

A Canadian Woman Takes and Interest in Troubled  
Mexico:

Agnes C. Laut's Journalistic and Philanthropic Work in  
Revolutionary Mexico,

1913-1921

by

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August 2008

A thesis submitted to McGill University in partial fulfilment of the  
requirements of the degree of M.A. in History

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## Abstract

Agnes Laut (Ontario, 1871 - New York, 1936) was a Canadian journalist, novelist, financial advisor, and a farmer who became closely involved with United States-Mexico relations during the Mexican Revolution (1910-1921). This research analyses Agnes Laut's editorial work, travels, and publications about Mexico and its social strife. Furthermore, it explores her role as coordinator among US civic and religious associations aiming to relieve Mexico's social troubles through humanitarian aid. This thesis is a first approach to the study of the impact of foreign civic society and philanthropic organizations in revolutionary Mexico.

## Résumé

Agnes Laut (Ontario, 1871 - New York, 1936) était une journaliste canadienne, romancière, conseillère financière et une fermière qui était étroitement engagé dans les relations entre les États-Unis et le Mexique pendant la Révolution mexicaine (1910-1921). Cette investigation analyse les travaux éditoriaux, les voyages et les articles publiés d' Agnes Laut sur la problématique de Mexique. En plus, cette recherche étudie son rôle comme liaison entre les organisations civiques et religieuses des États-Unis et son but de améliorer la situation troublé de la population au Mexique à travers de la philanthropie. Cette thèse est un premier effort pour étudier l' effet des organisations civiques étrangères dans le Mexique révolutionnaire au début du XXème siècle.

## CONTENTS

Abstract	
Introduction and Acknowledgements	p. 3
Chapter I: “The Mexican Revolution, 1910–1917: Internal Questioning and External Strains”	p. 13
Chapter II: “Agnes Laut Takes an Interest in Troubled Mexico”	p. 39
Chapter III: “1919: Agnes Laut, Mexico, and the Interventionist Push”	p. 63
Chapter IV: “From Observation to Action: Laut’ s Endeavours to Redeem Mexico”	p. 93
Conclusion	p. 121
Primary Sources and Bibliography	p. 123

*Para Jessica Solt*

*con el amor incondicional de tantos años de amistad*

## Introduction and Acknowledgements

Some years ago, having been granted a scholarship by Mexico's *Instituto Nacional de Estudios Históricos de la Revolución Mexicana*<sup>1</sup>, I worked in the translation of a huge document: the records of the investigation on Mexican affairs that was conducted by a senatorial committee presided by Senator Albert B. Fall. The "Fall Committee", as it is commonly referred to, was in charge of assessing the situation experienced by U.S. citizens in Mexico and reporting to President Wilson. The investigation was based on the testimonies of individuals who, to some extent or other, were linked to revolutionary Mexico. Of all the depositions I read, one seemed outstanding to me: that of Agnes Christina Laut, a Canadian journalist.

At the beginning of 1919, Agnes Laut crossed the U.S.-Mexican border. During her two-month stay in Mexico she traveled in trains that were blown up soon after she got off them; gathered financial information from members of the foreign community in Mexico City; held talks with teachers and union leaders; visited Indian villages, urban slums, hospitals and orphanages; observed the conditions of provincial ranches; and explored the Gulf of Mexico's oil country. Back in the U.S., her country of residence, Laut's Mexican experience triggered her

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<sup>1</sup> The *INEHRM*, was created in 1953 with the official purpose of fomenting academic research on the Mexican Revolution. In 2006, the institute changed its name and widened its scope of research; the *Instituto Nacional de Estudios Históricos de las Revoluciones de México* currently carries out historical research on Mexican revolutionary movements of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

publication of magazine articles, presentation of lectures, and organization of charity programs.

This thesis is devoted to Laut's involvement with revolutionary Mexico: it examines her Mexican obsession from its inception, when Laut worked as an editor for *Forum* magazine during World War I, to its zenith marked by the creation of the Children Conservation League in 1920. Unlike other foreign journalists and writers, such as John Reed, Laut, and her corpus of texts concerning Mexico, has not been studied. Moreover, her national background, her feminine condition, her links to both religious and civic U.S. associations, and her active participation in philanthropic projects pose particular questions that differentiate her case from others. How did her Canadian background affect her perspective on the Mexican issue? Did Canada-U.S. and U.S.-Mexican interactions forge her perception of the region in a particular way? Are her arguments in favour of direct U.S. involvement in Mexico similar to those of her male counterparts; if not, what is the difference?

Despite the fact that Agnes Laut's connection to Mexico has mostly remained in obscurity, much historical research about the diverse foreign interactions with Mexico during the revolutionary period has been carried out. An event of such epic proportions, combined with the vast and varied sources available, encourages multiple approaches of historical research on the subject. Of course, the intense bilateral relations between revolutionary Mexico and its Northern neighbor provide particularly attractive research topics for Mexican and U.S. historians alike.

Government records, not only in Mexico but also -- and in considerable number -- in the U.S., were the first documentary mine avidly exploited by historians. Furthermore, the preservation of the

personal documents and files of prominent politicians in national archives and universities of both countries enhanced the initial boom of political and diplomatic approaches that exploded in the 1970s. Berta Ulloa's *La revolución intervenida: Relaciones diplomáticas entre México y Estados Unidos* (1971) was a pioneering learned work in terms of documentary research: the Mexican historian analyzed U.S.-Mexican relations using Mexican and U.S. archival material. U.S. historians, like Mark Gilderhus, also profited from archival material: in 1977, he published *Diplomacy and Revolution: U.S.-Mexican Relations under Wilson and Carranza*.

The historical context also contributed to this trend in diplomatic history. The hostile panorama of the Cold War constantly posed the question of U.S. direct involvement in foreign, revolutionary contexts. U.S. historians, moved by their present concerns, undertook the task of analyzing previous, similar scenarios, such as the Mexican Revolution. A case in point is Edward Haley's *Revolution and Intervention: The Diplomacy of Taft and Wilson in Mexico* (1970).

Diplomatic relations between revolutionary Mexico and other countries have also been explored, for example, in Friedrich Katz's classic *The Secret War in Mexico: Europe, the United States, and the Mexican Revolution* (1981). Josefina McGregor recently turned her attention to Spain: her research in Mexican and Spanish archives produced *Revolución Mexicana y diplomacia española* (2003). Historian Lorenzo Meyer is focusing part of his historical work on Great Britain; his book *Su Majestad Británica contra la Revolución Mexicana* (1991) is an example of the more recent, comprehensive historiographic approach that amalgamates international relations interpretations with economic, social and cultural explanations.

Indeed, the political-diplomatic perspective was followed by a wave of historical research focused on economic and commercial foreign interests in Mexico during the revolutionary years. Oil, mining, agricultural and other financial ventures have been the center of attention for historians. Just to mention a few works on the subject: Linda Hall's *Oil, Banks and Politics: The United States and Post-revolutionary Mexico* (1995) and *Oil and Revolution in Mexico* by Jonathan Brown (1993).

Lately, cultural approaches have added new dimensions to the study of the Mexican Revolution and its interactions beyond Mexican borders. The study of artistic and intellectual dynamics between foreigners and the Mexican Revolution has been a prolific field for research: *American Writers, Mexico, and Mexican Immigrants, 1880-1930* (2004) by Gilbert González and *The Enormous Vogue of all Things Mexican* (1992) by Helen Delpar dwell on the topic. Visual and audiovisual sources provide material for iconographic and representational analyses, for example, John Britton's book *Revolution and Ideology: Images of the Mexican Revolution in the United States* (1995).

Among the studies of cultural interactions, little research, however, has been done on foreign philanthropic enterprises in Mexico during the Revolution, Armando Solórzano's PhD dissertation "¿Fiebre dorada o fiebre amarilla? La Fundación Rockefeller en México, 1911-1924" (1997) being one of the few in this vein. Following the same thematic line, this thesis contributes to the study of cultural relations between Mexico and the outside (specifically North America) by examining humanitarian projects aimed at revolutionary Mexico. In what

ways did Agnes Laut's philanthropic arguments and humanitarian projects differ from interventionist discourses?<sup>2</sup> What arguments did she use to promote this kind of foreign involvement in a sovereign country? What were her goals and methods in organizing the projects? What role did she play in civic associations? What was the nature of interaction among the individual (Laut in this case), civic organizations and the U.S. government? What was the dynamic among different civic associations, and did their ideological, religious or political orientations interfere with or facilitate their cooperation for philanthropic ends?

Due to the limited nature of the sources available to me and limited time, this study, of a very particular case, is planned as the first step toward future research. My thesis is based exclusively on Canadian and U.S. sources; the inclusion of Mexican documents would give a more complete analysis. In terms of research lines, this thesis also leaves questions in the air, for example, the differentiated responses of the Mexican public to these humanitarian activities initiated from abroad. Other questions for further investigation are: What other U.S. philanthropic and humanitarian enterprises became involved during Mexico's revolutionary period? Were they similar in their ideological bases and aims? How were they formed, and how did they interact with

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<sup>2</sup> The term "intervention" within the context of U.S.-Mexican relations during the revolutionary years can be misinterpreted if not clarified. While philanthropic involvement or official policies such as trade embargoes can be defined as interventionist actions, in this thesis, the use of the term intervention and interventionist will refer exclusively to U.S. military incursion in Mexico; other terms, euphemisms to be more exact, will be used to depict both President Woodrow Wilson's and Agnes Laut's stances. I choose to do so because I want to stick to the same semantic meaning as was understood by the U.S. public during the 1913-1919 juncture. Nonetheless, throughout this thesis, the ambiguities, contradictions, agreements, similarities and clashes among different positions will be examined.



both the U.S. public and governmental authorities? How did they operate in Mexico, and how successful were they?

Intended for Canadian readers and, in general, for everyone who is not deeply familiar with the intricate development of the Mexican Revolution, Chapter I provides the contextual frame required to understand Agnes Laut's first contacts with Mexico. Because the Revolution in Mexico was such a multi-layered and long lasting event, my narrative, of necessity, focuses exclusively on the diverse interactions between revolutionary Mexico and the exterior. The bilateral relation between Mexico and the U.S. receives particular attention due to its particular intensity. Commercial, diplomatic and cultural dealings, from the Porfirio Diaz dictatorship to Venustiano Carranza's de facto government are examined. Meant as an overview, this chapter emphasizes certain critical episodes that express the tension the Mexican internal struggle engendered in the outside, such as the 1914 U.S. occupation of the Mexican port of Veracruz and Francisco Villa's 1916 raid against Columbus, New Mexico.

The first chapter closely relates to Chapter II, in which the time period previously covered on a large scale is reviewed once more from the individual's perspective, following Agnes Laut's particular experience. A look into her personal background (professional passions, life-long obsessions, geopolitical perceptions, among others) permits deeper understanding of the nature of Laut's interest in Mexico. This enterprise is completed by relating Laut to her native Canadian milieu, as well as by analyzing her conception of and immersion in the dynamics among Canada, the U.S. and Mexico. This chapter studies the first phase of Laut's encounter with Mexico, from initial second-hand references to deeper knowledge due to her work as a magazine editor in New York.

Chapter III is devoted to the last key juncture in the inside-outside interactions in the history of revolutionary Mexico: the year 1919. That year witnessed a powerful wave of pressure from diverse sectors of U.S. society that demanded military intervention in Mexico. Concurrently, Laut's involvement in the issue grew in intensity when she embarked on a two-month research trip to Mexico. This chapter analyzes both features and links them together by analyzing Laut's connections to interventionist pressure groups, in particular the National Association for the Protection of American Rights in Mexico, both before and after her Mexican expedition. A description of the trip, from its inception to its undertaking, precedes an analysis of Laut's public viewpoints on the intervention - non intervention debate based on her deposition before the U.S. Senate subcommittee that in 1919 launched an investigation of Mexican affairs.

The final chapter, Chapter IV, continues to scrutinize Agnes Laut's reflections on Mexico. The content of her published articles sheds light on her perception of the Mexican social struggle, her evaluation of its means and outcomes, and her thoughts about external involvement in the matter. Not limited entirely to her discourse, this fourth section attempts a close observation of Laut's activities in favour of a peaceful solution to Mexican social discontent: her arguments in support of the humanitarian option, and her endeavours to organize her charitable enterprise, in particular her negotiations aimed at getting the sponsorship of the National Civic Federation.

Tracing Laut's Mexican adventure has been difficult as far as primary sources goes. The document that originally attracted my attention to Agnes Laut and her involvement with Mexico during its revolutionary years is the testimony she rendered before the Fall

Committee. Her deposition provided not only crucial information about her trip to Mexico but also much needed leads to other documentary material on the subject, for example her published articles. Thus, Chapter III is mostly based on Agnes Laut's records in the files of Fall's Subcommittee. As much as consultation of the files of the National Association for the Protection of American Rights in Mexico would have completed the research, I was not able to locate them. Another set of missing material is that documenting Laut's personal involvement with the religious movement of united churches that ultimately were to administer her charity project.<sup>3</sup>

Concerning Laut's efforts to launch a humanitarian program to relieve Mexico's social problems, my attempt to examine her specific role, her discursive arguments, and her strategic actions relies exclusively on the National Civic Association's records in New York, in particular the files on both Mexico and Laut. These documents support a considerable part of Chapter IV, along with news reports from several U.S. newspapers such as the *New York Times*.

