population that certain features of the indigenous culture could survive even after the colonization of the Spaniards. In this way, she empowered a group of people searching for an identity and reclaimed the power that the indigenous lost after the Spaniards invaded their land and their culture.

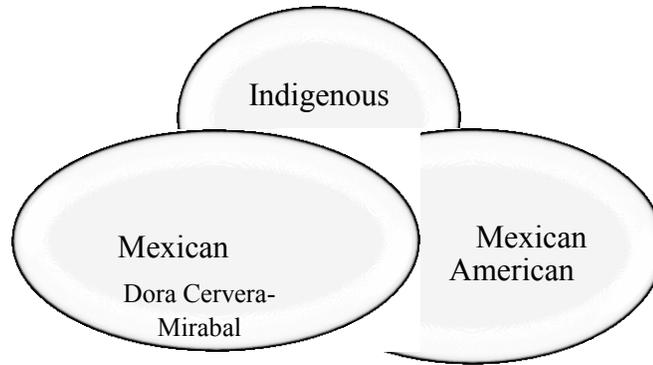
### **Conclusion**

By requesting that the general population be privy to a scholarly education, Sor Juana Inés was creating a space for not only the indigenous people but also the women who were being pushed aside because of colonization, by doing so she created a space of transition, a space for women to find their identity. Born in Mexico, and raised in a country rapidly becoming a land of mixed races (*mestizos*), Sor Juana Inés allowed that inconsistency and displacement to create an identity in the land of in-between. Through her writings, Sor Juana Inés separated herself from the imposed Spanish idea of "La Mala Mujer," advocated for women's rights, and protested the colonization which was impeding women and indigenous people from creating a sense of self. Sor Juana Inés thus created a space of transition, a space for those who were stuck between two worlds.

### **III. THE MEXICAN PHASE: DORA CERVERA-MIRABAL**

Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz wrote to empower women *and* the indigenous people who were slowly being forgotten because of colonization. As a woman caught between the Spanish and indigenous people of Mexico, Sor Juana Inés became a model for the Mexican American woman stuck between borders and cultural expectations.

One such woman, Dora Cervera-Mirabal, resided in Corpus Christi, Texas, and was inspired by feminists of both Anglo and Mexican descent to create an identity that merged both her Mexican and Mexican American culture. Mirabal was a successor in the line of colonized women fighting for their rights, but her residency in the United States created a hybrid identity which allowed for a more vocal and public analysis of the problems women were encountering. Mirabal was also the beneficiary of a family with money and a father who respected her intellect. With these gifts, Mirabal fought for other women's rights to receive an education equal to that received by men, much as Sor Juana Inés had done centuries earlier. Also like Sor Juana Inés, Mirabal countered colonization, in her case U.S. cultural imperialism, and critiqued selective feminism that did not allow a space for women of different cultures. Dora Cervera-Mirabal's form of feminism allowed for women raised between Mexico and the United States to create a space of their own.



*Figure 4. Dora Cervera-Mirabal's Space within the "Buena Mujer Model"*

**Dora Cervera-Mirabal's Journey Between Borders**

Dora Cervera-Mirabal was the eldest daughter of eleven, and her parents, Matias Cervera and Aracelia Gonzalez-Cervera, were influential in Mirabal's success. In order to improve their family opportunities to secure a better lifestyle, her parents moved Mirabal and her siblings to the United States when she was two years old. The family initially moved to Del Rio, Texas, from Piedras Negras, Coahuila, Mexico, but the Cervera family finally settled down in Corpus Christi, Texas.

Mirabal was a bright and curious child, and her parents encouraged her to learn as much as possible. She was taught both English and Spanish and was fluent in both languages by the age of three. She also had the privilege of having a family of educated men. Her grandfather was a poet, and her father was a literate man who helped instill the love of literature and writing in Mirabal. Mr. Cervera had an extensive library, and he encouraged Mirabal to join in his love of literature. Both her grandfather and her father believed it was imperative for Mirabal to immerse herself in education. Her father fought for her to gain equal education to the one being received by white students in Corpus Christi, sending her to a distinguished university in Mexico when the U.S. school failed to move Mirabal to a grade level that matched her level of intelligence.

Regardless of societal norms, Matias Cervera was supportive of his daughter, and when he saw the interest his daughter had in writing he made it his mission to accommodate all of her needs. Mirabal was sent to the Universidad Nacional Autonoma de Mexico situated in Monterrey, Nuevo Leon, where she was educated by several of Mr. Cervera's close friends. It was in this setting that Mirabal came into contact with the history of Mexico. Although there is no documentation of what courses were offered during her stay in the university, it is assumed that she was able to study a detailed history of Mexico, the struggle of her people, and the displacement of Mexicans from the US regions lost to *los gringos*. This knowledge allowed her to have a broader perspective of what was taking place within the Mexican American communities and the struggles they were facing, providing her with both sides of the story. Mirabal received her degree from UNAM returning to the United States shortly after, but the education she received during her stay in Mexico is reflected within her writing.

Although she had the support of her family, it was her marital union and economic status that allowed her to publish political and feminist topics during a time when this form of behavior was not encouraged. Mirabal's priority was to allow women to gain the respect of the men around them. She wanted women to have the chance to be educated and find a way to integrate into a society that limited them based on their gender. She was a member of the YMCA, YWCA, Corpus Christi Chamber of Commerce, Mexican Chamber of Commerce, and volunteered her services in many other organizations. With the intent of continuing to aid the community and educating women on their potential, Mirabal used her prominence in order to influence members of the Mexican Chamber of Commerce to allow women to become members of the

organization. She went on to successfully sway the members into allowing female involvement and eventually went on to become an elected officer. She was driven to fight against discrimination, whether it was racial or sexist, and it was because of this that she fought against the relegation of women and Latinos.

### **Mirabal Protests U.S. Cultural Imperialism**

Mirabal was raised in the U.S., but she was very much aware of her Mexican descent. She worked within her community to help the Latino population better their living conditions and gain an education. She also fought to create a public space within the primarily male Anglo community for Latino/a individuals. While her husband worked with LULAC to create a space for Mexican men within Corpus Christi and throughout the United States, Mirabal fought to educate the Mexican population in order for them to be able to have options. Her daughter, Rosie Mirabal-Garza, remembers her mother as a person who stood up for what she believed in, took action, and led by example (see Appendix B for interview transcript). When asked, “Did any sort of events (either national or local) influence her beliefs or her actions?” Mrs. Mirabal-Garza answered:

Discrimination against Hispanics, particularly children in the school system, led her to become active in that area. Similarly seeing women being relegated to second class status in the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce and other organizations led her to seek a greater role for women there. (Mirabal-Garza)

It was this desire to protest discrimination against “Hispanics” (or Latinos) and to advocate women’s rights that prompted Dora Cervera-Mirabal to begin publishing her editorials in the family newspaper, *El Progreso*. She strived to write about the experience of the Mexican American women in Corpus Christi, but her message covered topics that

affected the general public, regardless of sex. By creating opportunities for the Mexican population in Corpus Christi Mirabal provided them with the tools necessary to succeed while simultaneously encouraging them to maintain their Mexican identity.

Mirabal used her hybridized position to her advantage. She wrote in her family newspaper and her yearly publication, *La Calavera*, in Spanish, but she understood the benefits that came with speaking English. As her daughter mentions in “Remembering My Parents” Mirabal “did not want people held back due to a lack of language proficiency” (35). Because of this she opened her bilingual school, and when it outgrew her resources, Mirabal reached out to her close friends to create the group “Nuestros Amigos Para Los Estudiantes Bilingual Circle” (37). Mirabal and her husband were involved with LULAC and Mirabal held on to many of the same beliefs advocated by the organization. She too “fought to retain their Latino heritage while also advocating a grasp of the English language,” although her writings do not reflect the need for loyalty to the United States and the American institutions (Yarsinske 9). Rather, Mirabal wrote to advocate the need for change and progress for a group of people who were stuck between borders, languages, and identities.

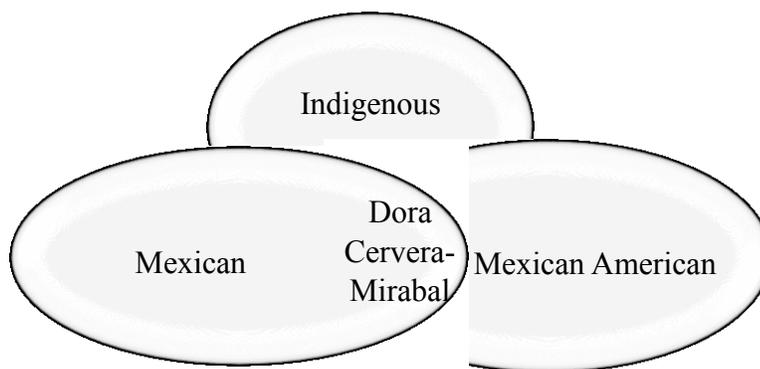
### **Mirabal Advocates Women’s Rights**

Not all women were given the same opportunities as Mirabal, but she reminded the female community that they were capable of choosing who they wanted to be in life. Forty years later, Bernice Rincón would voice similar demands in her piece “La Chicana: Her role in the Past and Her Search for a New Role in the Future,” after claiming that Chicanas did not want to join the Anglo Women’s Liberation, choosing

instead to gain support from their own Brown role models and the men who showed support:

We do not want to compete with men. We do not want to be given the opportunity to do whatever it is that we do best in the line of work. We want to have our efforts recognized and our success rewarded with more responsibility and when feasible with financial awards. We want to have our ideas recognized and implemented with credits going to the originators. We want to be in on the decision making if we are “leaders” and to work beside our men as equals. (28)

Mirabal was ahead of her time in creating a space in which women could choose to be educated *and* be the woman of the house. She also allowed women to revert back to their indigenous roots, where women were revered as mothers but held an important role within their community. In “Authentic Feminism” she argued the main reason for feminism was for women to “liberate themselves from those laws which decreed her mental incapacity,” but she encouraged women not to forget their “sacred duties of mother and wife (80)” (See Figure 5).



*Figure 5. Mirabal Creates a New Space*

“Authentic Feminism,” written on June of 1939, argues the necessity for “equality of women” and references the struggles women experience because of sexism

(80). She cites feminist movements, observing that feminism “has filed down chains, abolished injustices, distinguished women from darkness toward light, [and] show[n] her a wider horizon” (80). Mirabal believed that it was important for women to learn their self-worth and teach the younger female population their rights within a male-dominated society. She believed it was important to recognize feminism as a powerful movement as it would free women from the “laws which decreed [their] mental incapacity and intellectuality in relation to man” and would allow them to be more involved socially, politically, and civically (80).

Yet, Mirabal did not instruct women to forget their femininity. She argued for freedom from restrictive norms, but also believed that women should never lose their sense of decorum. On one hand, she fought for women’s need of a scholarly education, freedom from civic restrictions, and for equality, but she believed that women needed to remember and fulfill their roles within the home if they chose to marry. The new generation of women had to be knowledgeable of their rights “which [they are] justified in demanding,” but never forget the “responsibilities of [their] duties” (80). By doing so, women would be able to unite in fighting against the inequalities and injustices practiced against them and help others as well. Ethics and moral superiority would allow them to learn their “own worth,” which would then help them “sustain [themselves] in the ranks of dignity” (80).

Her message to the women reading her editorials was therefore not for to separate themselves from the male population and create a sole identity as women. Rather, Mirabal argued for women to find their own identity within the role they chose to follow. She encouraged women to be strong, educated versions of themselves. Mirabal fought to

change the detrimental conditions of women within her surroundings, but she never forgot her role as a wife. She continued to serve her family, taking care of her children and her husband while simultaneously writing and donating her time and resources to her community. She embraced her labels of woman and wife and encouraged other women to do the same. Although she was sometimes extreme in her position concerning feminine roles and traits, insisting in her 1940 article, "The Woman," that the role of women as the "preserver of domestic peace" was as important as the "antique virgins were [to] the sacred fire," Mirabal believed that women were capable of being feminine while continuing to be intellectually equal to their male counterparts (4). In essence, she highlighted intellectual equality over physiological differences when comparing the sexes. She also believed in the sanctity of marriage, and she encouraged women to use their power within their marriage while continuing to care for their families.

Mirabal was also an activist, fighting to get women into political positions in order to challenge U.S. cultural imperialism and racism against Mexican Americans. She created venues empowering Latinos such as her bilingual school, among other charitable works. She fought to secure positions for women within the political life in her own city.

Contrary to Sor Juana Inés' rejection of the role of the matriarch, Mirabal cherished the position thrust upon her and encouraged other women to do the same. In this way her literature fits into the Mexican phase of the "Buena Mujer Model" as Mirabal encouraged a new form of feminism that allowed Mexican and Mexican American women to honor their cultural beliefs and practices. In her article, "What is it to be a Wife?," published October 27, 1939, Mirabal describes the role of married

women, stating that it does not simply entail “being a possession” or “merchandise with which to speculate” (1).

Mirabal makes an allusion to “The Wife of Noble Character,” found in Proverbs 31: 10-31, by describing the wife as a woman of worth, valued by her husband not simply as a possession but rather as an asset working alongside men to create a comfortable and enjoyable environment in the home. Many of the *soldaderas* who fought in the Revolución worked alongside their husbands and provided a homely environment while they were on missions, and a majority was allowed to participate in the fighting, literally walking alongside their men in battle. Similarly, Mirabal depicts the wife as a tender being full of potential not only to help her husband but also improve humanity as a whole. Within her article she encouraged women to be supportive of their husbands, as well as to continue their religious education, which would allow them to have a successful partnership.

Mexican women fighting for equality wanted to be able to have civil rights and participate in the roles primarily assigned to men, such as politics and military, but they also wanted the opportunity to stay at home. Mirabal was also able to balance her religiosity, family, and feminist writings without claiming that her way of living was the proper way for women to act. In “The Faces of the Rebellion: From Revolutionaries to Veterans in Nationalist Mexico,” Martha Eva Rocha explains Mexican women didn’t impose the roles they were fighting for on women who didn’t seek them: “Like other feminists of their time, their proposals linked equality and liberalism in terms of dignifying women in the areas of education, work, political participation, without challenging the social function of maternity as women’s destiny” (27). These women did

not claim that it was necessary to abandon motherhood in order to have equality; rather, women had the right to be active participants of society and fulfill their roles as mothers. Similarly, Mirabal wanted women to be treated as equal to men in the arenas listed by Rocha, but she still wanted the role of the mother to be honored.

Mirabal was a mother, a scholar, a writer, and a wife. She chose her role, and she gave the women who read her editorials the option to make their own choices. She encouraged women to be educated, but she never imposed her own beliefs on others. Yet, she did reprimand men for imposing a fake sense of weakness upon women. Although she understood that women could be physically weaker than men, she believed that women were intellectually equal to their male counterparts. In “The Woman: In Her Physical and Moral Aspect,” published November 19, 1939, Mirabal argues against the mental restrictions placed upon women. She claims that men have feared that education will ruin their women, rather than feed their souls, and she argues against the mentality that women are incapable of withstanding the power that comes with an education. She writes:

It seems to be that education believes that the delicate hand of the woman cannot grab volumes without wasting away its gentleness, and since it is its belief that a pretty and soft hand is worth more than a cultivated intelligence it prefers this vanity over knowledge of the past. It does not by any chance let the dust of the scientific schools touch from afar the silk of her dress...Unjust education? Nature protests against your tyranny. (4)

In this piece, Mirabal fights against being treated as a weakling in regards to receiving an education. She speaks out against the tyrants who chose to keep women uneducated and scorns education for the unfair advantage it provides men.

In “The Woman: In Her Moral and Physical Aspect,” Mirabal depicts Education as a character that does not allow for women to be intellectually equal to men. It is a concept that contradicts itself as it depicts women as tender, delicate beings who should not waste away reading and learning. Education believes that women should never reach the level of education that men hold as it can transform them into callused beings. Education claims to be protecting women from “wasting away” in the classroom (4). Yet, by denying women the right to learn, Education treats them like slaves rather than the delicate beings it claims they allegedly are. Mirabal reprimands men and goes on to personify Education as an oppressor of women who does not allow them to reach their full potential. Education cannot conceive of women being tender and soft as well as cultivating intelligence. Education continues to contradict itself as it does not treat women with the delicacy it claims they deserve, but rather exiles women to the “corner of the palaces of science, only feeds [women] with the men’s leftovers, and dresses [women] with the rags that [men] give her as charity” (4).

Mirabal also alludes to Sor Juana Inés’ writings when she reprimands Education for being too lazy to take care of women. She questions, “but if it [Education] would have dedicated itself to creating woman how she should be, how many Paulas, how many Gertrudis, how many Catalinas wouldn’t it have created?” (4). Sor Juana Inés likewise listed these women from the Christian era, who were literate, well-versed in the Latin language, and teachers, in order to argue for women’s education (Little 20).

In her article “A Woman’s Education: Her Intelligence,” published November 3, 1939, Mirabal continues arguing for the need of women to be educated. In this article, Mirabal echoes the ideas Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz presents in *Respuesta a Sor Filotea de la Cruz*, noting, “The science of God, the science of man, the science of nature, the language of antiquity, the history, the eloquence, the poetry, the beautiful, the sublime is not only a gift exclusive of one sex it is the patrimony of intelligence” (4). Similarly, Sor Juana Inés believed it was important for both men and women to be educated on topics such as history, philosophy, architecture, and literature in order to be able to fully understand their surroundings. Whether it was reading the Bible—and understanding the deeper, metaphorical layers under the simple architectural details—or dealing with political issues that could affect the lives of millions, an education could provide an individual with a broader range of options and examples of how to act. Mirabal shared Sor Juana Inés’ mentality and believed it was important for the entire human population to be well-versed in as many topics as possible.

In “A Woman’s Education,” Mirabal continues to portray Education as an unfair character responsible for the image of vanity which has been imposed on women by society. Women are accused of being preoccupied with their physical appearance with little regards to anything else. Yet, Mirabal believed that if women were given the opportunity to obtain an education equal to the one men receive, women’s priorities would change:

Poor woman! She is born, and since she is in her cradle she does not see anything else but a crown of wreaths and branches for her head, jewels and silk for her body; nor does she hear anything other than the mournful prayer of her poor intellectual

condition, and it is because she is always seeing and hearing the same thing, that she convinces herself that her real mission in this earth is nothing more than to fix her body in order to conquer men with her bodily attractions. (4)

Although women had been relegated to a role of second-class citizens, Mirabal believed that a scholarly education could elevate women to their rightful place. She sought to inform women about the power they possessed over their own bodies and how they could take control of their own destinies. She believed a woman's intelligence was equal to that of a man, and that women were equally capable of learning.