Agnes Laut's published articles on Mexico (1919-1921) provide facts about her trip, as well as information regarding her perceptions of the Revolution itself. Those texts complement Chapters III and IV, while articles discussing Mexican issues published between 1913 and 1916

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<sup>3</sup> Agnes Laut envisioned the cooperation of Protestant and Catholic churches in both Mexico and the U.S. to carry out her humanitarian project in Mexico. See "Investigation of Mexican Affairs", United States Senate, Subcommittee of the Committee of Foreign Affairs, Monday, September 15, 1919, p. 378. She specifically refers to the Latin American Division of the Interchurch World Movement as the ideal organization for this mission. The Interchurch World Movement of North America (1919-1920) was an attempt by thirty U.S. Protestant Denominations to raise funds in order to fulfill missionary and humanitarian world programs. See Eldon Ernst, "The Interchurch World Movement of North America, 1919-1920" (New Haven: Yale University PhD Dissertation, 1968).

in the journal *Forum* under her editorial supervision are fundamental sources for Chapter II. The data concerning historical context (Chapter I) and Laut's biography (Chapter II) are based on secondary sources.

Finding first hand information about Laut's endeavours in Mexico was difficult during the preliminary stages of this research project. The aid of my supervisor, Prof. Catherine LeGrand, led me to contact Prof. Valerie Legge of Memorial University in Newfoundland. Professor Legge, who has devoted her career to studying the life and literary work of Agnes Laut, provided me with invaluable information on primary sources about Laut's Mexican adventure. My research is indebted to Prof. Legge.

Above all, I owe much to Prof. Catherine LeGrand, chair of McGill's History Department and a professional in Latin American history. Her interest, patience, suggestions, editing, and advice made this work possible.

A fundamental part of this research was funded by McGill's Faculty of Arts. The Arts Graduate Student Travel Award allowed me to do research in New York City, where the National Civic Association Records are found. This thesis, as well as my M.A. studies at McGill University, were partially funded by a fee waiver granted by the *Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport of the Province of Quebec*, as part of its bilateral agreement with the Mexican Ministry of Foreign Affairs (*Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores de México*).

Finally, the life changing and intellectually enriching experience of studying abroad would never have been possible without the absolute support of the entire Jiménez family. I want to close this foreword with two very affectionate and sincere acknowledgments: first, to my uncle Gabriel Jiménez who unconditionally backed this project of mine in every

possible way, and last to my friends Mercedes González and Hugo Olivares who helped me during the last phase of this process.

## CHAPTER I

### The Mexican Revolution, 1910-1917: Internal Questioning and External Strains

In his celebrated compilation of essays, *El laberinto de la soledad*, Octavio Paz defines Mexican history as a dialectical clash between periods of openness and periods of introspection.<sup>4</sup> Published for the first time in 1950, the text can be considered as a cultural expression of the nationalist policies enforced by Mexico, and most Latin American countries, since the 1930s, as well as a clear example of the chief intellectual worry of the moment: the quest for the true national self, for “*mexicanidad*”. The poet regards the interaction of Mexico with the world beyond national boundaries, and its receptiveness to foreign influences, as a way of putting a mask on the “authentic” Mexican self. This self-repression, according to Paz, can not be bottled up forever: it inevitably explodes in a spontaneous, and often violent, fashion that turns attention from the outside world to an internal questioning.

The history of Mexico after the definitive break with Spain in 1821 followed a painful path of national consolidation; the diverse and opposed projects developed by factions in confrontation were inspired by external models of political organization, economic administration, and

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<sup>4</sup> The book consists of nine essays that reflect upon multiple aspects of Mexican identity. Although national history is addressed throughout the work, the historical analysis is mostly concentrated in chapters five and six: “Conquest and Colonial Life” and “From Independence to Revolution”. Octavio Paz, *El laberinto de la soledad*, (México, D.F.: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1981), pp. 81-134. This collection of essays was published in English under the title *The Labyrinth of Solitude* by Grove Press (New York) in 1961.

cultural trends. The chaotic first half century of independent life finally devolved into the long lasting dictatorship of Porfirio Díaz (1876–1910).

Díaz' s pragmatic administration had a clear goal and followed particular strategies to achieve it. In order to include Mexico in the admired clique of modern, industrialized nations, stable conditions and financial soundness were required. Based on an imported positivist philosophy and carried out with the influx of foreign capital combined with the underpaid labour of the Mexican workforce, the Porfirian project benefited both a small Mexican oligarchy and external investors. The marginalization of the incipient middle class and the vast lower layers of society, however, provoked, in the early twentieth century, the abrupt crumbling of the Díaz regime.

Porfirio Díaz was forced out of power in 1911, after less than a year of armed revolt. The violent movement that focused its demands on political reforms gave the cue to multiple actors who sought social and economic improvements. With the end of the Díaz regime, a devastating civil war that would last more than ten years was inaugurated. If the Mexican nineteenth century appears as an attempt to imitate and welcome foreign concepts, capital, and settlers, the Revolution can be perceived, in Octavio Paz' s words, as “a sudden dip of Mexico into its own self. [...] Our Revolution is Mexico' s other face, the one that was ignored by the *Reforma* and humiliated by the Dictatorship. [...] With whom does Mexico bond? With itself, with its own self” .<sup>5</sup>

Octavio Paz certainly identifies Mexico' s perennial tension between internal balance and external thrusts; however, this interaction must

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<sup>5</sup>Paz, p. 134. The translation is mine.

not be thought of as the contraposition of two distinct facets. On the contrary, the revolutionary impetus to express and solve internal conflicts was decisively affected by the relationship with the exterior. The contrasting presence of the outside element was vital to the quest for self recognition and identity. Moreover, this explosive exercise of introspection was not an experience that concerned only Mexico; it had effects upon the outer world and took place within specific international contexts that influenced its development. In sum, the Mexican Revolution was not, could not have been, an absolute enclosure.

The connections between Revolutionary Mexico and the world beyond its territory were, at the same time, heterogeneous and closely tied to one another. Financial interests oriented diplomatic stances; scientific and literary works enhanced the penetration of foreign investment; and educational projects tried to close the socio-cultural gaps that resulted from these business ventures.

Indeed, the multiple contacts between Mexico and the outside show different dimensions and constant reconfigurations. The nature of the Revolution itself imbued these interactions with diverse shades: the broad range of revolutionary factions and programs, as well as the ever changing balance of power called for different strategies of adapting to the context. Specific regional conditions also played an important part in these relations. The weight of distinct foreign nationalities in Mexico varied depending on geographical locations, economic activities and cultural relations. Finally, the international juncture, marked by the First World War, had a prominent influence on the external response to the Mexican issue.



## The Shock of 1910

The year 1910 marked the centennial commemoration of the start of the Mexican war of Independence from Spain. In the eyes of Porfirio Díaz, the celebration was the ideal showcase to display the country's material progress to the world. In fact, what the ruler had to do was simply confirm the generalized perception of Mexico shared by the international powers at the time. During his three decades of de facto control, Díaz had cleverly managed to transform the negative image of Mexico into an optimistic one.

Back in 1876, when General Díaz first took the presidency, he inherited a chaotic economic situation: public employees were not receiving their salaries; public works had been stopped due to the shortage of funding; smuggling activities had increased, while foreign trade diminished; the small Mexican group of entrepreneurs was uneasy because of constant rumours of tax hikes; and the Republic had unpaid debts with several countries, mainly Great Britain, Spain, France, and the United States.<sup>6</sup> The quick consolidation of Don Porfirio's political power enabled him to launch policies aiming to order public finances, mainly by drastically reducing expenses.

Hoping that this stability and order would attract the foreign investment needed to build infrastructure, Díaz confronted the debt issue. The Díaz administration astutely negotiated Mexico's outstanding debts with Great Britain and Spain. His forceful attitude not only

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<sup>6</sup> Stephen Bodayla, "Financial Diplomacy." PhD diss., New York University, 1975, p. 10.

accomplished the significant reduction of the debt but also projected the image of security needed obtain new international loans.<sup>7</sup>

The official program of modernizing through foreign capital was in motion. The creation of infrastructure was a priority of the regime, and, thus, a special effort fomenting investment in that area was carried out by granting concessions, promoting the exploitation of the country's natural resources, and lowering taxes. This open-door policy achieved its goal of providing Mexico with basic infrastructure, the railroad system being of utmost importance.

At the same time, the possibility of moving throughout Mexico on the newly built railroads encouraged foreigners, fundamentally U.S. natives, to explore the country as tourists, missionaries, and scientific researchers. Their publications, which attracted a broad readership, tended to highlight the picturesque cultural peculiarities encountered. They also surveyed the actual state of foreign business in Mexico, affirmed its positive nature, and informed of potential fields for investment. In particular, the authors from the United States “focused great attention on the supposed benefits that U.S. capital and American know-how brought to Mexico and were not shy in explaining in substantial detail why Mexico needed the United States' guidance and its expertise in order to modernize.”<sup>8</sup>

The conviction that the presence of external elements in Mexico would not only bring profit to the outsiders but also would mean betterment for the host nation was shared by foreigners and the Díaz government. Díaz sought to match his open investment policy with an open

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<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 13-14.

<sup>8</sup> Gilbert González, *Culture of Empire: American Writers, Mexico and Mexican Immigrants*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2004), p. 47.

migration policy. Whether attracted by official migratory schemes or by the favourable conditions for investment, the arrival of external elements was indeed welcomed.

Spanish investors were the major foreign presence in Díaz' s Mexico.<sup>9</sup> Despite Mexican resentment against this community because of their association with the colonial era, the integration of Spaniards was easier due to sharing a common language, religion, and cultural practices. Assimilation to the host country was not that simple for other foreign communities.

By the start of the twentieth century, the British colony living in Mexico totalled 2,799 people: ten years later, at the time of the revolutionary outburst, the number had risen to 5,274. In terms of investment, a big chunk of British capital invested in Mexico went into the railroads. Other enterprises that attracted British investment were public services, mining, real estate, public debt, banking, and oil. In terms of social interaction, the British community led a somewhat isolated life in Mexico: in Mexico City, they had their own social spaces the British Club, the Christ Church, the Sports Club, and the British Society, and established relations only with the Mexican elite.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Pablo Yankelevich, "Hispanofobia y revolución", *Hispanic American Historical Review*, 86:1 (2006), p. 32. For statistics on the nationalities and the investing fields of foreigners in Mexico in the last years of the *Porfiriato*, see also Moisés González Navarro' s article "Xenofobia y Xenofilia en la Revolución Mexicana," *Historia Mexicana*, 18:72, April-June 1969, pp. 569-614.

<sup>10</sup> Lorenzo Meyer, *Su Majestad Británica contra la Revolución Mexicana*, (México, D.F.: El Colegio de México, 1991), pp. 61-62. In a similar way, the U.S. colony in *Porfirian* Mexico consolidated an enclosed community. William Schell studies U.S. associations in Mexico (social clubs, hospitals, and religious organizations) in Chapter IV of his book *Integral Outsiders: The American Colony in Mexico City, 1876-1911* (Wilmington, Del.: SR Books, 2001).

As important as British investment was in Porfirian Mexico, US capital surpassed it. The US presence in Mexico at the end of the twentieth century's first decade was varied and numerous:

The influx of American emigrants, which exceeded 3,000 each year in the early 1900s, alarmed a growing number of Mexicans. The foreigners came as property owners, businessmen, miners, petroleum engineers, railroad workers, farmers, and ranchers. By 1910, more than 40,000 Americans resided in Mexico. Most colonists chose rural settings, but significant numbers, perhaps 20,000, opted to live in cities and towns.<sup>11</sup>

This flow of US business to Mexico illustrates that, come 1910, the relationship between foreign entrepreneurs and the Mexican regime was as sweet as ever; and there was nothing but optimism and generalized confidence concerning their business in the country.<sup>12</sup>

The 1910 celebration of the first hundred years of Mexico's formal independence was an event that underscored for the international community this positive perception of the country. This commemoration, however, was not the only incident that sketched Mexico's image in the eyes of the world on the eve of the revolution. Almost simultaneously, in 1909, a series of articles that would depict quite a different picture of Porfirian Mexico were published in *The American Magazine*.

John Kenneth Turner's *Barbarous Mexico* contested the general image of Porfirio Díaz as a ruler popularly admired for his endeavors to establish order and progress in Mexico. Instead, "Turner's articles

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<sup>11</sup> John Mason Hart, *Empire and Revolution: The Americans in Mexico since the Civil War* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), p. 271.

<sup>12</sup> For more information about the economic and cultural role of the U.S. colony in Mexico during the *Porfiriato*, see Schell, *Integral Outsiders*.

described the superficiality of Mexico's alleged peace and prosperity and the misery and misfortune of the common man at whose expense, in Turner's view, Díaz had created his 'modern' and 'progressive' state. Moreover, Turner implicated American business interests and the United States government in the sordid situation he described."<sup>13</sup> Widely read and favourably reviewed by the U.S. press, the articles brought up a debate that encouraged Díaz's supporters to put into printed word their point of view.

The other Anglo-power highly involved in Mexico, Great Britain, also showed a reaction to journalistic accounts. The same year that Turner's articles appeared, Arnold Channing and Frederick Frost published the text *The American Egypt*, in which they narrated their travels through the Yucatan Peninsula. The authors argued that the labour system on Yucatecan plantations was equivalent to a slave system. This work provoked public rejection and protest from British anti-slavery societies who successfully pushed the British Ambassador in Mexico, reluctantly, to inform the Mexican government of his country's objection to peonage labour systems.<sup>14</sup>

By the end of the Porfiriato, the work of foreign journalists laid bare Mexico's extreme social inequalities. Mexican nationalist discourse did something similar: "Mexican critics noted that the benefits of industrialization were going principally, if not entirely, to the Americans and a handful of rich Mexicans. The opposition saw the small group of Mexicans who made up the nation's economic and political

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<sup>13</sup> Tommie Sessions, "American Reformers and the Mexican Revolution: Progressives and Woodrow Wilson's Policy in Mexico, 1913-1917," PhD diss., American University, 1974, p. 47.