Mirabal believed it necessary to exalt the women's soul and body in order for women to know their worth. She equally blamed men and educational institutions for women's detrimental conditions, and avoided placing blame solely on her male counterparts. Doing so could assign her a position of rebellion within her Mexican American community, which valued marriage and the institutionalization of males as patriarchs. Although those were her primary targets, Mirabal placed blame on everybody who refused to allow women the freedom to learn. She finishes her "A Women's Education" with the statement, "Stop then *you*, unjust and inhuman, complaining of the unhappy woman, and try to elevate her back to the rank which she is deserving of" (emphasis added). By addressing the "you" in the population, Mirabal rebukes all, regardless of sex or economic position, for reducing women to a character without depth or worry other than over her personal appearance.

### **Conclusion**

Although Mirabal did not have the hands-on experience that the *soldaderas* possessed from fighting alongside their men, she continued the Revolución with her

publications during the '20s and '30s. Mirabal joined the ranks of women fighting against the government and the institutionalization of women as the weaker sex. She encouraged women to seek out the role they wanted to fulfill, never forgetting that they had their bodies, soul, and mind to protect. She promoted an interest in their personal beauty, reminding them that caring for their appearance brought them a sense of respect from themselves and others, but she fought against those who used women's beauty as an excuse for their relegation to second-class citizens.

Mirabal was a Mexican woman living in the United States surrounded by a society that treasured men as leaders, during a time period that provided limited space for women with an opinion, but she was capable of continuing her life as a mother and a wife, while working to change the detrimental conditions women were experiencing. Mirabal's cultural identity did not allow her to neatly fit into Showalter's second phase, as her publications did not "demand for autonomy" (Showalter 13). Rather, she fits the Mexican phase of the "Buena Mujer Model" as she advocated women's rights, protested colonization/racism, and fought for a new form of feminism that honored the mother role present in Mexican and Mexican American cultures.

#### IV. THE MEXICAN AMERICAN PHASE: SANDRA CISNEROS

##### Transitions Between Borders and Generations

As Chicanas we respect our men. We respect the home, the family. This is all dealing within the cultural context. Yet times are changing. You are coping with a new Chicana, a Chicana working within the college system. A Chicana who is seeing that her place need not only be in the home, with her husband and family. She is sensing her ability beyond that, yet not excluding it. She will go through and the college system to get her degree and then she realizes she must go on, not stop the cycle at being a housewife. She must utilize her degree her capacity as a Chicana woman and continue the cycle of enlightenment. (Garcia 40)

Throughout the centuries, minority groups across the United States have fought against institutionalized racism and sexism. During the 1920s, African Americans fought to be equal members of society. Yet, many other groups continued to be left out. In the 70s, Chicana women, along with other women of color, began to fight an institution that did not allow space for them. As Alma Garcia explains in *Chicana Feminist Thought: The Basic Historical Writings*, “Chicana feminists shared a common experience with other women of color whose life histories were shaped by the multiple sources of oppression generated by race, gender and social class” (4). Chicanas belonged to a group of women who had to fight sexism and racism simultaneously.

While these Chicana women were fighting for their own space, they also had to find their space within their own culture. They did not fit in to the boxes created by the white-feminist movement, and they were left out of the Chicano Movement being led by their men. The white-feminist movements did not account for cultural differences, and because of this Chicanas created their own theories to accommodate to their beliefs and

customs. As Elvira Saragoza mentions in “La Mujer in the Chicano Movement,” Chicanas were evolving and wanted to be able to play a different role than that held by their mothers. Saragoza argues that Chicana women, in a maneuver reminiscent of Mirabal’s, wanted the choice to be domestic but also be educated (77).

This need for identity within an ever-changing culture was evident in the Mexican and Mexican American population from the moment they were colonized. Chicanas only brought the movement to the United States’ public eye. Women of color had been advocating for women’s rights as long as the white feminist movement had been active. Women –such as Dora Cervera-Mirabal in the early ‘30s –wrote to inform the public that it was important for the younger generations to adapt to the changing conditions, and the older generations should not hinder their growth due to androcentric cultural norms. In “El Femenismo Authetico” Mirabal wrote to the older generations:

It is then of great importance, to illustrate to the feminine youth in formation, the one which is called to be the housewife of tomorrow and mothers of a new generation, in the knowledge of her rights within the responsibilities of her duties. (80)

Mirabal believed it was important for each generation of women to instill in their daughters the need for an education in order to empower them and provide them with options. Later, women such as Gloria Anzaldúa, would go on to create their identity –and help other women of color find theirs– by reclaiming the border between Mexico and the United States. Her book *Borderlands / La Frontera: The New Mestiza* allowed women of color a space not understood before the Chicana Movement.

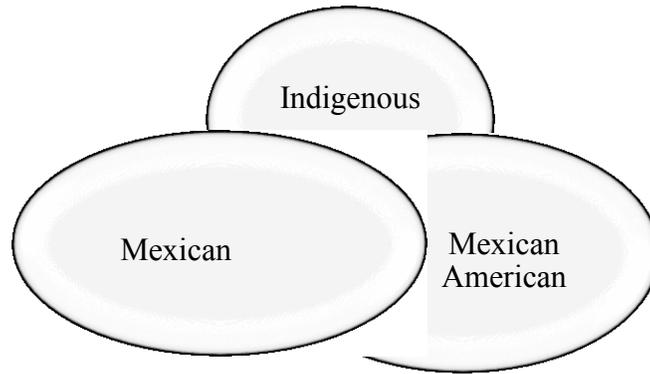
As Latinas worked to reach the level of equality that white women had been able to achieve, authors such as Sandra Cisneros used their literature to address the issues that

arise from being a Latina. Cisneros fits the Mexican American phase of the “Buena Mujer Model” as she wrote to advocate for the rights of women of color, to protest colonization, and to help Latina women find a connection with their past. Consequently, Cisneros’s characters evolve through the three phases of the model.

In particular, in *Caramelo*, Cisneros creates a multi-dimensional story revealing generational changes spurred by the feminist movements that took place in the Mexico and U.S. With the incorporation of each woman’s story, Cisneros exposes the unhappiness her Latina characters experience as well as the reasons for their discontent. While the adult women hold the “coveted” roles of wives and mothers, they struggle with the issue of finding their self-worth. Through their stories, Cisneros reveals that much of their unhappiness stems from the cultural bounds that have been placed upon their character. Cisneros exposes the limitations experienced by the women in her story, but also shows how each generation is moving towards a less restrictive lifestyle. Soledad, the angry grandmother, is part of the Mexican population who is still very much in touch with their indigenous roots. Her daughter-in-law, Zoila, was born in the United State and raised in a traditional Mexican home. The narrator, Celaya, is born and raised in the United States and as such she is caught between nations, straddling the US/Mexican border, both literally and emotionally. As a member of a Mexican American family, with Mexican grandparents, and living in the United States, Celaya has a hard time understanding who she is.

Because Cisneros’s three characters have such diverse backgrounds, it is difficult to analyze their character from a feminist perspective simply using the three-phase development created by Showalter: feminine, feminist, female. Rather each woman fits

into the “Buena Mujer Model” with Soledad being part of the Indigenous phase, Zoila participating in the Mexican phase, and Celaya part of the Mexican American phase (see Figure 6).



*Figure 6. “Buena Mujer Model”*

The Indigenous phase of this model accounts for the limitations that were held by the recently colonized woman. Before the colonization of Mexico, indigenous women held power within their communities. History tells that “the submission of women, along with institutions such as the church and the patriarchy, was imported by the European colonizers, and remains to this day part of Anglo society” (Vidal 23). When these women transitioned from their indigenous roles to the new order forced by the Spaniards, cultures clashed. Indigenous women began to be referred to by the Spaniards as “La Mala Mujer” if they strayed from their newly imposed roles. Yet, there were still women who rebelled against the new rules and risked the label that could cause their demise. Women such as Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz paved the way for later generations to fight for their civil rights.

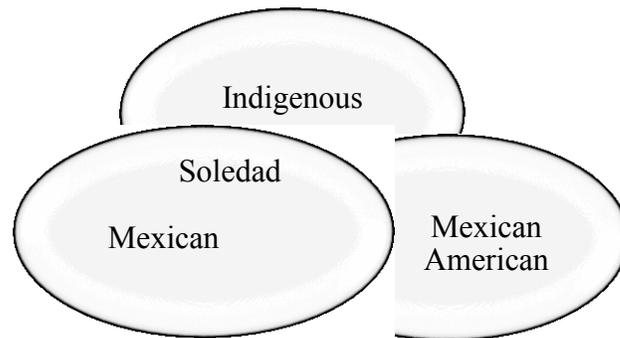
Studies, such as “A Comparison of Mexican and Mexican- American Families,” have shown that men and women are thought to hold gender-specific roles in both Mexican and Mexican American families. Men are depicted as the breadwinners, and

they tend to be portrayed as cold and unloving. Their sole purpose is caring for their families. Women, on the other hand, are depicted as holding a role of “of accentuated femininity and submissiveness” (Stanton 325). Cisneros deviates from the stereotype by portraying a realistic image of the dynamic in Mexican and Mexican American families. A popular saying makes fun of the “machista” Mexican man when it says, “*El hombre es la cabeza de la familia pero la mujer es el cuello.*” This translates to “A man is the head of the family, but the woman is the neck,” reminding everybody that the real head of the family is the wife. Although many aspects of the roles explored and explained by research are correct, there is much more to a relationship between a man and a woman in these cultures.

Soledad can be analyzed as a weak character incapable of surviving without a man, but in actuality she is the person who holds her home together. Even while her attempts at living a happy life often fail, she is capable of running a business, owning property, and even relocating herself to America. After the Little Grandfather dies, and the Grandmother decides she is moving out of her lonely home, she argues that she has “always been independent. Always, always, always” (Cisneros 251). Yet, in the next page she confesses that what she misses the most of having her husband in her home is the laundry. Thus, although she is ashamed to admit it, it is her role as a wife that makes her feel complete. She is capable of surviving without her husband, but she still misses his dependence on her and “waking up to a warm someone” (252).

Soledad thus fits into the Indigenous stage of the “Buena Mujer Model”; even when she is referred to as a “mala mujer” by her family because of her strict, unemotional persona, by the end Cisneros reveals a “buena mujer” by revealing that Soledad is a

strong mother figure capable of surviving sexism and colonization (See Figure 7).



*Figure 7. Soledad's Transition*

Cisneros informs the reader of the many Mexican traditions that influence Soledad's characteristics. While initially it is hard to understand her hard demeanor, a new form of respect is formed as more of her history and character is exposed. Using the Indigenous stage of the "Buena Mujer Model" to analyze Soledad allows for a different perspective of her character in which she is not as selfish as she originally seems. Rather, she becomes a character with strength and capacity for growth. Soledad did her best to fulfill her maternal role, which was expected of her, but she was also capable of holding a job, surviving loss, and financially caring for her family. Within the three stages of Indigenous, Mexican, and Mexican American in the "Buena Mujer Model," Soledad was able to reconcile her indigenous and Mexican role to create an identity whereby she had a certain amount of autonomy. Unfortunately, she did not understand her role until she was on her deathbed and seeks help from Celaya to redeem her name: "You'll tell my story, won't you Celaya? So that I'll be understood? So that I'll be forgiven?" (409). Soledad stays around after her death to redeem herself, but also to help Celaya become a stronger woman than she ever was.

The other women in the novel move through the “Buena Mujer Model.” Zoila, Soledad’s daughter-in-law, fits the Mexican portion of the model as even while she follows the norm of marrying and creating a family, she goes on to advocate women’s rights as well as speak out against political issues. In “Once You Get the Card You Can Do Anything You Want: Migrant Identities and Gender Transgressions in Chicana Dramatic Literature,” Marta Fernandez Morales analyzes how the Mexican American family works to contain women’s rights and unconsciously aids in the subjugation of women:

The traditional Mexican and Mexican-American family has been revealed by Chicana feminists as one of the main tools of gender oppression. Presented by Chicanos as the key to cultural preservation and as the most important axis for the construction of a powerful community in the new *gringo* context, *la familia* has forced women into a position of inferiority defined specifically by gender identity. (87)

Morales goes on to explore issues that stem from the tight-knit family that dominates the Mexican and Mexican American communities, including the fact that women have found ways to escape the forced roles they have filled for centuries. In this manner women start to move away from their Mexican mothers, creating a space in which they are allowed more power than before.

Zoila attempts to break the male domination at home by choosing her only daughter’s name, Celaya, “disobey[ing] Father” for the first time (232). Yet, the reader soon realizes that while Zoila loves her children, they represent her many failed expectations. It is obvious since the beginning that Zoila is unhappy with her life, but it is understood that it is the role of a wife to be submissive and obedient for the sake of her

family, regardless of her personal happiness. Ross D. Staton analyzed Mexican and Mexican American family dynamics and articulates the arrangement found within these families:

However, the Mexican-American wife, as well as the Mexican wife, has no other concept of her relationship with her husband than that of obedient servant and housekeeper. In both families the husband is entitled to unquestioning obedience from his wife. The wife is expected to acknowledge his authority and superiority, to seek his advice and permission for all but the most minor details, to give him comfort and pleasure, and to always think of his needs before her own. (327)

Zoila follows this tradition, as in every scene she is performing her marital duties, but the scenes in which she is shown as a character separate from her husband expose a higher level of intellect than she is first thought to possess.

Zoila seems to be unhappy in her marriage, and in the chapter “Neither With You Nor Without You” the reader is given a glimpse into her past. Although Celaya’s father embellishes the story to create a fairy tale outcome, in reality Zoila admits that she settled for her husband and has more than a handful of regrets. The title of the chapter is an indication of the many downfalls of her marriage. The line “neither with you nor without you” comes from Ovid’s *Amores*, Book III, Elegy XI, entitled “Weary at Length of his Mistress’ Infidelities, He Swears that He Will Love Her No Longer,” foreshadowing the infidelities that will occur in Zoila’s life.

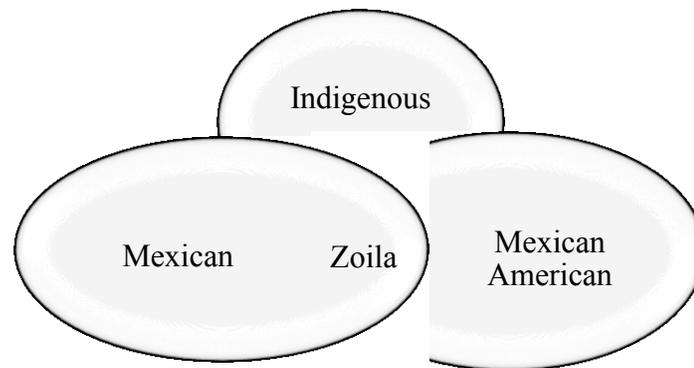
The irony of the chapter’s chosen title is that Ovid's elegiac narration depicts a man, exhausted of his mistress’ infidelities, who fights to separate himself from the love of his life. He despises her for cheating, but his “wavering heart” will not allow him to

distance himself from her (Ovid 88). Similarly, at a young age Zoila becomes entangled in a love affair with her lover Enrique, and after he abandons her she marries her husband out of loneliness and desperation. Her husband will go on to cheat on her, as well, fathering a daughter he will never acknowledge. This infidelity creates further tension in a relationship in which happiness is rare, and Zoila spends the rest of her life paying for her weak emotional state. She goes on to live vicariously through her children and encourages her children to be educated.

Ironically, with the use of those six words as a title, Cisneros introduces the reader to Zoila's literary knowledge. While at a young age Zoila's passion for reading is consumed by magazines such as *Mirror* and *Hollywood*, she has aspirations to go to college. Many might argue that "Azteca Beauty College" is not an Ivy League University, but the fact that Zoila was interested in a future without a man during the time period she was growing up in stands out to the reader when comparing it to Soledad's story (Cisneros 223).

Although Zoila never attends college, she seizes any opportunity to educate herself. In her arguments with her husband she reveals that she keeps in touch with current events even if her interest stems from her son being drafted. In a footnote, Cisneros further describes the changes that come with her other children's college years. Zoila begins to read books ranging from "*Freire, Fomm, Paz, Neruda, and later Sor Juana, Eldridge Cleaver, Malcolm X, and Chief Joseph*" (248). She reads authors who advocated self-sufficiency and agency from oppressive situations. She escapes her oppressive marriage through her books because she is unable to escape the societal norms imposed by her culture.

Zoila rebels against the notion of being the woman of the house by going against everything that she has been taught. Zoila becomes “La Buena Mujer,” transcending the Mexican maternal role and beginning to shift to the freedoms advocated by Chicanas (see Figure 8). While she is incapable of fully embodying the cultural shifts embraced by the Chicanas, she allows for her daughter to have a more lenient role in the household.



*Figure 8. Zoila’s Space*

Zoila feels trapped in a role with expectations that do not allow her to blossom into her full capacity as a woman. It is because of this that she uses her role as a mother to educate her daughter, Celaya, and allow her more freedom than what she has personally experienced.

Celaya’s parents value education and with this education Celaya is capable of creating a space not inhabited by the generation of women before her. In the chapter entitled “Everything a Niña Could Want,” Celaya reveals that she wants everything her father disapproves of, including living by herself, something her father thinks absurd. He reprimands her skewed way of thinking reminding her, “that’s not for girls like you. Good girls don’t leave their father’s house until they marry, and not before. Why would you ever want to live by yourself?” (359). Celaya goes on to explain that she wants to go on to do different things such as acquiring an education and educating others, but the

father questions if she simply wants to do things that “girls who are not Mexican do,” once again reinforcing the idea that women need to marry and stay home.

Her father (representing men of his generation) does not understand the freedom Celaya holds, but the reader is allowed to witness Celaya’s ability to adapt her identity to the different cultures surrounding her. She becomes a strong character when she is capable of accepting her heritage, as well as her role as a Chicana. While she is capable of envisioning a life as a wife, running away with her boyfriend at an early age, she also shies away from the domestic role, even refusing a job as a housekeeper. Although the reader does not get a glimpse into a future in which Celaya graduates college, travels the world, gains her independence, and chooses the way she lives her life, Celaya is capable of relating to the women in her life and will only depend on a man if she chooses to.

By the end of the story –and with the guidance of the wise women before her– Celaya is capable of adapting her behavior and her language according to the situation. She merges the Indigenous, Mexican, and Mexican American to create a strong, educated Chicana. Celaya becomes the collector of stories. She is capable of weaving her grandmother’s story (Indigenous), her mother’s (Mexican) and her own (Mexican American) into a story of empowerment and understanding (see Figure 9). She defies tradition by telling the women’s stories and exposing the cultural flaws that relegate them to second-class citizenship. In the process of narrating her family’s journey through borders and generations Celaya finds her own identity and connects with the women of her past that have been essential to molding who she is by the end of her story.