<sup>14</sup> Meyer, p. 92.

elite as ‘sellouts’ .”<sup>15</sup> Despite the evident, increasing hostility toward foreigners in Mexico, no one within the foreign community expected the eruption of a social revolution. In a way, their disbelief in a popular insurrection -- despite the increasing nationalist feeling -- proved to be correct.

The spark that initiated the collapse of the regime of Porfirio Díaz was not lit by peasants or exploited workers, though these groups quickly raised their voices following the revolutionary call. Francisco I. Madero, a prosperous landowner from the northern Mexican province of Coahuila, candidly dared to face Díaz. Expressing the discontent of an emerging middle class that had benefited economically from the regime’s policies but lacked political representation, Madero ran in the 1910 presidential election against General Díaz.<sup>16</sup>

Despite his old age and the generalized anxiety, in Mexico and abroad, about securing a peaceful transference of power, Díaz refused to step aside. The dictator ordered Madero’s temporary arrest. After his release, the “Apostle of Democracy”, as Madero was later to be popularly known, fled to the U.S., but not before launching a revolutionary program, the Plan de San Luis, in which he called on Mexicans to rebel against the decadent patriarch.

The response to Madero’s appeal to start the uprising on November 20, 1910 was a true disappointment, but surprisingly, support mounted

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<sup>15</sup> Hart, p. 272.

<sup>16</sup> The Mexican Revolution, as previously stated, is a complicated process that, in this thesis, will be partially covered. For more information on the Mexican Revolution see the series *Historia de la Revolución Mexicana* (México, D.F., El Colegio de México). This compilation is formed by 23 volumes -- written during the past two decades by prominent Mexican historians such as Luis González y González, Berta Ulloa, Enrique Krauze, and Álvaro Matute -- that analyze Mexico’s contemporary history (from the beginning of the revolutionary movement to the 1960s).

gradually and ultimately the revolution exploded. The conflict unleashed by Madero would outlast the abdication of Porfirio Díaz and would reconfigure Mexican society from its very foundations. Not less importantly, the decade of civil war that followed would also disrupt the international love affair with Mexico and challenge the interaction between this country and external forces. The revolutionary introspective reaction, expressed in nationalistic terms, was necessarily paired with hostility towards the foreign element.

**“Tan lejos de Dios y tan cerca de los Estados Unidos”** <sup>17</sup>

Great Britain, Spain, and France were undoubtedly concerned about the Mexican conflict; all these nations not only had financial interests and profitable enterprises at stake, but fellow nationals also demanded protection and saw their lives threatened by the violence. Although these countries’ diplomatic representatives played a significant role in providing both official and monetary support to the revolutionary groups each considered the most suitable to look after their interests, the nation whose response to the Revolution was decisive was the “Colossus of the North” , the United States.

Despite occasional disagreements between the European powers and the U.S. regarding Mexican policy<sup>18</sup>, some European countries rallied around the United States, seeking help to solve their own grievances

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<sup>17</sup> This is an anonymous and popular Mexican quote that emphasizes the historically difficult relationship between Mexico and the U.S. A literal translation of the complete phrase would read: “Poor Mexico, so far from God and so close to the United States” .

<sup>18</sup> The main disagreement between European governments and the U.S. concerning diplomatic stances towards Mexican revolutionary governments occurred during the *Huertista* period. See pp. 23-24.

towards Mexico. Either due to lack of consular representation or for pragmatic reasons, the Spanish ambassador in Mexico negotiated his complaints mostly through the U.S. State Department mediation or directly in U.S. territory with Mexican ambassador Bonillas.<sup>19</sup> In 1914, Washington Foreign Affairs Ministry took in its own hands the mission of protecting British citizens in Mexico by dealing officially with the Benton affair<sup>20</sup>.

This prominent U.S. role went beyond the diplomatic sphere. The International Committee of Bankers on Mexico was created in 1919 by Thomas Lamont of J.P. Morgan Co., with the purpose of protecting the financial interests of international investors in Mexico. The Committee, which also comprised representatives of British and French banks, was to be permanently managed by its U.S. constituents. This organism, directed by U.S. interests, aimed to represent all foreign creditors in Mexico.<sup>21</sup>

These examples illustrate just some of the aspects that made the United States the most significant outside actor in the Mexican Revolution. Through diplomatic pressure, cultural propaganda, economic embargoes, and even military intervention, the United States ultimately became the leader that guided external involvement in Mexico's internal war.

Geographical proximity between the two countries certainly contributed to the exceptional role played by the United States in the

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<sup>19</sup> Josefina MacGregor, *Revolución Mexicana y diplomacia española*, (México, D.F.: Instituto Nacional de Estudios Históricos de la Revolución Mexicana, 2002), pp. 105-136.

<sup>20</sup> William Smith Benton, a Scott married to a Mexican, was murdered by *Villista* forces. By delegating the issue to U.S. authorities, Great Britain implicitly acknowledged the dominant role of the United States regarding the Mexican situation. Lorenzo Meyer, p. 160.

<sup>21</sup> Boydala, pp. 39-41.



evolution of the Mexican Revolution. The weak revolutionary forces that undermined the Díaz regime with unexpected swiftness were organized and operated in the northern provinces of the country.<sup>22</sup> Before Díaz came to power, the main sources of border friction between Mexico and the United States were the Indian raids that originated in Mexico and the legal impossibility of U.S. military groups crossing the border to punish the fleeing Indian bands.<sup>23</sup> By taking action against the Indian raids and by gradually consolidating military control of the central government over the northern part of Mexico, Díaz had built a more stable and calmer border interaction with the U.S. This situation created a relaxed border policy that ultimately acted to the Mexican regime's detriment.

In the early twentieth century, the United States became the refuge for political opponents of the dictatorship and, later on, for every defeated revolutionary faction that sought to regroup and resume the fight.<sup>24</sup> The fact that "rebellious" foreign cells that ranged from

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<sup>22</sup> The regional features and importance of the northern Mexican provinces in the development of the revolutionary movement has been thoroughly analyzed. To mention a few relevant works on the subject: Friedrich Katz reflects upon the land tenure, economic activities, and labor dynamics of the area to explain the eruption of the war in the first chapter of his classic work *La guerra secreta en México* (México, D.F.: ERA, 2001); Deborah Baldwin connects pioneer revolutionary activity in the northern part of Mexico with the successful penetration of Protestantism in the zone in her book *Protestants and the Mexican Revolution* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1990); and Linda Hall and Don Coerver have devoted much of their research to revolutionary activity on the border and the several interactions, such as migration, commerce, and consular work, between Mexican and US border communities.

<sup>23</sup> In 1882 Mexico and the United States reached an agreement providing for the reciprocal crossing of the boundary by troops in pursuit of bands of Indians. Linda Hall and Don Coerver, *Revolution on the Border*, (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1988), p. 10.

<sup>24</sup> In a broader sense, during the decade of civil war, the U.S. became a haven for civilians who fled the violence. From 1911 to 1920, a total of 206, 955 legal immigrants were registered. Mexicans with professional education and skilled laborers, as well as non professional and illegal immigrants crossed the border in this period.

anarchists to military generals were active in US territory was not ignored by that country' s government.<sup>25</sup>

Between 1890 and 1906, Mexican anarchists, headed by the Flores Magón brothers, found in Texas the most favourable environment to print their anti-Díaz publications.<sup>26</sup> A few years later, in November of 1910, former candidate for the Mexican presidency, Francisco I. Madero, left his exile in the U.S., crossed the border, and started a confrontation that would continue for a decade.

In official discourse, the foreign policy of the United States was not to meddle in the internal affairs of a sovereign nation. Much to the dismay of the Díaz administration and the foreign groups that gave unconditional support to the regime, this stand effectively forbade any sort of overt action by the U.S. government against Mexican citizens legally settled in its territory. Even more problematic was the official U.S. stance of keeping hands off the selling of arms and ammunition to revolutionary factions and the flexible attitude towards the smuggling of these.

The first stage of the revolution, the Maderista insurrection, thus benefited from the fact that President William Howard Taft followed this policy. Being in the final juncture of his administration, Taft took a very cautious attitude towards the issue, despite the incendiary messages that he received from Henry Lane Wilson, the U.S. ambassador in Mexico City. Taft' s actions were limited to increasing support and

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For a detailed study of Mexican migration to the U.S. during the revolution, see Hall and Coerver, pp. 126-141.

<sup>25</sup> A detailed study of the official U.S. strategies to deal with Mexican leaders in exile and their results is *Los Revoltosos: Rebeldes mexicanos en los Estados Unidos 1903-1923* (México, D.F.: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1993) by Dick Raat.

<sup>26</sup> Hall and Coerver, p. 17.

communications with the border states as a preventive measure in case violent episodes should occur on the U.S. side of the border and to advise fellow US nationals in Mexico to withdraw from danger zones.<sup>27</sup>

The non-interventionist discourse implemented by President Taft was fervently embraced by his successor, Woodrow Wilson (1913-1921). Wilson's approach to the Mexican conflict, defined as a policy of "watchful waiting", would face the multiple stages of the revolution's progress. Based on civic principles of democracy, revered by Wilson with religious zeal, and faith in the right of all nations to self-government, he articulated a non-interventionist discourse. His Mexican policies, however, aimed at an active, though indirect, involvement in internal Mexican affairs.

President Wilson was convinced that, while the capacity of self-government was inherent to all nations, it could be acquired only after a long period of disciplined experience. Thus, every state possessed the democratic seed that, with the appropriate instruction, would eventually bloom. This creed moved Wilson to get actively involved in the Mexican situation from the moment he took power. According to him, the moral and constitutional legitimacy of any victorious revolutionary government in Mexico was to be determined from the outside.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Edward Haley, *Revolution and Intervention: The Diplomacy of Taft and Wilson in Mexico* (Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 1970), Chapter I: "A Brave Beginning".

<sup>28</sup> Marta Strauss Neuman, "Wilson y Bryan ante Victoriano Huerta," *Estudios de Historia Moderna y Contemporánea*, vol. XI, 1988, p. 203. The ambivalent characteristics of U.S. liberal discourse and the contradictions that resulted from its impossible application during the period of economic expansion and imperialism of the United States since the second half of the nineteenth century are also examined, in a general way, in Emily Rosenberg's *Spreading the American Dream* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982).

Unlike Taft, Wilson managed to subtly, but decisively, play an active role in the conflict. Sending secret emissaries to investigate and negotiate with all of the factions in the conflict, allowing the commerce and contraband of arms to some revolutionary groups while restricting it from others, bargaining the diplomatic recognition of a particular government, and preventing the shipment of food as a pressure strategy were some of Wilson's measures to canalize the Revolution his way.<sup>29</sup>

Immediately after stepping into office, President Wilson faced his first Mexican challenge: a victorious counterrevolutionary attack on the democratic government of Francisco Madero. The Maderista revolution was lethal to the exhausted regime of Porfirio Díaz; however, it was not efficient in consolidating a new one. Social dissatisfaction was overwhelming and demanded instant solutions. President Madero was unable to carry through on his promises of quick land distribution; he maintained the federal militia inherited from Porfirian times; and he faced the rejection of the international community in Mexico that feared the loss of their former privileges and the return of Mexico's legendary instability. All these factors made Madero's administration vulnerable.

In February 1913, Mexico City experienced ten days of armed struggle between some regiments of the Mexican army that rose against Madero and the federal troops in charge of its defence. The so called

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<sup>29</sup> Larry Hill extensively researched the efforts of President Wilson's agents with different revolutionary leaders in revolutionary Mexico in his PhD dissertation: "Woodrow Wilson's Executive Agents in Mexico from the Beginning of his Administration to the Recognition of Venustiano Carranza" (PhD diss., Louisiana State University, 1971).

*Decena Trágica*<sup>30</sup> ended with the betrayal of General Victoriano Huerta, a Porfirian military leader kept on by Madero; the arrest of President Francisco I. Madero and Vice-President José María Pino Suárez; and Huerta taking power as provisional president.

The overthrow of Madero took place when Taft was two weeks shy of leaving office. His administration accepted Huerta's regime as "legally established" but refused to bestow diplomatic recognition until Huerta accepted the settlement of certain U.S. grievances, mainly border claims. Huerta did not agree and Taft's administration came to an end with the U.S. and Mexican governments deadlocked.<sup>31</sup> In stepped Woodrow Wilson with an overt rejection of Huerta's anti-democratic ways.

### **1914 and 1916: Two Outstanding Episodes**

The encounters between outside forces and revolutionary activity were uneven during the decade of civil strife in Mexico. International attention and interest in the Mexican conflict was directly connected to other major global events, principally the development of the Great War (1914-1918). In particular, the foreign policy of the United States changed priorities depending on the varying worldwide context.

Huerta's coup *d'etat* triggered an immediate reaction of different groups in the country. On the one hand, Huerta faced the opposition of existing rebellious parties like the Zapatistas, who continued with their agrarian demands through guerrilla warfare in the

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<sup>30</sup> The term confers a tragic feature to the ten days of combat in the capital that heralded Madero's fall.

<sup>31</sup> Haley, pp. 72-73.

southern region of the country, while in northern Mexico, a new revolutionary faction came into being. Headed by Coahuila's governor, Venustiano Carranza, the *Constitucionalistas* fused with former Madero supporters, such as the celebrated Francisco (Pancho) Villa, disowning General Huerta and insisting on the enforcement of the constitutional principles of 1857.