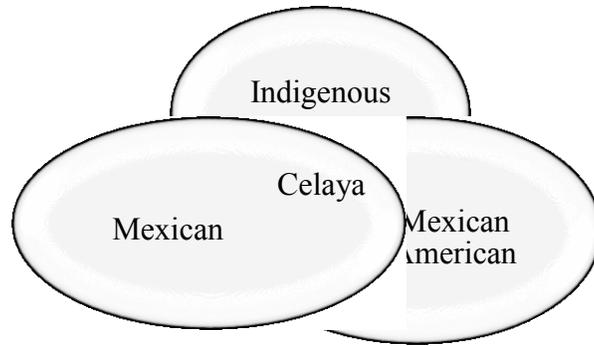


Figure 9. Celaya's Space

While *Caramelo* is not a biographical novel, Cisneros models much of the story on her own life. Similar to Celaya, Cisneros straddled the border traveling between her native Chicago and Mexico. Unlike Celaya, Cisneros had the support of both her parents and went on to receive her B.A. in English from the Loyola University of Chicago as well as her M.F.A in Creative Writing at the University of Iowa. Cisneros mastered the English language and went on to pay tribute to her Mexican heritage. It is her “mestizo history and experiences” that create the identity which allows Cisneros to write stories such as *The House in Mango Street* (de la Luz Montes 24). Her novels have received numerous awards, including the McArthur Fellowship, National Endowment for the Arts fellowships, and a Texas Medal of Art, but most importantly Cisneros has created a home for all the destitute Latinos searching for an identity.

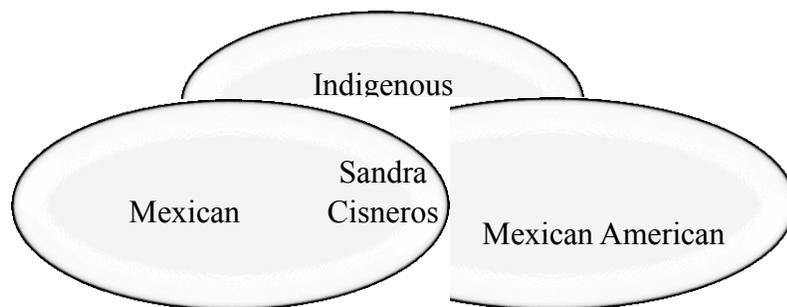


Figure 10. Cisneros's Space in the “Buena Mujer Model”

She fits the Mexican American phase of the “Buena Mujer Model” as she has used her writings to advocate for the rights of women of color, protest colonization, and find her connection with her Mexican past. While Cisneros has never married, she empowers the Mexican women who run the homes, the women who spend their energies raising their families and creating a new generation of Latina women more empowered than those that came before them. By allowing her characters to adjust their role according to their ever-changing culture, and having the women teach each succeeding generation the importance of identity, Cisneros allows the women to have the power. Cisneros does not reprimand women for being dependent of men, rather she comments on cultural deficiencies.

Similar to Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, Cisneros left Illinois and her family behind migrating to Texas in order to find a place of refuge for her writing. Yet, she mirrors much of Dora Cervera-Mirabal’s writing by empowering Latina women regardless of the choice they make in regards to starting a family. Cisneros focuses on educating her Latina readers on their role within the liminal space of being a Mexican American raised in the United States.

## V. CONCLUSION

Colonized women have searched for identity for centuries. Imposed rules and regulations have created environments which only allow colonized women a liminal space within each culture. Under these restrictions women –such as Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, Dora Cervera-Mirabal, and Sandra Cisneros –turned their situation around by owning their liminal space. These women writers went on to use their new found power and identities to help empower their fellow sisters.

In order to find their space, colonized women have had to adapt to the cultural changes colonizers bring with conquest. Literature has served women as an outlet to protest colonization and sexism, and each generation has been allowed the opportunity to learn from the women that came before them and alter the cultural norms that continue to relegate them to second-class citizens. The “Buena Mujer Model” allows a different perspective of the colonized women within literature for readers who are not personally familiar with colonization. The model allows the women of the stories to explain the role they play within their culture without suffering the judgment of the outsiders who are not acquainted with their cultural norms. The three phases allow for the changes that have occurred since the Spaniards colonized Mexico allowing the women in each subsequent generation a voice within their liminal space:

1. Indigenous phase- women wrote in order to separate themselves from the image of “La Mala Mujer,” advocate women’s rights, and protest colonization.
2. Mexican phase- women wrote to advocate for women’s rights, to protest colonization, and to incorporate a new form of feminism which allowed them to honor their cultural beliefs and practices.

3. Mexican American phase- women wrote to advocate for the rights of colored women, to protest colonization, and to find a connection with their past.

It also fills the liminal space that exists in the Showalter model and provides Mexican and Mexican American women a new space within the U.S. culture.

Using this model to read Mexican and Mexican American literature will hopefully provide readers with a different perspective of the Latino women. Rather than compartmentalize her into the white, middle-class feminist's idea of a strong woman, the reader will be able to understand that the women in these stories are strong characters even while they chose to call the shots from the while making tortillas for their family.

## VI. AFTERWORD

While the works of two prominent Latina authors, Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz and Sandra Cisneros, are incorporated in this paper, Dora Cervera-Mirabal was the woman who inspired me to write this thesis. Her writings inspired me to dive into feminism, and the process of translating her published works allowed me to feel connected with my culture for the first time in my life. Translating the pieces was a hard process, as the Spanish is a more formal Spanish than the one I speak, but it allowed me a connection with the women of my past and one of the most important women of my present, my mother.

One night I approached my mother, frustrated because although I could understand Mirabal's general message I could not clarify it for my audience. She hesitated, worried that her limited scholarly education would impede her from analyzing what I claimed to be a feminist piece. I bullied her into helping me, and the results can be found in pages 35 and 36 of my thesis. My mother helped me fully understand what Mirabal was trying to tell me in "The Woman: In Her Physical and Moral Aspect," and my mother provided me with an insight into Mirabal's mind that I would have never discovered on my own.

I hope that the translations found in Appendix A find their way to other women who like me need help connecting to their past and coming to terms with the hybrid identity that comes with being Mexican American.

## APPENDIX A

### **Feminismo Autentico**

Mucho se preconiza la absoluta igualdad de derechos entre el hombre y la mujer. Pero, los que tal hacen incurrir en gravísimo error. Si bien en algunos aspectos se puede establecer esa igualdad, en el orden moral es un contrasentido suponerlo.

Las libres acciones del hombre sirviendo de pauta a la vida de la mujer, constituirían un verdadero escándalo social. Sería un paso regresivo a la época brumosa en que la única ley era el instinto...

Evidentemente, existe una incomprensión en lo que al feminismo se refiere en su estricto y básico sentido. Esta incomprensión se debe en parte, a la vasta esfera de influencia que abarca entre la clase popular, mal preparada aún para aquilatarlo el injusto límite de sus

### **Authentic Feminism**

The absolute equality of rights between man and woman is argued about very often, but those who do so are committing a grave error. Although there are certain aspects, in which that equality can be established, in the moral order it does not make sense to suppose so. If the free actions of men were to constitute a model to the life of a woman, it would create great social scandal. It would be a step backwards into the hazy era in which the only law was instinct...

Apparently there exists a misunderstanding of what feminism means in its strictest and basic sense. This misunderstanding is based in part, to the vast sphere of influence, which is overpowering amongst the popular class,

principios fundamentales.

A causa de este lamentable desconocimiento, existen mujeres que confunden el lícito albedrío y el racional derecho de acción con la extrema libertad, perdiendo al hacerlo, la noble expresión de seriedad, que constituyen su mejor encanto.

Porque si es innegable que el feminismo bien entendido, el que es símbolo de bien y de progreso, ha limado cadenas, abolido injusticias, y destacado a la mujer del oscurantismo hacia la luz, mostrándole más amplios horizontes, que tiende en fin al conjunto harmónico de la existencia, también es muy cierto que en su nombre y al amparo de su sombra se guarecen mujeres que desconociéndolo, o no queriendo conocerlo olvidan principios, arrollan prejuicios, y arrastran a su paso pedazos de su propia y ajena dignidad.

wrongly prepared to assess it in the fair limit of its fundamental principles.

Because of this lamentable lack of knowledge, there exist women who confuse the permissible free will and the reasonable right of action with extreme liberty, losing by doing this, the noble expression of seriousness, which constitutes her best charm.

Because it is undeniable that feminism when well understood, the one which is a symbol of good and progress, has filed down chains, abolished injustices, distinguished women from darkness towards the light, showing her a wider horizon, which tends in the end to the harmonious union of existence, it is also very true that in her name and in the protection of her shadow are sheltered women who without their knowledge, or without wanting to recognize it, forget principles, sweep

Esta evolución social que en su forma integral presenta la eficaz solución al oscuro problema femenino, no puede ser la obra súbita de un día, ni llevarse a efecto su completa instauración sin un gradual proceso de preparación, y no sin destruir el fuerte valladar que se opone al libre curso de su alta finalidad.

Es de suma importancia por tanto, ilustrar a la juventud femenina en formación, la que está llamada ser en el mañana ama de hogar y progenitora de una nueva generación, en el conocimiento de sus derechos dentro de la responsabilidad de sus deberes.

El feminismo nació, por una necesidad de defensa social. Por defenderse la mujer de esa misma sociedad encargada de poner en alto su valer, y que no obstante la condena aun desnivel deprimente y doloroso.

prejudices, and drag in their steps pieces of their own and others dignity.