On the other hand, foreign residents and diplomatic representatives showed support for the new regime. Regarded as the desired return to the Porfirian *age d'or*, Huerta's conservative tendencies were alluring to the foreign community. This attitude was officially expressed when almost the entirety of the nations with diplomatic corps in Mexico gave Huerta diplomatic recognition; the sole exception was the United States.<sup>32</sup> The official U.S. government stand on the matter provoked a tense situation not only with the international consensus but also with the U.S. groups with interests in Mexico.<sup>33</sup>

Without a doubt the recently inaugurated U.S. administration faced insistent pressure to recognize Victoriano Huerta. The U.S. ambassador to Mexico, Henry Lane Wilson, was probably the most effusive backer of the General. Beyond his alleged central role in the organization of

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<sup>32</sup> This unconditional and public support of Huerta had later negative consequences for some of the foreign communities. The huge Spanish colony suffered due to the public comments of its diplomatic representatives; tainted as reactionaries who had befriended the illegal *Huertista* government, Spaniards were targeted and abused by Francisco Villa with special resentment. Revolutionary anti-Spanish sentiment is analyzed in Josefina Macgregor's *Revolución Mexicana y diplomacia española* and Pablo Yankelevich's "Hispanofobia y revolución".

<sup>33</sup> Paul Henderson has analyzed the way in which Woodrow Wilson used international law to affect the internal stability of Latin American nations, in particular his attitude toward Huerta's regime. See "Woodrow Wilson, Victoriano Huerta, and the Recognition Issue in Mexico," *The Americas*, 41:1, July 1984.

Madero' s overthrow<sup>34</sup>, Lane Wilson acted as the mediator between the U.S. colony and President Wilson. The ambassador' s official communications informed Washington of the colony' s approval of Huerta and urged the President not only to recognize Huerta' s government but also to show public approval by granting him international credit that would help Huerta consolidate his control and crush his opponents.<sup>35</sup> The pressure from the international community, U.S. interests, and Ambassador Lane Wilson, however, did not crack President Wilson.

U.S. President Wilson' s categorical refusal to recognize Huerta, as well as his strategies to get rid of him, rested on several foundations. Huerta embodied all negative features associated with Latin American countries: he had attained power by the use of force, overthrowing a constitutional government, and, on top of that, he was responsible for the assassination of his predecessor. "Such disregard for the rudimentary principles of constitutional government not only violated his [President Wilson' s] moral and ethical sense but also jeopardized his vision of a hemispheric community."<sup>36</sup> Wilson feared that Huerta' s actions would become an example that other Latin American

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<sup>34</sup> It has been widely maintained that the plot against Madero was designed in the U.S. Embassy with Lane Wilson' s participation. His involvement did not respond to any official order; most likely it was brought about by his dislike of Madero' s political program, perceived by him as a threat to foreign interests. The first text that pointed to Lane Wilson' s activities in the matter was Luis Manuel Rojas' *Yo acuso* -- (the text can be found in volume one of Jesús Silva Herzog' s *Breve historia de la Revolución Mexicana* (México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1997), pp. 362-364. Rojas, a representative who refused to validate Huerta' s *coup*, protested publicly about the Ambassador' s involvement in the drama. This action cost him jail time during the dictatorial regime. Lane Wilson' s implication was also confirmed by the first agent sent by Woodrow Wilson to deal with Mexican revolutionaries, William Bayard Hale. His reports accelerated Lane Wilson' s departure from Mexico. See Haley, pp. 94-97.

<sup>35</sup> Haley, pp. 90-94.

<sup>36</sup> Mark Gilderhus, *Diplomacy and Revolution* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1977), p. 5.

nations would attempt to follow. These moral reasons prevented Wilson from giving diplomatic recognition to Huerta, despite the traditional U.S. policy of granting recognition to leaders who possessed de facto authority.<sup>37</sup>

This attitude can also be interpreted in the context of international rivalry between European powers and rising U.S. power. Wilson regarded the Mexican affair as an example that would show the world that U.S. hegemony was primarily motivated by moral considerations and not economic ones. It also would prove that U.S. influence on under-developed countries was much more beneficial than that of Europe.<sup>38</sup> Wilson ended up showing the undisputable supremacy of the United States in this international clash. After a brief period of disagreement, the European powers decided to follow U.S. policy and to turn their backs on Victoriano Huerta.

Far from stepping aside and letting the neighbour nation sort out its own problems, Wilson followed different strategies to achieve what he truly considered best for Mexico: the removal of Victoriano Huerta from the scene. At first, President Wilson limited himself to strongly suggesting that his fellow nationals residing in Mexican territory leave the country before the conflict between Huerta and the *Constitucionalistas* escalated. He also enforced a decree forbidding the export of arms to Mexico.

When, in September of 1913, Huerta dissolved the Mexican Congress and assumed dictatorial authority, President Wilson's Mexican policy became less neutral. By allowing the trade of arms and munitions

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<sup>37</sup> Strauss Neuman, p. 209.

<sup>38</sup> Meyer, p. 120.



exclusively to the *Constitucionalista* faction and preventing arms shipments from the U.S. to the federal army, Wilson attempted to shift the balance in favour of the opposition to Huerta. The Wilson administration's publicly stated policy towards Mexico focused on the total isolation of Huerta: the goal was forcing his resignation by isolating his government from foreign moral support and loans.<sup>39</sup>

Because these measures were not as successful as expected, U.S. action turned even more proactive. In an effort to interrupt Huerta's main source of revenue, the Veracruz port customs income, President Wilson used a minor incident concerning the arrest of a contingent of U.S. sailors by federal troops in the port of Tampico as justification for a military occupation. U.S. naval forces invaded the city of Veracruz in April 1914.<sup>40</sup>

This action was rejected both by the U.S. Congress and by all Mexican revolutionary factions. President Wilson carried out this military intervention without previous ratification by the U.S. Senate. Besides aggravating his own Congress, Wilson's actions infuriated Mexican public opinion, and, paradoxically, helped to somewhat increase Huerta's popularity due to the sentiment of unity against the foreign intruder. What must have been more surprising to Wilson himself was the response of the *Constitucionalistas*, in particular its leader. Venustiano Carranza, regarded by Wilson as the most appropriate

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<sup>39</sup> This official stand appeared in a message entitled "Our Purposes in Mexico" written by Secretary of State William Jennings Bryan on November 24, 1913. See Strauss Neuman, pp. 213-214.

<sup>40</sup> For a detailed account of this event based on primary sources from U.S. archives, the press of both countries and some interviews, see Robert Quirk, *An Affair of Honor: Woodrow Wilson and the Occupation of Veracruz* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1962).

revolutionary to establish a liberal and democratic government in Mexico, was not shy in expressing his nationalistic stance by demanding the end of any foreign involvement in the national conflict and advocating the notion of self-government.<sup>41</sup>

After this U.S. armed intervention in Mexico, one thing became certain: the social struggle had reached a point of no return. The occupation of Veracruz, the rupture of diplomatic relations between Mexico and the U.S., the continual meddling of foreign powers supporting different revolutionary groups, and the frightening threat of going into a large scale war with the United States in the midst of a civil war were not reasons powerful enough to stop the revolutionary impetus. The *Constitucionalista* army slowly imposed its will over Huerta's forces. In August 1914 Victoriano Huerta fled the country and the *Constitucionalistas* peacefully took over the capital.

Wilson's troops finally left Veracruz in November 1914 on an optimistic note. The President wrote to his Secretary of State: "I am heartily glad to see things clearing up, as they seem to be in Mexico. I pray most earnestly that this may be indeed the beginning of the end."<sup>42</sup> His words quite soon proved to be mere wishful thinking. The ousting of Victoriano Huerta and the ending of the U.S. occupation concluded only the first phase of U.S. direct involvement in the Mexican Revolution.

In 1915 the *Constitucionalista* coalition that defeated Huerta failed to consolidate a new government that represented the diverse

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<sup>41</sup> An analysis of Mexican nationalism -- in particular economic, cultural, and xenophobic expressions of *Carrancista* nationalism -- can be found in Alan Knight's book *U.S.-Mexican Relations, 1910-1940, An Interpretation* (San Diego: University of California Press, 1987).

<sup>42</sup> Wilson to Bryan, December 3, 1914, Wilson Papers. The text of this letter can be found in Haley, p. 151.

interests. The fracturing of this group ended the brief pause between violent revolutionary confrontations; a devastating combat ensued between the *Zapatista* and *Villista* factions that defended popular causes and the *Carrancista* movement, whose priorities were political-constitutional reforms. Also by 1915, war was fully developing in Europe. The intersection of the two conflicts stirred once more the relations between Mexico and the outside.

Mexico had been a constant concern for its northern neighbour since the beginning of the revolution, but, when the U.S. faced a crisis that could demand its direct involvement in the European war after the sinking of the *Lusitania* in May 1915, Mexico became an alarming factor regarding national security. Besides the continual threat to oil fields owned by British and U.S. companies that provided a vital element for the war effort in Europe, the increasing suspicions of German secret activities in Mexico made Wilson focus on consolidating a stable Mexican government, willing to cooperate with U.S. policies. The fierce struggle for power between revolutionary groups, however, made the vision of a pacified Mexico more unattainable than ever.

On the one hand, President Wilson had managed to monitor the two strong leaders of the broken *Constitucionalista* movement, Pancho Villa and Venustiano Carranza, via his special agents; on the other, the revolutionary leaders, despite their nationalist discourses, acknowledged the importance of being in the favor of the U.S. As a consequence of this concern, all of the revolutionary leaders not only had spokesmen lobbying for their respective causes in Washington, but

most also made considerable efforts to create propaganda organisms within the United States.<sup>43</sup>

With a constant flow of propaganda and official reports, considering different recommendations and possible scenarios, the U.S. administration spent most of 1915 deciding which group would get official support.<sup>44</sup> Finally, in October 1915, the United States granted *de facto* recognition to Carranza's government. Despite critical voices that argued Carranza's lack of actual control over Mexican territory and warned about his overtly nationalist policies, Wilson regarded this revolutionary leader as the best option. In consequence, his support was expressed by prohibiting armament shipments to Pancho Villa and appointing Henry Fletcher as the new ambassador.<sup>45</sup> Far from contributing to the settlement of the civil war, Wilson faced Villa's resentment and, ultimately, a severe crisis that almost ignited war between the two countries.

The attacks perpetrated by "El Centauro del Norte", Pancho Villa, in his zone of dominion in the northern Mexican provinces continued. The vulnerability of U.S. citizens living along the border was a special concern, particularly after Wilson decided to back Carranza over Villa. Early in 1916, a band of Villistas seized and murdered sixteen U.S. mining engineers in the Mexican village of Santa

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<sup>43</sup> Venustiano Carranza was remarkable in his endeavors to exploit the press north of the border in order to generate support among Mexican expatriates, secure recognition from the Wilson Administration, enhance his personal image, and defend his movement against criticism in the United States. See Michael Smith, "Carrancista Propaganda and Print Media in the U.S.," *The Americas*, 52:2, Oct. 1995, pp. 155-174.

<sup>44</sup> For a detailed account of U.S. *de facto* recognition of Venustiano Carranza, see Gilderhus, pp. 20-30.

<sup>45</sup> The former U.S. diplomatic representative, Nelson O' Shaughnessy, had been forced back home by Huerta after the invasion of Veracruz.

Isabel. Wilson instructed his new Secretary of State, Robert Lansing, to ask President Carranza for the immediate apprehension and punishment of Villa. The incident delayed the arrival of Ambassador Fletcher but did not have further consequences for Villa or for Carranza's government. Woodrow Wilson was not that lucky; he faced very public and strong criticism from prominent U.S. politicians who demanded direct action in the Mexican cases. An especially vociferous politician was Senator Albert Fall, who regarded the outcome "as confirmation of Carranza's incompetence and Wilson's timidity".<sup>46</sup>

Tension rose to the brink of warfare between the two countries when two months after the Santa Isabel massacre, on March 1916, Villa raided the town of Columbus in New Mexico. This affront brought the bilateral conflict into a new level that could no longer bear the "watchful waiting" stance. The U.S. response, however, was not decided in the outrage of the moment; engaging in a full invasion south of the border was not a possible move when the European question was the principal concern. The Wilson Administration opted for sending a military expedition, a punitive expedition, with the sole purpose of punishing Pancho Villa.

Hoping that this action would quiet critics within the U.S. and successfully capture Villa, which Carranza seemed unable to accomplish, Wilson sent General John Pershing to head this expedition comprised of 192 officers and 4800 enlisted men<sup>47</sup>. Once more the assumptions of the U.S. president were wrong; after months of unsuccessful wandering, confrontation with the Mexican population, and failed negotiations with

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<sup>46</sup> Gilderhus, p. 33.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 38.

Carranza, Pershing left Mexico empty handed. This negative outcome was diminished by the imminent entry of the United States into the Great War. With U.S. attention focused on Europe, Wilson put the Mexican problem to rest, at least for a while.

### **The Revolutionary Balance, 1910–1917**

The outburst that started in 1910 transfigured Mexico, not only its internal conditions but also its relationship with the rest of the world. Foreigners, many of whom had already lived thirty years in welcoming Mexico, had invested both their patrimony and their life projects in a country that had become stable and profitable under General Díaz' s tutelage. When the regime fell, Mexicans saw in the hands of these strangers wealth and properties of which, in their eyes, they themselves were rightful owners.

Although citizens from all countries were affected by the nationalistic sentiment and programs enhanced by the revolution, U.S. interests were particularly resented and active in terms of defending what they had earned in Mexico. Geographical proximity and a history of constant collisions between these two countries, diametrically opposed in cultural terms to one another, forced the U.S. government to take stances and assume an active role in Mexico' s domestic issues.

Besides members of the political and financial elite, many North American groups, associations, and individuals got interested and participated in the Mexican Revolution. Charity organizations, philanthropists, reformist associations, artists, journalists, scholars, missionaries, adventurers, and mercenaries were some of the actors who became involved with the convulsed country. Within this heterogeneous body of foreigners who devoted some of their efforts to revolutionary

Mexico, few were Canadian and even fewer were women. Agnes Laut was, in these respects, a peculiar and exceptional case.

## CHAPTER II

### Agnes Laut Takes an Interest in Troubled Mexico

When the second decade of the twentieth century began, Mexico witnessed the awakening of its population to enthusiastic participation in the revolutionary struggle. Though, at first sight, the revered military heroes and the images of hoards of armed men with big sombreros suggest a totally male-oriented revolution, women actually played a vigorous role in the conflict. Some women, popularly identified as “*Adelitas*”, left their traditional private domain to follow their male partners into the “line of fire”. True, women primarily stuck to the chores socially expected of their gender; however, they performed them in a public sphere formerly circumscribed.<sup>48</sup>

By then, women in other world areas had been undertaking a gradual expansion of female functions in society. In the northern regions of the American continent, women had been “invading” male domains since the last decades of the nineteenth century. Without neglecting the responsibility of the mother-wife role, Canadian women succeeded in the intellectual world, particularly in the literary

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<sup>48</sup> For more information on the participation of women in the Mexican Revolution see Ángeles Mendieta, *La mujer en la Revolución Mexicana* (México, D.F.: Instituto Nacional de Estudios Históricos de la Revolución Mexicana, 1961); Carmen Ramos Escandón, “Women and Power in Mexico: The Forgotten Heritage, 1880-1954” in Victoria Rodríguez, *Women’s Participation in Mexican Political Life* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1988, pp. 87-101); and the compilation of essays *The Women’s Revolution in Mexico 1910-1953* edited by Stephanie Mitchell and Patience A. Schell that examine role of women as educators, housewives, suffragettes, soldiers, members of organizations, prostitutes, and workers during and after the Mexican Revolution. Also see the essays collected in Gabriela Cano, Jocelyn Olcott and Mary Kay Vaughan (eds.) *Sex and Revolution: Gender, Politics, and Power in Modern Mexico* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006).



milieu.<sup>49</sup> Female incursions into the “written world” were usually linked to adventurous enterprises. Voyages of exploration of little-known places within Canadian territory and other parts of the world were undertaken by women who, often narrated their experiences in journal articles and books. Either by expressing in literary terms their concerns about national consolidation<sup>50</sup> or by getting first hand knowledge of their diverse and fragmented country, women publicly contributed to the Canadian nation-building enterprise of the early twentieth century. Once more, similar to the Mexican case, the common association of the tough process of Canada’s national construction exclusively with male efforts is erroneous.<sup>51</sup>

One of these Canadian women who led an amazingly active life in the public sphere was Agnes Christina Laut.<sup>52</sup> Agnes Laut was born on February 11, 1871 in Ontario’s Huron County. Two years later the Lauts, led by John Laut (a Glasgow merchant) and Eliza George (daughter of Rev. James George who, in the mid-nineteenth century held important positions in Queen’s University), moved to Winnipeg. There, Agnes and her seven siblings spent their early years on a farm, in close contact with nature

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<sup>49</sup> Just to mention two prominent women in Canadian literature of the period: Sarah Jeanette Duncan, who published the novel, *The Imperialist* (1904), was the first woman hired full time by a Canadian newspaper; and Lucy Maud Montgomery, authored *Anne of Green Gables*, a novel that was, and still is, embraced by readers beyond Canada. See Antonio Ruiz Sánchez, *Los comienzos de la novela canadiense en lengua inglesa* (Córdoba, España: Universidad de Córdoba, 2002), pp. 35-71.

<sup>50</sup> For example, Sara Jeanette Duncan’s novel *The Imperialist* conveys a nationalist stance and the fear for Canada’s future due to the increasing threat of “Americanization”. Ruiz Sánchez, p. 37.

<sup>51</sup> Valerie Legge, Introduction to Agnes Laut, *Lords of the North*, (Ottawa: Tecumseh Press, 2001), p. viii.

<sup>52</sup> All biographical information is owed to the exhaustive research Prof. Valerie Legge of Memorial University, in Newfoundland, has undertaken on Agnes Laut. See Valerie Legge, “Introduction” to *Lords of the North*, pp. ix-xvii.

and enjoying outdoor activities. An avid reader of history books and convinced of her literary vocation, Laut finished Normal School, at the young age of fifteen, and taught for a while before being admitted to the University of Manitoba in 1889.

In 1895, after a forced retirement to the country due to health problems, Agnes Laut got herself hired as an editorial writer for the *Winnipeg Free Press*. Her work as a journalist led her to travel across the diverse Canadian territory; by plane, canoe, horseback or automobile, Laut was able to fulfill her exploratory impulses. Both her calling for reporting and the contact with nature were defining throughout her adult life; she described herself as a journalist and a farmer.<sup>53</sup>

Her essays and articles showed the wide range of her personal interests. Travel, Canadian and U.S. history, labour issues, the situation of women, Canadian identity, and financial relations were some of her usual topics. Although her body of journalistic work is remarkably prolific and diverse, Laut's most memorable legacy belongs to the literary field.<sup>54</sup> She profited from her passion for North American history to write some of her most renowned works of fiction, such as *Lords of the North* (1900), *Heralds of Empire* (1902), and *Freebooters of the Wilderness* (1910). Laut also expressed by literary means her concern for the estrangement from nature suffered by modern, industrial society of the early 1900's: her text *The New Dawn* (1913) expresses this

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<sup>53</sup> "Investigation of Mexican Affairs", United States Senate, Subcommittee of the Committee of Foreign Affairs, Monday, September 15, 1919, p. 370.

<sup>54</sup> Agnes Laut published hundreds of essays in more than twenty-five periodicals. See Legge, p. xvii.

anxiety, shared by a whole generation of Canadian writers.<sup>55</sup> At the beginning of the twentieth century, Laut's authorial ambitions led her to move to the U.S. where it was easier to stay in contact with publishing houses; the town of Wassaic, New York, in the south-eastern part of the State, became her residence.

At first sight, one could think that Laut's busy life, constant voyages, periods of writing seclusion, and journalistic engagements left her with no time or energy to expand her activities to new ventures and projects. By 1919, however, this unstoppable woman was also personally invested in the Mexican conflict, which seems odd given her origins and main interests. Mexico gradually attracted Laut's attention, first from third party accounts and, later, from first hand experience. Ultimately, Agnes Laut managed to actively participate in the conflict. Why did this Canadian woman establish a direct link with Mexico, a country that had hardly any relations with her birth nation? What influence did her familiarity with the U.S. and its elite groups have in this adventure?

Before focusing on the development of Laut's particular role in the Mexican issue, it is pertinent to depict the bigger picture, that of the peculiar relation among Canada, Mexico, and the United States. In order to understand the nature of Laut's involvement in Mexico as a Canadian familiar with the U.S. environment, let us review the broad context and, then, link it with Laut's singular case.

### **Canada and Mexico: Strangers with "One Common Problem between Them"**

Canada's relationship with Mexico, as well as the rest of Latin America, has not been easily built, and it has developed at a very slow

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<sup>55</sup> See Ruiz Sánchez, p. 49.

pace. The establishment of commercial networks was the basic Canadian interest in the countries south of the U.S., while opening diplomatic missions in those countries of lesser international prominence was not Canada's priority. In both commercial links and diplomacy, the attempts and actual connections between Canada and Mexico during the first three decades of the twentieth century were either mediated, regulated, created or invigilated by a third party: the United States.<sup>56</sup>

Several fruitless official attempts were undertaken by Canada during the second half of the nineteenth century to consolidate trade agreements with Mexico and the rest of Latin America. Moved by specific junctures that demanded the opening of alternative markets, Canadians flirted with the idea of creating channels of commerce with their continental neighbours of the south. Nevertheless, few were these commercial expeditions<sup>57</sup> and always planned with the previous approval of the United States, which had no intention of allowing a strong Canadian involvement in its area of dominance.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> The other country that played an important role as a mediator between Canada and Latin American countries was Great Britain. As Christopher Armstrong explains, the connections of Canadian citizens in Latin America were attained through British counsel. See *Southern Exposure: Canadian Promoters in Latin America and the Caribbean, 1896-1930* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988), p. X.

<sup>57</sup> The first Canadian commercial mission was directed by the Confederate Council for Trade in 1865, when the U.S. Civil War threatened to abrogate the Reciprocity Treaty of 1854 that guaranteed a market for Canadian products in the United States. Canadian representatives visited Brazil, Cuba and Puerto Rico (they intended to stop in Mexico, but this was not possible due to the internal war against the French intervention). The Council filed a report that was quickly forgotten. The second Canadian commercial expedition would take place 75 years later, when the Second World War forced a change in Canada's trade patterns. See J.C.M. Ogelsby, "Mission Diplomacy: The Flight of the Snowbirds, 1866-1968," in *Gingos from the Far North: Essays in the History of Canadian-Latin American Relations, 1866-1968* (Toronto: Maclean-Hunter Press, 1976).

<sup>58</sup> Ogelsby, p. 17.

As far as diplomatic presence goes, Canadian interests during the Porfiriato and the revolution that followed were represented by Great Britain. The Statute of Westminster established the independence of all autonomous dominions in 1931. Thus, by the time Canada achieved independence, the violent period of the revolution was over in Mexico and the process of reconstruction was underway. Although that moment goes beyond the chronological setting of the present study, it is pertinent to comment that the diplomatic bonds between independent Canada and Latin America, the same as the commercial relationships, were guided by U. S. influence.

The government of William Lyon Mackenzie King (1921-1926) saw in the establishment of diplomatic missions in important countries, a way to demonstrate and affirm Canada's autonomy from Great Britain. Latin American countries were not targeted for that purpose even though their governments appealed, negotiated, pushed, and even begged to establish diplomatic relations with Canada. The Canadian government refused to do so, arguing lack of financial resources and professional staff. The U.S, however, openly encouraged Canada to establish relations with the Latin American countries where its influence was threatened by another international power. Nevertheless, Canada was forced to reject an invitation to become a member of the Pan American Union due to U.S. pressure. While Latin American countries regarded Canada, with its partial Latin and Catholic legacy, as a possible mediator between them and the U.S., the latter forbade any Canadian intervention within its area of control. <sup>59</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> See Ogelsby, "The Belle of the Ball: Diplomatic Relations" in *Gringos from the Far North*, pp. 40-65.

In particular, the mutual Canadian-Mexican interest in establishing effective connections was hindered by several factors. In the early twentieth century, the main obstacle for carrying out a successful trade partnership was the transportation problem. The fact that products from both countries had to pass across U.S. territory made the cost inconveniently high. The fact that there was an actual interest in sorting out this situation is illustrated by the early twentieth century project of creating a Mexican-Canadian line of steamships that would facilitate trade between the two countries. The revolutionary struggle, however, forced the abortion of this scheme.<sup>60</sup> In spite of this complicated picture, Canadian capital found a niche in the Mexican pre-revolutionary economy. Canadians, as other foreigners, heard the siren song of Porfirian Mexico. However, their involvement was, once more, mediated by U.S. influence.

For Canadian investors, the most attractive field of investment in Mexico was that of public services, particularly the areas of electric light and tramways. Mexican Tramways Co., an enterprise registered in Canada in 1907, dominated the market of urban transportation in Mexico City.<sup>61</sup> Canadian businessmen combined their control of the tramway scene with control of Mexican Light & Power, the company that provided

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<sup>60</sup> See Ogelsby, "Canadian-Mexican Trade Relations: One Common Market between Them" in *Gringos from the Far North*, pp. 66-84.

<sup>61</sup> Mexico's public services were an attractive area of investment due to the successful venture Canadians had experienced in Brazil in 1902. Other factors also influenced this expansion of Canadian investment into Mexico: the economic increase of domestic capital formation, consolidated financial institutions like stock markets and banks with growing assets, and the exhaustion of investment possibilities within Canada. See Armstrong, pp. 12-23.

electricity to Mexico City and its surroundings.<sup>62</sup> This Canadian presence in Mexico was due to the vision and initiative of a U.S. engineer, Frederick S. Pearson.

Often Pearson is mistaken for a Canadian because of his close association with Canadian capital; however, he was an electrical engineer from the United States. Through Pearson's projects, Canadian investors finally penetrated Latin American markets, mainly in Brazil and Mexico.<sup>63</sup> His educational background encouraged Pearson to focus on planning enterprises devoted to providing electrical power and urban transport moved by electricity. In the late nineteenth century, Pearson, along with a Canadian partner who shared his last name, created a project to electrify the Halifax tramway system. This enterprise generated attention from other Canadian regions, and Frederick Pearson was invited to participate in the tramway electrification of Toronto and Montreal.

Pearson's ventures in Canada put him in contact with the country's prominent investors. These relations proved to be useful in the undertaking of old schemes of his. Having worked as a mining engineer in Latin America for a brief period in the late 1870's, Pearson saw the possibilities of investing in Brazil and Mexico. He had the idea, the know-how, and the contacts but lacked the funds. Pearson found the needed resources in Canadian capitalists who were "involved

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<sup>62</sup> By 1910, Anglo-Canadian interests had 211.5 million pesos invested in public services; *Mexican Tramways* was valued in 21 million CAN and *Mexican Light & Power* at 39 million CAN. Meyer, p. 76.