This social evolution in its complete form presents the efficient solution to the dark feminist problem, it cannot be the hasty labor of one day, nor have its effect of complete integration without a gradual process of preparation, and not without destroying the strong obstacle which opposes the free course of its high finality.

It is then of great importance, to illustrate to the feminine youth in formation, the one which is called to be the housewife of tomorrow and mother of a new generation, in the knowledge of her rights within the responsibilities of her duties.

Feminism was born, because of a need of social defense. In order to defend the woman of that same society in charge of exalting her worth and that

Esa es la razón fundamental del feminismo: la lucha de la mujer por libertarse de esas leyes que decretaron su incapacidad mental e intelectual en relación con el hombre; la necesidad de abolir esos códigos, producto del cerebro masculino, que la confinan a un grado de inferioridad mental que menoscaba, alcanzar sus derechos cívicos, políticos y sociales como ser civilizado, consciente y capacitado, sin olvidar por eso sus sagrados deberes de madre y esposa, funcionando en armónico concierto a un mismo tiempo las fuerzas del corazón y las fuerzas del cerebro.

De esa hermosa asociación de ideales surgirá el equilibrio universal basado en los firmes principios de igualdad y de justicia. La mujer, como apóstol del pacifismo, como adalid de un puro ideal, no sólo luchará por sus propios intereses; que también opondrán sus fuerzas morales a las injusticias

therefore condemns her to a depressing and painful inequality.

That is the fundamental reason of feminism: for woman to fight to be liberated of those laws which decreed her mental incapacity and intellectuality in relation to man; the need to abolish these codes, product of the male brain, which confine her to a inferior level which is damaging, to reach her civic, political, and social rights, how to be civilized, conscious and capable, without forgetting because of this her sacred duty of being a mother and a wife, functioning in harmonious concerto the strength of heart and brain in unison.

From this beautiful association of ideals will surge the universal balance based on the firm principles of equality and justice. Woman, like the disciple of peace, like a champion of a pure ideal, will not only fight for her own interests; who will also place her moral force

sociales, a la destrucción de los pueblos como a todo cuanto signifique arbitrariedad y barbarie moviendo almas, despertando conciencias; y enarbolando así la bandera de una paz real, efectiva y de completa confraternidad universal.

Por consiguiente, en una de las misiones del feminismo, repetimos, instruir a las mujeres en el conocimiento de sus deberes antes de entrar en el ejercicio de los derechos que con justicia reclaman. Ay que crearles una conciencia, señalarles las normas éticas a seguir, orientarlas hacia una moral superior que las lleve al descubrimiento de su propio valer, y las sostenga siempre firmes en las firmas del decoro.

El feminismo que toda mujer debe conocer, es el que está constituido a base de respetos y deberes; el que es hogar con lumbre, canción de cuna en

against social injustices, to the destruction of towns, to everything which means savagery in order to bring together and to move souls, waking up consciences; and thus raising the flag of a real peace, effective and complete universal brotherhood.

Because of this, it is one of the missions of feminism, we repeat, to instruct woman in the knowledge of her duties before entering in the practice of her rights which she is justified in demanding. A conscience needs to be created, we need to signal to them the ethical norms which are to be followed, orient them towards a higher level of moral superiority which will take them to the discovery of their own worth, and which will always sustain her in the ranks dignity.

The feminism which every woman should know is the one which is based on respect and duties; the one

los labios de la madre, abnegación en los ojos de la esposa, paz, amor; lealtad.

Únicamente así, tiene la mujer derecho al cetro que la corresponde como reina y señora del hogar y del mundo. Únicamente así: nimbada en el prestigio de su feminidad y sus virtudes, envuelta en sus purísimos cendales de pudores, conmoviendo y delumbrando magnífica y triunfal, con la fuerza incomparable de su exquisita debilidad....

which is a home with a fire, has the lullaby on the lips of the mother, self-denial in the eyes of the wife, peace, love, loyalty.

Only like that, does the woman have right of the reign which she is worthy of as a queen and lady of the home, and the world. Only like this, with the prestige of her femininity and her virtues, wrapped around her pure path of modesty, touching and shining her light magnificent and triumphant, with the incomparable strength of her exquisite weakness...

**EDUCACION DE LA MUJER: SU  
INTELIGENCIA**

La ciencia de Dios, la ciencia del hombre, la ciencia de la Naturaleza, el idioma de la antigüedad, la historia, la elocuencia, la poesía, lo bello, lo sublime no es un don exclusivo de un sexo, es el patrimonio de la inteligencia.

La mujer tiene también inteligencia, y una inteligencia de la misma naturaleza, tan capaz, tan basta y tan flexible como la del hombre.

Luego a la mujer pertenece también ese patrimonio.

Luego la educación debe trabajar para que ella también lo posea.

Pobre mujer! Ella nace, y como desde la cuna no ve otra cosa que ramos y guirnaldas para su cabeza, joyas y ceda para su cuerpo; ni oye otra cosa, que la oración fúnebre de su triste condición intelectual, en su fuerza de tanto ver y de tanto oír siempre lo mismo, llega a

**A WOMAN'S EDUCATION: HER  
INTELLIGENCE**

The science of God, the science of man, the science of nature, the language of antiquity, the history, the eloquence, the poetry, the beautiful, the sublime, not a gift exclusive of one sex, it is the patrimony of intelligence.

Woman too has intelligence, and an intelligence of the same nature, so capable, so vast, and flexible as that of man.

So too, to the woman belongs this patrimony.

So then, education should work so that she too can possess it.

Poor woman! She is born, and since the cradle sees nothing but a crown of wreaths and branches for her head, jewels and silk for her body; nor, does she hear anything other than the mournful prayer of her poor intellectual

Persuadirse que realmente su misión sobre la tierra no es otra que la de componer su cuerpo para conquistar con sus atractivos la mano de un hombre.

A proporción que su cuerpo es exaltado, su alma deprimida y humillada; sus potencias se embotan, sus facultades se adormecen y apenas atina con la aguja.

Abrumada desde su infancia con el peso de las cadenas de oro que la aprisionan, cree que su destino es el de vivir siempre encadenada y el de ignorarlo todo, hasta su cautiverio mismo.

Semejante a esos infelices que nacen bajo una vieja tiranía cree que el llevar un yugo es el estado natural de su condición.

Ella ve las cadenas, las toca, y las arrastra también, pero hasta ignora que llevándolos es esclava.

condition, and because she always sees and hears the same thing, she convinces herself that her real mission on earth is none other than to fix her body to conquer men with her bodily attractions.

In accordance to her body being exalted, her soul is being humiliated and depressed; her potential is dulled, her faculties are put to sleep and she can barely hit the mark with her needle.

Overwhelmed from infancy by the weight of the chains of gold keeping her captive, she believes it her destiny to always live chained and ignore everything, even her own imprisonment.

Similar to those unfortunates who are born under an old tyranny, she believes that carrying the yoke is the natural state of her condition.

She sees the chains, touches them, and drags them too, but she even ignores that carrying them makes her a slave.

La educación es quien tiene la culpa del cautiverio de esta reina, tan ilustre y tan abatida.

La mujer es material o físicamente más débil que el hombre.

Por lo mismo, la educación debe trabajar en darle mayor fuerza moral, desarrollando todavía más, en cuanto fuese posible, sus facultades intelectuales.

Así se equilibrarían las fuerzas, y el hombre no sería jamás el amor de la mujer.

Pero desgraciadamente, la educación prescinde de esto.

Muchas ocasiones suelen algunos lamentar que la mujer se ocupe tanto de adornar su cuerpo, olvidándose de ilustrar y perfeccionar su alma.

Por esto se le critica, se le murmura y aun a veces hasta se le desprecia.

Education is at fault for the captivity of this queen, so distinguished and so beat down.

The woman is materially or physically weaker than man.

Because of this, education should work to give her moral strength, helping her further develop her intellectual faculties.

Only like this would there be equality in strength, and man would no longer be the lover of women.

But unfortunately, education does not allow this.

Quite often many mourn the fact that women take so long to fix up her body, forgetting to illustrate and perfect her soul.

Because of this she is criticized, talked about, and many times even despised.

Mas este proceder es muy injusto, la culpa como he dicho no es de la pobre mujer, es de la educación.

Dele esta lo que le corresponde, elévala a su propia esfera, entréguela la herencia que le corresponde, y se verá entonces que la mujer no se ocupa tanto de adornar su cuerpo, como de perfeccionar su alma: no vivirá más de prestado, ni mendigando mérito a la puerta de las tiendas, ni de las modistas, ni habitará en una choza.

Las quejas de esos contra la mujer, son como las de algunas familias ricas, que teniendo un deudo en miseria, no hacen más que lamentar su suerte, muchas veces murmuran del mismo infeliz y hasta le vuelven el rostro cuando lo encuentran por la calle, pero no le alargan la mano para socorrerlo y elevarlo a su propia altura.

Yet this way of thinking is very unjust, the fault is not of the poor woman, like I've said, but rather of education.

Give her what she deserves, elevate her to her own sphere, return the inheritance which belongs to her, and it will become clear that woman does not spend her time fixing up her body, as much as she does perfecting her soul: no longer living with what has been borrowed, nor will she beg for merit in store's doorsteps, nor from the dressmakers, nor will she reside in a hut.

The complaints of those who speak against women, are the same as those of some rich families, who having someone in their debt, do nothing more but lament his luck, whispering about the unfortunate man and even turning their faces when they see him in the streets, but they do not stretch their hand

Dejen pues, esos injustos e  
inhumanos de quejarse de la infeliz  
mujer y traten de colocarla en el rango  
que le corresponde.

towards him to save him in order and  
elevate him to their own worth.