<sup>63</sup> See Ogelsby, "Canada and Brazil" and "Canadians and the Mexican Revolution," in *Gringos from the Far North*, pp. 122-153 and pp. 154-181.

in the Canadian Pacific Railway, [and] had a surplus that they were investing in various enterprises in Canada and abroad.”<sup>64</sup>

In 1899, the São Paulo Tramway, Light and Power Company Limited was incorporated in Ontario, setting the grounds for the most important Canadian international corporation of the time. After Brazil, Pearson guided the Canadian interests into Mexican territory and took over Mexico City’s electrical system in 1902. By 1909, almost at the unexpected end of the Porfirian era, “Canadian interests came to control virtually the entire electric utility system in Mexico’s Federal District.”<sup>65</sup> The alliance between Pearson and Canadian capital also penetrated the railway business, by purchasing the Mexican Northwestern Railway, and had close ties with the mines in the north of Mexico; the Northern Mexico Power Company, chartered in Montreal, provided power for mining in several provinces.<sup>66</sup>

The successful Canadian experience in Mexico convinced other capitalists of Mexico’s investment potential. In particular, banking interests were attracted to Mexico; they affiliated with the Canadian investors that were involved with Pearson’s companies. The Bank of Montreal and the Canadian branch of the Bank of Commerce established branches in Mexico between 1906 and 1910. By 1910, Canadian investment in Mexico totalled almost fifty million dollars.<sup>67</sup> Thereafter, distressed by material losses, like the blowing up of railroads, and mandatory loans forced upon Canadian banks by revolutionary leaders, particularly

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<sup>64</sup> Ogelsby, p. 127.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 157.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*; See also “Investigation of Mexican Affairs”, United States Senate, Subcommittee of the Committee of Foreign Affairs, Monday, September 15, 1919, p. 372.

<sup>67</sup> Ogelsby, p. 158.



Carranza, the Canadian investors sought, rather unsuccessfully, the intervention of either British or U.S. diplomats on their behalf. At first, the losses were not serious; however, with the radicalization of the revolution and its nationalist programs, Canadian enterprises experienced a crisis.

During the first revolutionary years, contrary to what Canadian investors generally feared, electric power and tramway companies continued earning profits. The actual demand for electrical energy and urban transport in the increased capital; capital investment in this sector totalled almost as much as in the huge oil enterprise.<sup>68</sup>

Nevertheless, as the conflict developed, the different revolutionary factions that took power in the capital became indebted to the Light & Power and Tramway Companies. Furthermore, by 1917 new labour stipulations in the Mexican Constitution required better wages and conditions for Mexican employees, and nationalistic laws claimed concessions and property owned by foreign companies. Although the nationalization of its possessions was never implemented, the Mexico City Tramway Company “paid no dividends between 1913 and 1946 and consistently operated at a loss from 1928 until two years before the Mexican government took it over in 1946.”<sup>69</sup> The first, major Canadian financial involvement in Mexico was, thus, brief and bittersweet.

Just as Canada’s relationship with Mexico was strongly defined by the mediation of Great Britain and the U.S., Agnes Laut’s bond to Mexico, at least in its first stages, was greatly articulated by

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<sup>68</sup> Meyer, p. 113.

<sup>69</sup> Ogelsby, p. 166.

friends, writers, private organizations, financial institutions, and publications from these two Anglo-powers.

“Shall I begin with what first interested me in Mexico?”

-Agnes Laut, “Investigation of Mexican Affairs” (1919)

Mexico caught the attention of Agnes Laut for the first time through her personal acquaintance with Mrs. Alex Tweedie. Ethel Tweedie shared Laut’s enthusiasm for travels, as well as a vocation for narrative; it is no wonder that both women enjoyed conversing with one another. A few years before the fall of Porfirio Díaz, during a stay in London, Laut visited her constantly and, in her own words, “she got me very much interested in Mexico.”<sup>70</sup> Undoubtedly, Tweedie’s book on Mexico was a crucial influence on the journalist’s primal approach to the Mexican issue; its ideas and perceptions of pre-revolutionary Mexico provided Laut’s first mediated impressions on the matter.

In 1901, Ethel Tweedie published *Mexico As I Saw It*, a renowned book that narrated her experiences while traveling through Porfirian Mexico.<sup>71</sup> Tweedie chose Mexico as the destination for one of her exhilarating journeys because “that land seemed to offer a more historic past than almost any other country on God’s earth.”<sup>72</sup> She arrived in the country with the intention of writing a book. Drawn to

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<sup>70</sup> “Investigation of Mexican Affairs”, United States Senate, Subcommittee of the Committee of Foreign Affairs, Monday, September 15, 1919, p. 371.

<sup>71</sup> Mrs. Tweedie visited both urban and rural Mexican sites. Her book includes her insights on Mexico City from a perspective notably influenced by the Mexican elite group she was acquainted with, and also her opinion of provinces where the Indian element dominated, such as Oaxaca. See Ethel Tweedie, *Mexico As I Saw It*, (London: Hurst and Blackett, 1901).

<sup>72</sup>Tweedie, p. 1.

Mexico for its epic history, Tweedie also witnessed first hand the highest splendour of Díaz regime. Expecting to see only ruins of lost civilizations, this British professional traveler discovered a country with great potential for growth: “that Mexico had a past I knew, that Mexico has a future I have only lately learned.”<sup>73</sup>

Of course, Ethel Tweedie’s depiction of Mexico was not just an enumeration of the Porfirian administration’s virtues. Through her voyages, she also perceived a country that suffered from unsafe and unsanitary conditions, exploitation of children, generalized abuse of alcohol, superstitions, lack of education, and inefficient services. Despite these negative aspects and the acknowledgement of Don Porfirio’s authoritarian rule, the fall of his regime was deplorable in the eyes of Mrs. Tweedie. Her thoughts on the matter represent the generalized, though by no means exclusive, view of the international community regarding the explosion of the Mexican Revolution: before Díaz, chaos reigned over Mexico and, after his departure, chaos came back; Díaz’s downfall was Mexico’s greatest calamity.<sup>74</sup>

After this first encounter with the Mexican context, some years later, Agnes Laut worked as an editor of *Forum*.<sup>75</sup> From 1913 to 1919, several articles were published by this periodical regarding Mexican issues. In September 1916, while General John Pershing chased Pancho Villa and the bilateral U.S.-Mexican relation was in a critical state,

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<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>74</sup> Meyer, p. 100.

<sup>75</sup> The *Forum* was founded in 1886 by Isaac L. Rice. The publication was closely bound to the journalist Walter Hines; he became *Forum*’s editor in its early years of existence and later collaborated in diplomatic ventures during Woodrow Wilson’s administration. In 1950, *Forum* ceased to be published. See “Century Magazine Sold to The Forum”, *New York Times*, May 28, 1950, p. 21.

*Forum* put out an issue devoted entirely to Mexico. Laut's original awareness of Mexico was nurtured continuously, in a second phase, by the articles printed in this publication.<sup>76</sup>

Drawing parallels and linking Mexican occurrences to her own interests<sup>77</sup>, Agnes Laut followed the complicated development of the revolution. After reading an article about the revolutionary leader Salvador Alvarado and his radical administration in the Mexican province of Yucatán, she took a special interest in this subject:

[...] because in my writings, handling financial problems for Current Opinion and The New York Sun, and dealing with international finances between Canada and the United States, I was interested in the financial problems of "pegging prices", "pegging wages", "pegging currency". It struck me as something so curiously new in economics to abrogate the law of supply and demand, that I got tremendously interested in the Yucatan situation.<sup>78</sup>

Undoubtedly, the *Forum* articles Agnes Laut is referring to, "Yucatan and the International Harvest Company" and "General Salvador Alvarado: Fighter and Administrator", must have expanded her understanding of the Mexican context. Carlo de Fornaro, author of both articles, analyses the revolution with an entirely different approach to that of Tweedie. The English woman regarded the Porfirian era as a glorious period that benefited Mexican society as a whole. Díaz's authoritarian ways were, in her perspective, justified by the achievements of his administration: "Díaz has been the architect of

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<sup>76</sup> "Investigation of Mexican Affairs", United States Senate, Subcommittee of the Committee of Foreign Affairs, Monday, September 15, 1919, p. 371.

<sup>77</sup> See this thesis Chapter IV, pp. 82-83.

<sup>78</sup> "Investigation of Mexican Affairs", United States Senate, Subcommittee of the Committee of Foreign Affairs, Monday, September 15, 1919, p. 371.

modern Mexico, and so well has he done his work, it is extremely unlikely that anyone will undo it.”<sup>79</sup> Thus, she thought the revolt against this system was a huge mistake that would stop and reverse the progressive development of the country.

In contrast, Carlo de Fornaro, viewed the *Porfiriato* as a regime that facilitated foreign control of Mexico’s riches; he thought that the revolutionary movement would confront social injustice and end the previous period of oppression.<sup>80</sup> The case of Yucatan, one of Mexico’s southern provinces, was exemplary to his argument. The major staple in the region, henequen fibre was by 1910 an extremely valuable asset on the international market. The International Harvester Company, a U.S. enterprise devoted to the fabrication of farming equipment, took over the henequen market during the welcoming Díaz administration. “The Harvester trust began to invade the field of the cordage and twine industry and very soon controlled the output and price of the fibre.”<sup>81</sup>

With the help of Yucatan’s governor, a member of the Porfirian elite, competition in the production and making of henequen was erased. In this way, Governor Olegario Molina, in cahoots with the foreign company, obtained profits for himself and his family circle and, in exchange, doomed the peons to accept the miserable wages and debt forced upon them by the foreign monopoly.<sup>82</sup> When Francisco Madero came to power in 1911, he developed a plan to solve the land tenure and peonage problem; however, his brief administration could not do much. After

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<sup>79</sup> Tweedie, p. 137.

<sup>80</sup> Carlo de Fornaro, “Yucatan and the International Harvester Company”, *Forum*, 54:3, Sept. 1915, p. 340.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 338.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 338-339.

Madero's overthrow, "Huerta's dictatorship had behind it all the foreign and American corporations. When Carranza drove out Huerta, the reaction lifted its head in Yucatan and money was subscribed for a revolt."<sup>83</sup> The regional insurrection against the federal *Carrancista* authority was carried out by Abel Ortiz Argumedo, a former federal employee, and financed by the Harvester trust.

Salvador Alvarado was a merchant from the province of Sonora in the North of Mexico, when Madero launched his revolution against the dictatorship. Loyal to the *Maderista* cause, he entered the *Constitucionalista* army following Huerta's coup. He was sent to Yucatan to fight the reactionary revolt led by Ortiz Argumedo; after successfully doing so, he became governor of the province. Then Alvarado abolished the debt system and undertook a program of reforms in the fields of education, land distribution, labour rights, and anti-alcoholism.<sup>84</sup>

What called the attention of Agnes Laut, financial analyst that she was, were Alvarado's policies concerning the henequen market. Based on Madero's original plan, Alvarado created the *Reguladora* Company whose purpose was to fix the price of henequen in a fair way. The reaction of International Harvester, used to imposing its conditions in the henequen market, was immediate; it pressed the U.S. government to interfere with Alvarado's rule in Yucatan, arguing that the trade of henequen fibre, much needed by U.S. farmers, was being illegally hindered. The trust did not succeed in provoking U.S. armed intervention; the *Reguladora* managed not only to peg the price of the

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<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 340.

<sup>84</sup> Carlo de Fornaro, "Salvador Alvarado. Fighter and Administrator", *Forum*, 55:1, Jan. 1916, pp. 75-76.

fibre but also to raise and fix the peons' wages and at the same time give a fair share of profits to the henequen planters.

Carlo de Fornaro's understanding and assessment of the Yucatecan revolutionary experience certainly nurtured Laut's interest in Mexico, but it was not, by any means, the only theme that came to her knowledge through her editorial and authorial work in *Forum*. This periodical published a considerable set of articles about the revolutionary events in Mexico, and Laut, as one of the editors, had the opportunity to soak up a great amount of information on the subject.

### **Mexico in Laut's Editorial Work**

When working as an editor, just before the First World War, Agnes Laut aimed to make "the Forum absolutely a forum, that is, for the expression of facts on both sides of every question[...]"<sup>85</sup> She certainly achieved her goal when it came to the issue of the Mexican Revolution. This is significant not only because of the true intent to inform the U.S. public of multiple views on the conflict, but also because her own perspective, before having direct experience of Mexico, was shaped from a variety of sometimes contradictory approaches. Her personal assessments and actions, undoubtedly, had diverse, but solid, grounds; in a nutshell, she was broadly informed on the matter.

*Forum* was a periodical mainly concerned with supporting the Allies during the Great War<sup>86</sup>; nonetheless, it showed notable interest in the Mexican dilemma. Articles touching several issues of the Mexican Revolution were published from 1913 to 1919. The frequency of articles

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<sup>85</sup> "Investigation of Mexican Affairs", United States Senate, Subcommittee of the Committee of Foreign Affairs, Monday, September 15, 1919, p. 371.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*

on Mexican subjects followed the uneven spans of U.S. attention to the situation. Whereas Huerta's coup inspired a vast corpus of articles in 1913, not much was published for the next two years. Then, in 1916, after Villa's incursion into New Mexico, interest peaked in what was going on in Mexico and, in consequence, the September issue was entirely devoted to Mexico.

*Forum's* debate on the Mexican "problem" reflected, on a small scale, the debate that took place throughout the decade in the high spheres of U.S. political decision-making. Most of the arguments part from a basic questioning of the appropriate U.S. role in the solution of its neighbour's civil war. Authors, both Mexican and from the U.S., articulated analyses of the aims and events of the revolution and the different ways in which the United States had played a role in their development. President Wilson's Mexican policy was in the spotlight; so were the actions of U.S. private interests in Mexico.

The overthrow of Francisco I. Madero by Victoriano Huerta was the first issue that forced the U.S. public to pay close attention to what was happening south of the border and question their country's position towards it. Indeed, the articles express divergent viewpoints. Madero was represented as the learned, democratic, industrious and brave member of the Mexican intelligentsia who had the total support of the Mexican public. His downfall, and that of the reformist government he established, most authors in *Forum* argued, was due to some noble mistakes and mostly due to the foreign interests who held the real power and acted through the backward Mexican elite. Madero's exceptionality was that:



He had the choice of any Latin-American President: to betray his people or to fight these allied interests. Had he consented in the betrayal, he would have had all the strength of Wall Street to render his government stable [...] It is not the false and dishonest Presidents of Latin-American republics who have anything to fear from Wall Street or foreign capital generally.<sup>87</sup>

While some articles blamed Mexico's troubles on the exploitative actions of foreigners, other authors wrote texts aiming to disprove that view. They argued that rather than being exploiters, foreigners legally fomented better conditions for Mexico. In 1916 one author strongly supported non-intervention:

The Americans that went to Mexico to honestly extend American Trade in the only effective way would prefer to be governed by local representatives of a responsible Mexican government, who understand them rather than by well-meaning uninformed Americans coming with the preconceived idea that their countrymen are "Interests", crooks, and troublemakers. Contrary to the mass literature disseminated during the past three years, [...] the fact is that intervention would be directly opposed to the interests of American residents in Mexico, as well as to their higher sentiments toward the nation in which they have made their homes.<sup>88</sup>

Not all evaluations of President Madero and his government were positive or explained his defeat in terms of outside involvement. For some, the revolution surpassed Madero in part because of his own lack of political capability and in part because of the internal struggle for power. A U.S. resident in Mexico, witness to the tragic ten days of

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<sup>87</sup> Dolores Butterfield, "The Conspiracy against Madero", *Forum*, 50:4, Oct. 1913, p. 469.

<sup>88</sup> W.B., "Do Interests Want Intervention?", *Forum*, 56:3, Sept. 1916, p. 280. This brief text is a letter written by a reader in response to the article "A Trial of Socialism in Mexico," authored by Modesto C. Rolland which appeared in *Forum* 56:1, July 1916. The letter is signed with the initials W.B.

combat that ended Madero's administration, wrote for *Forum* his account of what happened. He admits,

I was no admirer of Madero. I was always of the opinion that in trying to inaugurate a new regime in Mexico he was attempting to play a role for which he was in everyway unfitted. His visionary projects brought disaster upon himself and upon his country. But I do not, on that account, agree with the apologists of Huerta. I can see in his behaviour nothing but treason of the blackest sort.”<sup>89</sup>

While most of the articles barely mentioned the polemic matter of Ambassador Lane Wilson's interference in favour of the Huertista betrayal, the figure of Victoriano Huerta was differently appreciated. For some, Huerta was an educated soldier who rose to power on his own merits, loyal, and with enough authority to pacify the revolutionary chaos.<sup>90</sup> For others, Huerta's anti-democratic and dictatorial character was despicable and unacceptable for a country like the U.S.:

No civilized, or semi-civilized country, can condone the methods of a Huerta [...] A hundred Huertas would not recompense the world for a Madero, even if all the evil in one case and half the good in the other, were blotted out. It is no time for euphuisms [sic.], Huerta is a murderer and a despot. It would be decidedly peculiar if the United States accepted murder and tyranny as desirable attributes of a neighboring government.<sup>91</sup>

The real significance of these analyses of this revolutionary period does not lie in the various depictions of Madero and Huerta but

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<sup>89</sup> 'Chavacano', "The True Story of Madero's Death", *Forum*, 56:3, Sept. 1916, p. 286.

<sup>90</sup> Sidney Austin Whitherbee, "What is the Matter with Mexico?", *Forum*, 56:3, Sept. 1916, pp. 268-270.

<sup>91</sup> "Editorial Notes. Mexico", *Forum*, 50:5, Nov. 1913, p. 734.

in the features of foreign meddling that resulted from siding with one or the other. Two major positions expressed in the pages of *Forum* tried to convince public opinion in the U.S. of their views. On the one side, assessments of the revolution looked favourably on Wilson's Mexican policy. This approach, considering him "the strongest and ablest Chief Executive that Washington has seen in many a long year," showed confidence in his decisions: "Firmness in dealing with the situation is necessary, and will be shown. But the President will realize that powerful interests have been at work to force armed intervention. Intervention may come: but it must not come as a result of an organized press campaign of partial misrepresentation of conditions."<sup>92</sup>

On the other side, a concise and powerful group regarded Wilson's policy as the worst possible one. In one article, Henry Lane Wilson, former Ambassador to Mexico, depicted President Wilson as ignorant of the Mexican conditions and, therefore, inept in following an appropriate policy: "This Administration possesses no knowledge of conditions in Mexico and therefore is incapable of initiating a practical, constructive policy in relation to its affairs."<sup>93</sup> He was blamed for supporting the factions that were more hostile to foreigners in Mexico, and his denial to back Huerta up was seen as a huge mistake that prevented a quick and happy ending of the revolution.

Sydney A. Witherbee, identified in the publication as an oil entrepreneur with interests in Mexico, charged "Mr. Wilson [...] as being directly responsible for the hideous destruction of Mexico, and the ruin and sorrow of those who are victims of his dictatorship in the

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<sup>92</sup> "Editorial Notes. Mexico", *Forum*, 50:3, Sept. 1913, p. 412.

<sup>93</sup> Henry Lane Wilson, "Last Phases in Mexico", *Forum*, 56:3, Sept. 1916, p. 264.

sovereign rights of Mexico. [...] When the question is asked, as it often is, 'What is the matter with Mexico', we can reply, 'Wilson, that's all' ".<sup>94</sup> Furthermore, the administration was condemned for its passive attitude regarding the protection of rights and lives of U.S. citizens in Mexico:

Americans and other foreigners were murdered and outraged in constantly increasing numbers; the misery of the Mexican population grew apace; outrages against religion, decency and order were universal. But the Wilson Administration pursued its even course, bravely smiling while a system of law and order built up by thirty-five years of diligent effort was destroyed root and branch.<sup>95</sup>

Besides reflecting on the interventions, omissions, and presence of U.S. actors in the revolutionary drama, the articles that configured Laut's vision of the Mexican situation repeatedly addressed the question of the objectives, methods, and character of the Revolution. Since the events south of the border had an effect, in some way or another, on the U.S. society as a whole, the opinion grew more and more interested in understanding the nature of this struggle. As one of the texts published in *Forum* states:

President Wilson in one of his public addresses declared that we must permit the Latin-American republics to work out their own redemption, as the United States have worked out their problems of freedom; but as revolution has succeeded revolution with kaleidoscopic swiftness,

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<sup>94</sup> Sidney Austin Whitherbee, "What is the Matter with Mexico?" , *Forum*, 56:3, Sept. 1916, p. 279.

<sup>95</sup> Henry Lane Wilson, "Last Phases in Mexico" , *Forum*, 56:3, Sept. 1916, p. 264.

the American public has asked, "What does Mexico want? What are these Mexicans fighting for?"<sup>96</sup>

Once more, the perceptions vary and challenge one another. The oil man and prominent member of the U.S. colony in Mexico, Sidney Witherbee, represents the most negative concept of the revolutionary movement:

I should also like to make plain to you that while I have fallen into the habit of speaking of the outlawry and anarchy as "revolution", there was no government and no purpose other than to fill coffers and to prey upon the defenceless. They said they 'were fighting for liberty and constitution'. Their idea of liberty is license unrestrained and where nothing, not even the sacred honour of women or nuns, or the sacred houses of God, were sacred but were all violated in the most unspeakable ways.<sup>97</sup>

The opposed outlook can be found in Carlo de Fornaro's analysis of the Mexican Revolution:

The Porfirian régime was excellent for the pockets of some Mexicans and a great many Americans and Europeans; but it was a poisonous virus inoculated into the very life of Mexico. This national corruption culminated with the high fever of the revolution. The devastations, the horrors, the sacrifices, the seeming injustices of the revolution can be compared to the ravages of the sickness on a body; in appearance they are wasteful and destructive, and often incomprehensible; but in reality they are regenerating and healthful. After the revolution, the Mexican will possess high civic ideals and a greater conception of political life.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> Modesto C. Rolland, "A Trial of Socialism in Mexico", *Forum*, 56:1, July 1916, p. 79.

<sup>97</sup> Sidney Austin Whitherbee, "What is the Matter with Mexico?", *Forum*, 56:3, Sept. 1916, p. 278.

<sup>98</sup> Carlo de Fornaro, "The Great Mexican Revolution. An Analysis", *Forum*, 54:5, Nov. 1915, p. 534.

These two images illustrate the two poles that moved the public debate that took place in the U.S. throughout the different stages of the Mexican Revolution. Books, verbal debates in Congress, journalistic polemics, and political negotiations revolved around the contraposition of these characterizations of the civil war. Each vision demanded a different kind of U.S. involvement in the matter.

From this multiplicity of discourses, Agnes Laut partially constructed her image of the Mexican situation. Her journalistic orientation and her love for travelling, however, moved her to plan a trip that would help her get first hand facts and, consequently, would define her assessment of the conflict and urge her to act upon it.

**“I never like to take what people say to me. I try to get the facts direct”**

**-Agnes Laut, “Investigation of Mexican Affairs” (1919)**

In one of the yearly trips Laut used to take every summer before the outbreak of the Great War, the journalist had her first direct contact with revolutionary Mexico. As she recalls, “purely by chance, I was in Texas, I was in New Mexico, I was in Arizona, I was in California when the Revolution broke out in Mexico [...] and I saw the refugees pouring across the line.”<sup>99</sup> The encounter with those refugees, Mormon

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<sup>99</sup> “Investigation of Mexican Affairs”, United States Senate, Subcommittee of the Committee of Foreign Affairs, Monday, September 15, 1919, p. 372. The exact date of that trip does not appear in the testimony; however, it could have been in 1913 when the migratory flow north of the border peaked due to the violence that followed Huerta’s *coup d’etat*; by 1914 this Mexican migration to the U.S. decreased considerably. See Linda Hall’s “El refugio: Migración mexicana a los Estados Unidos, 1910-1920”, *Históricas. Boletín de Información del Instituto de Investigaciones*

refugees forced to return to the U.S., allowed Laut to put into practice her reportorial skills; talking with the migrants gave her understanding of Mexico a new depth and further enticed her to carry out field research.

The body of facts about Mexico that she absorbed through interviews with refugees, editorial work, reading books and articles, and friendly conversations led her to think of the revolution as an erroneous and unnecessary way of solving fair social claims: "It struck me as a terrible thing that wrongs which might have been righted in a perfectly legitimate constitutional way were being seemingly attempted to be righted with such fearful bloodshed. That interested me in Mexico."<sup>100</sup> This true distress invited her proactive personality to figure out what a non-violent solution for Mexico's grievances might be and to do everything possible to make it happen.

When the Great War, which was her main concern, ended in 1918, Agnes Laut started making plans for a trip to Mexico. Determined as she was, Laut entered the convulsed country in 1919, in the midst of yet another period of tense relations between the U.S. and Mexico.

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*Históricas de la Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México*, No. 8, Jan.-April 1982, p. 25.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

### Chapter III

#### 1919: Agnes Laut, Mexico, and the Interventionist Push

By 1917, the crisis in U.S.-Mexican relations had been relegated to a secondary role in U.S. foreign policy. Nevertheless, whereas President Wilson's administration focused completely on the European conflict, the tension between the foreign community in Mexico and Venustiano Carranza's government was increasing at a steady pace.

With Wilson's diplomatic blessing and Mexico City in his control, Carranza undertook measures to consolidate his power. In addition to neutralizing and gradually suppressing his revolutionary opponents, Emiliano Zapata and Francisco Villa, the *Constitucionalista* faction put into effect its revolutionary program. Carranza followed a clear nationalist tendency in his policy-making. His purpose was to achieve domestic control of Mexico's natural resources and foment national economic growth without heavy dependency on external capital.<sup>101</sup> Two illustrations of the Mexican nationalist attitude between 1916 and 1919 are the *Carrancista* compound of nationalist ideas and policies and the 1917 Constitution.

The Carranza Doctrine was the name the Mexican press gave to the leader's nationalist policies, expressed in his public speeches and writings. The main points of this nationalist discourse argued that individuals residing in foreign nations should abide by the host's laws, and monopolies and special treatment of foreign investors should

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<sup>101</sup> Robert Smith, *Los Estados Unidos y el nacionalismo revolucionario 1916-1932* (México, D.F.: Editorial Extemporáneos, 1973), p. 125.



end. Carranza called for the rejection of the imperial connotations of the Monroe Doctrine that maimed his nation's sovereignty, and a true bonding among Latin American countries.<sup>102</sup> Indeed, Carranza was particularly keen on leading a Latin American alliance that would hinder the absolute continental hegemony of the "Northern Colossus". On top of the Mexican defensive stand, the tensions between Mexico and the U.S. increased due to one particular article featured in the new Constitution.