Stop then, those unjust and  
inhuman complaining of the unhappy  
woman and try to elevate her back to the  
rank which she is deserving of.

**LA MUJER EN SU ASPECTO  
FISICO Y MORAL**

La mujer es más débil que el hombre, es cierto, pero es en la parte física solamente.

Lo que la naturaleza quiere decir en esto es, que su educación física debe ser acomodada a su menor robustez, quiere decir que no se debe ocupar en ejercicios corporales como los del hombre, quiere decir que a este respecto se le ha de educar de diferente modo; quiere decir que no ha nacido ni para los campos de batalla, ni para lidiar con las fieras, ni para luchar con las hondas, ni para tomar el arado.

Pero no quiere decir que la educación reduzca sus conocimientos al estrecho límite a que los reduce.

No quiere decir que la educación haga un monopolio de las ciencias.

**THE WOMAN IN HER PHYSICAL  
AND MORAL ASPECT**

Woman is weaker than man; this is true but only physically.

What nature wants to say with this is that her physical education is to be accommodated to her smaller robustness, it means to say that she should not engage in corporal exercise like the man, it means to say to this matter that she should be educated differently; it means to say that she was not born for the battlefield, nor to deal with beasts, nor to fight against the waves, nor to take the plow.

But it does not mean to say that education reduces her knowledge to the narrow limits to which it's reduced.

It does not mean for education to make a monopoly of the sciences.

No quiere decir que la educación deje los trapos para ella y el oro para el hombre.

No quiere decir que la educación degrade el alma de la mujer y realce su cuerpo, para que después lo devoren los cuervos.

Por la unión íntima del cuerpo con el alma, se desarrolla está a proporción que se desarrolla aquel.

La organización física de la mujer en nada impide el desarrollo relativo de su alma.

Piensan, o quieren los opresores de la mujer que su debilidad física hace que su espíritu sea también débil.

No hay tal cosa, porque si su educación fuese otra esa debilidad espiritual imaginaria, no existiría.

La educación ha explotado jamás el espíritu de la mujer, su talento, su capacidad, su inteligencia?

It does not mean that education leaves the rags to her and the gold to the man.

It does not mean that education degrades the soul of the woman and enhances her body, so that she is later devoured by the crows.

By the intimate union of the body with the soul, she develops to proportion that he develops.

The physical organization of woman at no point stops the development of her soul.

The oppressors want to believe that the physical weakness of the woman makes her spirit be weak as well.

There is no such thing, because if there was some other sort of education, this imagined spiritual weakness, would not exist.

Has education never exploited the spirit of the woman, her talent, her capacity, her intelligence?

Ha quitado la pluma a tantos hombres que debieran manejar la aguja, y se la ha dado a tantas mujeres que deberían manejar la pluma?

Ha experimentado hasta que altura puede elevarse la mujer en el conocimiento de las ciencias?

Esto ha sido hasta hoy una tarea demasiado árdua para su indolencia criminal.

Pero si se hubiese dedicado a formar como debe a la mujer cuantas Paulas, cuantas Gertrudis, cuantas Catalinas no hubiese dado?

Parece que la educación cree que la mano delicada de la mujer no puede agarrar tomos en folios sin desmejorar su blandura, y como en su concepto más vale una mano linda y suave que una inteligencia cultivada, prefiere este vanidad al conocimiento de la antigüedad.

Has it taken away the pen from so many men who should be working the needle, and has given it to so many women that have been working the pen?

Has it experimented to see what height woman can be elevated in the knowledge of the sciences?

This has been up to till now a task too difficult for its criminal laziness.

But if it would have dedicated itself to creating woman how she should be, how many Paulas, how many Gertrudis, how many Catalinas wouldn't it have created?

It seems to be that education believes that the delicate hand of the woman cannot grab volumes without wasting away its gentleness, and since it is its belief that a pretty and soft hand is worth more than cultivated intelligence it prefers this vanity over knowledge of the past.

No permite de ningún modo que el polvo de las escuelas científicas toquen y de lejos las seda de sus vestidos.

Ese polvo que después bien amansado con el sudor del hombre produce los suntuosos edificios de las obras inmortales de la inteligencia humana, no quiere ni que produzca ollas en las manos de la mujer.

Ella aprecia más un vestido rico que todas las obras de los sabios.

Pero supongamos por un momento que la debilidad del espíritu de la mujer esté realmente en relación con su debilidad física, yo pregunto. Y este espíritu tal cual lo tiene, es cultivado por la educación como su naturaleza exige?

Es cultivado proporcionalmente como se cultiva el del hombre?

Es cultivado si quiera relativamente como se cultiva su cuerpo?

It does not by any chance let the dust of the scientific schools touch from afar the silk of her dress.

This dust, that after being tamed by the sweat of man produces the magnificent buildings of the immortal work of the human intelligence, does not even want for women's hands to produce kettles.

She appreciates more a rich dress than all the works of the wives.

But suppose for a moment that the weakness of the spirit of the woman is really in relation to her physical weakness, I ask. And this spirit such as she has, is cultivated by intelligence as nature demands?

Is it cultivated proportionate to that of men?

Is even cultivated relatively the same as her body's cultivated?

La mujer, confinada por la educación actual a un rincón del palacio de las ciencias, solo se alimenta con los despojos del hombre, y se viste con los andrajos que el le da de limosna. Siendo tan rica como el hombre, la educación hace se presente tan pobre, que lejos de parecer su madre, no parece sino como su esclava. Injusta educación! La naturaleza reclama contra tu tiranía.

The woman, exiled by modern education to the corner of the palace of sciences, only feeds herself with the leftovers of man, and dresses herself with the rags that he gives her as charity. Being as rich as man, education makes herself look poor that far from seeming to be his mother, does not appear more than slave. Unjust education! Nature protests against your tyranny.

## **La Mujer**

Los dioses no han hecho más que dos cosas perfectas: la mujer y la rosa.

Una mujer desbarata en un día lo que un hombre medita en un año.

La mujer fea ofende y daña la vista, la hermosa ofende y daña la razón.

La mujer no ha descontentarse con el testimonio de su conciencia sino que ha de buscar también el de mundo.

No ignoras que sin las mujeres el género humano hubiera perecido con Adán. No habría ciudades, artesanos labradores. No habría reyes, caballeros ni armas. No habría mercaderes ni comercios. No habría artes, leyes, cánones ni estatutos. No habría fiestas, juegos, danzas, amor, que sobrepuja a todo. Nadie sabría los movimientos de los cielos y de los planetas, ni tendría conocimiento de ellos, ni buscaría las operaciones ocultas de la naturaleza.

## **The Woman**

The gods have not made but two perfect things, the woman and the rose.

A woman tears down in a day what a man ponders about for a year.

The ugly woman offends and hurts the vision, the beautiful one offends and damages reason.

The woman should not be content simply with her conscience's testimony, but rather she should search for that of the world as well.

Don't ignore that without woman the human race would have perished with Adam. There would not be cities, craft men, farmers. There would not be kings, knights. There would not be merchants or commerce. There would not be art, laws, canyons, or statues. There would be no parties, games, dances, nor love, which overcomes everything. Nobody would know the movement of the skies and planets, nor would they have knowledge of them, nor

Nadie sabría porque el mar se hincha, ni de qué modo infiltra el agua en las venas de la tierra, para recobrarla después; ni la mútua trabazón de los elementos, ni la influencia de los cuerpos celestiales, ni a qué obedece la diversidad de las cuatro estaciones del año, ni la brevedad y longura de las noches, ni porque responde el eco desde las concavidades cuando el hombre grita; ni porque el Levante atrae las nubes lluviosas, ni porque tras montañas las impele, ni porque tiemble la tierra, ni multitud de fenómenos naturales cuya enumeración te cansaría si te la hicieras específicamente.

El ser más favorecido por la naturaleza es sin duda ninguna la mujer, ella ha colocado entre sus manos la varita de mágicas virtudes que trueca los males en bienes, y hace surgir de los áridos peñascos la fuente de consuelo y esperanza.

would they search for the hidden operations of nature.

No one would know why the ocean swells, nor how the earth's veins filter water to later recover; nor the mutual assembly of the elements, nor the influence of the heavenly bodies, nor to whom the four seasons answer to, nor the shortness or length of the nights, nor why the echo responds from the furthest point when a man screams; nor why the wind attracts the rainy clouds, nor why it impels it behind mountains, nor why the earth trembles, nor a multitude of natural phenomenon, which if I were to list would tire you.

Woman is without doubt blessed by nature, she has placed within her hands the magic wand of virtues which changes bad to good and makes resurface from the dry rocks the fountain of comfort and hope.

La mujer ha nacido para ser la conservadora de la paz doméstica, comolas antiguas vestales lo eran del sacro fuego.

La mujer debe cifrar todo su conato en no parecerse a los hombres, si no ha semejar a los ángeles sus hermanos.

La sociedad rechaza a la que se precia de sabia, porque no quiere que reine por el entendimiento, intermedio entre la tierra y cielo, si no por el alma, que es la esencia misma de la divinidad.

The woman was born to be the preserver of domestic piece, just like the antique virgins were of the sacred fire.

The woman should place all her effort in attempting to never appear as man, but rather resemble the angels her brothers.

Society rejects the woman who boasts of being wise, because it doesn't want her to reign intellectually, intermedate between the earth and the sky, but rather with soul which is the essence of divinity.

**LA ESPOSA: QUE ES SER  
ESPOSA?**

Ser esposa no es ser la criada de un hombre. No es ser su querida. No es ser una fuente impura en donde viles pasiones apaguen su ser. No es ser la compañera de un día. No es ser un mueble comprado con una cosa que se llama dote. No es ser una mercadería con se especula.

Ser esposa, es ser una mujer elegida con preferencia entre muchas por su honestidad por su religiosidad, por su amabilidad, por su asiduidad, por su laboriosidad, por su docilidad, por su dulzura, por su moderación, por su prudencia, su sensatez, por su ternura, por su modestia, por su recogimiento, por su sumisión, por su economía.

Ser esposa, es ser una mujer elegida entre millares, por sus virtudes, aureola inmortal, adorno esplendente, perfume imperecedero, perdurable

**THE WIFE: WHAT IS TO BE A  
WIFE?**

What is it to be a wife? To be a wife is not to be the maid of a man. It is not to be his lover. It is not to be an impure fountain from where vile passions extinguish his thirst. It is not being his companion for a day. It is not being a possession bought by a thing called dowry, it is not being merchandise with which to speculate with.

To be a wife is to be a chosen woman preferred over many others because of her honesty, her religiosity, for her kindness, for her diligence, her laboriousness, for her meekness, her pleasantness, for her moderation, for her prudence, for her common sense, her tenderness, for her modesty, for her composure, for her submission, for her economy.

To be a wife, is to be a woman chosen among millions because of her

encanto, celestial atractivo, emanación divina de las perfecciones inefables del mismo Dios; es ser elegida por sus virtudes cristianas, por sus virtudes constantes más que por su belleza exterior, accidente fugaz, que con una enfermedad o con los años desaparece, o que con la continuación de poseerse, empalaga.

Ser esposa, es ser el consuelo, la alegría, la riqueza, las delicias, la felicidad y la vida de un hombre, de cuya suerte depende la suya propia.

Ser esposa, es ser la compañera inseparable de un hombre, es ser amada con un amor puro, con un amor constante, con un amor racional, con un amor religioso, con un amor desinteresado, con un amor ferviente y tan duradero como la vida.

Ser esposa, es ser respetada, es ser atendida, es ser cuidada, es ser la

virtues, her immortal halo, her splendid adornment, her everlasting perfume, her everlasting enchantment, her celestial attractiveness, divine manifestations of the inexpressible perfection of god himself; it is being chosen for her Christian virtues, more for her faithful virtues than for her exterior beauty, fleeting accident that with a sickness or with the years vanishes, or with the continuous possession revolts.

To be a wife is to be the comfort, the happiness, the richness, the delicacy, the joy, and the life of a man, whose fate depends upon her own.

To be a wife, is to be the inseparable companion of a man, it is to be loved with a pure love, with a constant love, with a rational love, with a religious love, with an unselfish love, with a fervent love, and as lasting as life.

To be a wife is to be respected,

mitad de ese mismo corazón, comprado con el precio de sus virtudes.

Ser esposa, es ser el porvenir, es ser la corona de generaciones, es ser la esperanza, es ser el honor y el santo orgullo de la Religión de la Patria y de la Humanidad. Esto es ser Esposa.

attended, to be taken care of, it is to be the half of that same heart, bought with the price of her virtues.

To be a wife is to be the future, it is to be the crown of generations, it is to be the hope, it is to be the honor and the holy pride of the religion of the fatherland and humanity. This is to be the wife.

## APPENDIX B

### INTERVIEW WITH MRS. ROSIE MIRABAL-GARZA

*1. What do you think made your mother strong in her everyday life?*

I would have to say, first and foremost, was her devout Catholic faith. She was very close to the Church and drew strength from it on every occasion. I think her life experiences also helped her. Because she had overcome obstacles in the past, I think my mother had confidence that she could deal with any challenges she met. Of course, she also had the constant support of my father and many people around her that she could turn to.

*a. What types of things did she do which were out of the norms of women of that time?*

She was involved in an incredible array of activities, both professional and personal. While she was certainly most well known for her journalism, her interests were extremely broad. She was passionate about education and civic involvement. It would not be an exaggeration to say that in just about every arena that she entered, she stood out from her contemporaries, defying the norms and customs of the day. Please see the attached list, "Accomplishments," for some of the highlights of her activities.

*b. Did she voice her ideas in any other area other than her writings in the newspaper?*

My mother was very much a woman who lived her ideas and her ideals. I would say that if you look at any of her activities you will see a reflection of her beliefs. Her work on behalf of bilingual education was an outgrowth of her strong commitment to equality and equal opportunity. Her work in LULAC and other civic organizations grew from her belief in civic service and the need for women to play a more prominent role in the community. These things were natural for her because they were very much an integral part of who she was as a person.

*2. How did she balance her role of a mother/wife with that of a working woman?*

Many of Dora's friends and colleagues were amazed at her ability to do both. Part of it was simply her organizational skill. She knew what she wanted to accomplish and she

organized her life so that she could give time to her top priorities, her family and her work. Our home was only a stone's throw away from the business, so it was easy for her to be involved with us as children while she worked. In addition, my brother Robert and I were always involved in my parents' work in some way, whether it was playing around the printing shop, accompanying my mother on her rounds selling advertising or doing little chores around the shop. Of course, she and my father were constantly working together. It was really not so much two separate worlds of family and work, but rather a melding of those two worlds, and my mother was, in many ways, the glue that held them together.

*3. Did she raise you a certain way, maybe introduced to you at a young age, the things she wrote about in her pieces? In her Authentic Feminism piece she says, "the knowledge of her rights within the responsibilities of her duties," need to be taught to woman, was this taught to you as a young woman?*

She certainly instilled those values in me. While there were occasions where she might talk about them, more often than not, it was by example. She was not one who spoke a lot about feminism to me, which is why her writing on the subject is a revelation. Her way of teaching was by doing, by living her life in a way that she felt all women should be able to do. Simply by watching her, those values were transmitted to me. As a role model, her influence was probably much greater than if she had tried to sit me down and lecture or explain things. Her views came to me by osmosis if you will. I saw her and assuming, in my youthful naiveté, that she was the norm, I tried to emulate her.

*4. Was there any literature commonly seen around your house, any particular favorite authors, either in Spanish or English? Anything that reflected where your mother got her strong ideas from?*

I don't recall any literature in particular. We were certainly encouraged to read and had all of the books that children would have enjoyed. While my parents were both well read, they probably did not have a lot of time for books since their work took up so much of their time. I do remember there were always Spanish language magazines from Mexico, and we were actually featured in an article in Armando del Moral's *Revista del Cine*. Because they were active in the cultural exchange between Mexico and the U.S., my

parents found these periodicals interesting and useful.

I can only speculate that my mother's literary interest was inspired by her grandfather, Octaviano Cervera, who was an author in his own right. Her ideas on independence and women's equality may have come from her father, Matias Cervera, who, recognizing her talent, probably encouraged her to exploit it to the fullest. In the end though, I believe that she was largely a self-creation. That is the only way I can explain it.

*5. Did any sort of events (either national or local) influence her beliefs or her actions?*

Not that she ever explicitly voiced to me. Obviously, discrimination against Hispanics, particularly children in the school system, led her to become active in that area. Similarly seeing women being relegated to second class status in the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce and other organizations led her to seek a greater role for women there. As a journalist, she was probably more aware of then current events than most and she may well have felt that she was moving in concert with trends like the changing role of women during World War II. She was very much self-motivated though, and I think she acted, without regard to – and sometimes in spite of – what was going on around her.

*6. What was the relationship between your parents? Your mother's feminist ideas spoke of equality within the marriage with no one being smarter or stronger than the other, was this practiced in the home as well?*

Very much so. While my parents had their disagreements, in the end, they always worked as a team. While there was no sense that one was stronger than the other, they recognized that they each had their own unique strengths and talents and they took advantage of that so that together, they were stronger than. It was a very synergistic relationship.

*7. Did she ever talk about how women were (mis)treated or how unfair the situations were for them?*

No, not often. She might comment on the reality of a situation, but she was always more interested in doing something about a problem than talking about it. I suppose in that sense, she felt that actions spoke louder than words and time spent lamenting injustice was time that could have been spent correcting it.

8. *Did she compare the situations of the white woman she saw around her with her own or that of other Hispanic woman?*

Race was very seldom something that my mother mentioned. She was certainly aware of racial inequality and fought against it, but she did not use the language of race and gender with me. For her, everyone was equal, something she did express to me many times. I think that her instinct was to not frame things in terms of one group versus another. In that respect, I think she was in contrast to some other activists. Each person has their own view of how to achieve a desired result and many may be valid and helpful to a greater or lesser degree. Dora did not criticize others' approach, she simply did what she thought was best in the way that she thought was best and she accomplished a tremendous amount doing it her way.

9. *Now that you go back and read your mother's pieces, do you see the feminist ideas she was writing?*

Absolutely. They are all the more compelling because as I have mentioned, these were not things that she spoke of to me *per se*. Again, she taught by example and expressing any type of feminist ideology was not the way she communicated to me. The fact that she had such a well-developed intellectual framework on feminist is surprising. The fact that she was expressing these ideas in 1939 is little short of amazing! Each time that I think I have come to know everything about Dora Mirabal, she surprises me yet again. While children perhaps only truly come to appreciate who their parents were when they grow up, I think few have the experience I have had. Exploring my mother's life and legacy has been like peeling away the layers of an onion. It seems that there is always more to discover about this remarkable woman. Thank you so much for helping to reveal yet another layer. If I can provide you with any further assistance, please call on me.

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