The city of Querétaro, in Central Mexico, had been the scene of a constitutional assembly in late 1916. This convention gave birth to the Mexican Constitution of 1917 featuring four innovative regulations that responded to revolutionary claims: agrarian reform, anti-clericalism, labour rights, and an anti-foreigner reform aimed at fighting economic imperialism from abroad. This last aspect refers to four concise constitutional stipulations affecting foreigners in Mexico: 1) the prohibition of foreign religious ministers to undertake cult practices (article 130) and carry out educational enterprises (article 3); 2) the prohibition of foreigners involving themselves in Mexican politics; 3) the capacity of the Mexican State to expel foreigners when considered necessary; and 4) the regulation on acquisition of private property:

Only Mexicans by birth or naturalization, and Mexican societies, have the right to acquire direct dominion and access to land and water in the Republic of Mexico. The Mexican State can bestow the same rights on foreigners when they declare before the Ministry of Foreign Affairs that they renounce their nationality and their government's protection concerning the aforementioned

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<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 133.

properties, remaining entirely submitted, in that respect, to national laws and authorities.<sup>103</sup>

Article 27, the object of concern for foreign interests in Mexico, referred to the Nation's property rights: it established that not only land and bodies of water within national territory but also all natural resources in the subsoil are, by natural right, property of the Mexican Nation; and, as such, it is the Nation's right to grant its dominion to private interests. This assumption deeply disturbed foreign investors, particularly oilmen and mining entrepreneurs; they feared that a possible enforcement of this constitutional article would result in the confiscation of their oil-producing properties by the national government, its rightful owner according to the Constitution of 1917.

Despite President Venustiano Carranza's public and explicit assurance that the law would not be retroactive, thus, not affecting foreigners who had acquired properties in Mexico before the promulgation of the Constitution, mining and oil interests felt uneasy. As Agnes Laut recalls, during her visit to Mexico, she attended a luncheon given by *Carrancista* authorities for representatives of foreign governments with the purpose of announcing that the law would not be retroactive; however, later she was told that this guarantee was repudiated by the same authorities in a private talk with U.S. and French representatives.<sup>104</sup>

The feeling of uncertainty was constant in the foreign community, even more so when, in February 1918, Carranza issued a decree concerning

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<sup>103</sup> *Constitución Política de los Estados Unidos Mexicanos*, Article 27, (México, D.F.: Editorial Trillas, 1992), pp. 34-35. The translation is mine.

<sup>104</sup> "Investigation of Mexican Affairs", United States Senate, Subcommittee of the Committee of Foreign Affairs, Monday, September 15, 1919, p. 388.

the imposition of royalties on oil producing lands and the registration of such properties. Properties that were not officially registered could be claimed by anyone who held title to the property.<sup>105</sup> This implied that, in compliance with article 27, all foreigners who accepted to register their properties would have to renounce their nationality and protection of their country of origin and abide by the Mexican laws in order to get their property titles.

The general response, from Wilson's government and foreign landholding interests in Mexico, was to oppose this decree. The fact that these measures were not of a direct confiscatory nature was acknowledged; however, it was believed that "the issue of new property titles was a first step towards the re-organization of foreign properties as Mexican companies."<sup>106</sup> Carranza indeed tried to enforce the decree by forcing the oil companies that refused to register their lands to stop drilling. The measure, however, was unsuccessful due to the official protest of the U.S. government in 1919; the diplomatic negotiations ended with Carranza's agreement to grant those companies temporary drilling permits.<sup>107</sup>

U.S. investors' fear of suffering a sudden policy of nationalization at Carranza's will precipitated yet another phase of tense relations between the United States and Mexico during 1919. Voices

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<sup>105</sup> Smith, p. 178. This dilemma faced by foreign oil and mining companies was also discussed by Laut during her deposition. See "Investigation of Mexican Affairs", United States Senate, Subcommittee of the Committee of Foreign Affairs, Monday, September 15, 1919, p. 388.

<sup>106</sup> Smith, p. 178.

<sup>107</sup> National Association for the Protection of American Rights in Mexico, *Plow with Petroleum* (New York: National Association for the Protection of American Rights in Mexico, 1921) p. 12.

that called for President Wilson to toughen his foreign policy with the southern neighbour clamoured once more; simultaneously, other voices defended a softer approach. In this context of confrontation, Agnes Laut finally travelled to Mexico and, once being directly involved in the dispute, assumed a personal position.

### Interventionist Voices Rise

The end of the First World War had several effects on the relationship between the U.S. and Venustiano Carranza's government. On the one hand, Wilson's argument on the inadvisability of embarking on a war on two fronts, in Europe and in Mexico, at the same time disappeared. On the other, Mexico lost the margin of negotiation that it had previously exploited. When the United States became the supreme victorious power, Mexico's flirting with other nations, like Germany, ceased to be an effective strategy of pressure. At the same time, with President Wilson absorbed by the peace conferences at Versailles and his League of Nations project, foreign interests in Mexico and pro-interventionist sectors in the U.S. found a suitable juncture to press the administration for a change of policy. First Wilson's physical absence from the U.S., and later the stroke he suffered in 1919, gave the opportunity to Robert Lansing, Secretary of the Interior, to manoeuvre in favor of those who lobbied for military intervention in Mexico, with whom he sympathized<sup>108</sup>.

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<sup>108</sup> Linda Hall, *Oil, Banks, and Politics* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995), p. 37.

Among the political caste in the United States in the early twentieth century, the domestic aim of following a reformist program based on implementing social reforms to improve the living conditions of the working class and provide a welfare system within a liberal-capitalist society was generalized<sup>109</sup>. From this reform movement, three attitudes emerged in response to Mexican events and President Wilson's policy; one was loyal to Wilson's ambiguous Mexican policy and the other two were critical of it. One opposition view was represented by those who urged for absolute non-involvement; but

[...] by far the largest of the two groups opposing Wilson's Mexican policy was the one composed of individuals critical of the limits which the president seemed to place on the use of American power in Mexico. [...] they all called for a dominating United States role and presence in the Mexican conflict for the purpose of either controlling the revolution or stopping it.<sup>110</sup>

Republican representatives, among whom the ex-President Theodore Roosevelt and Senator Albert B. Fall stand out, publicly attacked Wilson's "watchful waiting" stand towards Mexico. Their discourse pointed to Mexico's revolutionary government as pro-German and, later, pro-Bolshevik; they claimed that President Carranza did not really control his country and, as a consequence, foreign interests suffered abuses from provincial bandits. These voices demanded that the Mexican administration pay the damages and losses incurred by U.S. citizens throughout the civil war and fiercely exhorted President Wilson to

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<sup>109</sup> See the introduction of Tommie Sessions' *American Reformers and the Mexican Revolution*. See also chapter 22 in Alan Brinkley's *Historia de los Estados Unidos. Un país en formación* (México, D.F.: MacGraw-Hill, 2003).

<sup>110</sup> Sessions, pp. 50-51.

enforce this with the use of military power <sup>111</sup>. Faced with an inconsistent official policy that neither followed a definite action to intervene in Mexico nor completely took hands off the matter, this group challenged the president to “get order in Mexico somewhat along the lines of what we have done in Santo Domingo and Cuba.” <sup>112</sup>

These politicians who championed social reforms at home suffered from the same moral and intellectual ambiguity of position as Wilson’s liberal discourse <sup>113</sup> by requesting official action to either stop or control a revolution in a neighboring “Third World” country that fought for social reforms. To manage this contradiction, they had to find suitable arguments to justify their ambivalence.

The clique of politicians that demanded a firm Mexican policy argued that the people of the U.S. identified with and supported the improvement demands of the oppressed Mexican masses but recognized that the struggle had been promoted by Mexican demagogues who never had had the intention of ameliorating the people’s conditions. Among others, Fall and Lansing shared the notion that the Revolution was nothing but a confrontation of oligarchic groups that would do nothing for the needy majority. Another, similar argument, which acknowledged the lofty

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<sup>111</sup> The tensions between the powerful group of U.S. politicians advocating for military intervention in Mexico and President Wilson is examined in the article written by Clifford Trow: “Woodrow Wilson and the Mexican Interventionist Movement of 1919”, *The Journal of American History*, 58:1, June 1971, pp. 46-72. Another reference concerning this juncture is Manuel Machado’s and James T. Judge’s “Tempest in a Teapot? The Mexican-United States Intervention Crisis of 1919,” *Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, 74:1, April 1971, pp. 1-23.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 56. Quote from a Theodore Roosevelt letter.

<sup>113</sup> See Chapter I of this thesis, p. 21.

revolutionary ideals, affirmed that those had been betrayed by the leaders, particularly Venustiano Carranza.<sup>114</sup>

The notion of a “betrayed revolution” went hand in hand with the belief in the responsibility of the U.S., being an evolved country, to show Mexico the right path to stability and betterment. In this sense, for progressive U.S. politicians, direct U.S. military intervention in Mexico, “if undertaken on behalf of that country’s movement for change, could be a progressive act [...] only the aid of the United States could complete the ‘revolution’.”<sup>115</sup> In fact, those who adopted this rhetoric tried to distance itself from any imperialistic strain, incongruent with the progressive spirit, by tainting it with a missionary aura that preached military intervention to stop bloodshed and provide favorable conditions for Mexicans to construct a democratic and liberal society.

Reformist politicians were an active force in pressuring Woodrow Wilson to use armed intervention in revolutionary Mexico, but they were not the only one. This pro-interventionist wave was led by the businessmen who perceived Carranza’s nationalistic program as a serious threat to their interests. Unlike the progressives who, in spite of being militant on the issue of Mexico, never constituted formal associations or leagues pushing for direct U.S. armed intervention south of the border, landholders and investors did form such organization. As Tommie Sessions argues: “for them, the use of force was not only necessary but desirable.”<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> Smith, p. 138.

<sup>115</sup> Sessions, p. 81.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 51.

While progressive politicians used an embellished rhetoric to reconcile their contradictions, this group used a different discourse. In their eyes, the question of armed intervention in Mexico had been played politically by the Mexicans themselves to avoid their responsibilities for the illegal outrages committed against U.S. citizens. According to this view, whenever the relations between the two countries suffered a crisis, the Mexicans used the press to complain that the U.S. only wanted a pretext to invade their country and, thus, delay the enforcement of rightful compensation for their wrongs. For these groups, 1919 was a new critical juncture and once more: "Mexico realizes that the day of justice is at hand and they have again thrown out this claim."<sup>117</sup> Among the organizations that shared this perception, The National Association for the Protection of American Rights in Mexico<sup>118</sup> was "the chief source of interventionist activities"<sup>119</sup>.

Formed in January 1919, the NAPARIM was an organization constituted, mostly, by representatives of every branch of U. S. industry in Mexico. After a meeting held in New York City, this association was born with the purpose of assisting "in bringing about the full recognition and adequate protection of American rights and lives in Mexico, and to promote the peace, progress, and welfare of that

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<sup>117</sup> "Investigation of Mexican Affairs", United States Senate, Subcommittee of the Committee of Foreign Affairs, Monday, September 16, 1919, p. 417. Testimony of Charles Boynton, Director of the Executive Committee of the National Association for the Protection of American Rights in Mexico.

<sup>118</sup> From now on, the National Association for the Protection of American Rights in Mexico will be referred as NAPARIM.

<sup>119</sup> Dennis Lou, "Fall Committee: An Investigation of Mexican Affairs" (PhD diss., Indiana University, 1963), p.1. See also the first five chapters of Lorenzo Meyer's *Los grupos de presión extranjeros en el México revolucionario, 1910-1940* (México, D.F.: Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores, 1973) for information on political and economic activities of U.S. oil and mining organizations in Mexico within the revolutionary context.



country, and to that end to cooperate with the Governments of the United States and of Mexico” <sup>120</sup>.

In the NAPARIM’ s ranks figured prominent bankers, such as Thomas Lamont, and renowned oilmen, such as Edward Doheny. Undoubtedly, the “Banking and Security Holders Group” , “Petroleum and Petroleum Refining Group” , and the “Mining and Smelting Group” were the members with most weight, as the distribution of directorial positions within the organization shows. <sup>121</sup> The other interests that completed the organization were: the “Agricultural and Cattle Group” , the “Commercial Trading Group” , the “Industrial Group” , and the “Press Group” . <sup>122</sup> There were two classes of members: the active members were those whose property or interests were jeopardized by the revolutionary conditions in Mexico, and the associate members were those who simply sympathized with the NAPARIM’ s aims.

While the Association had no official constitution, it adopted certain policies that included: correcting false impressions with regard to rights of Americans in Mexico created by misleading press statements; assisting the U. S. Administration and Congress to understand the situation of fellow nationals’ interests in Mexico and seeking their aid; demanding their rights, as U. S. citizens, claiming only “what is legal” ; and championing the rights and interests of the people of

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<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.

<sup>121</sup> Besides the fact that their areas of investment were the most influential and productive on a large scale and on the international scene, their members occupied eight of the ten posts in the Executive Committee of the Association. “List of Members. National Association for the Protection of American Rights in Mexico” , National Civic Federation Records, box 418, folder 2.

<sup>122</sup> A complete list of active members, featuring both companies and individuals, is found in the National Civic Federation Records, box 418, folder 2.

Mexico.<sup>123</sup> The NAPARIM put into effect different schemes to achieve these goals.

In a first stage, during the European conferences following the First World War, the organization sent Edward Doheny, President of the Pan-American Petroleum & Transport Co., to Paris. Despite knowing that the Mexican issue would not be addressed by Woodrow Wilson in that forum, Doheny traveled with the aim of vouching for the Association's interests. This direct approach was not fruitful at all due to Wilson's exclusive devotion to the constitution of the League of Nations.<sup>124</sup>

At the same time, the organization lost no opportunity to verbally express its convictions. The speeches and declarations offered by NAPARIM members depicted Mexico as a place where chaos, violence, anarchy, banditry, and murder reigned. In their eyes, the southern neighbor required the direct intervention of a power capable of righting these wrongs. Using the army to control the Mexican situation was part of the solution but not the only one: "besides brute force, Mexico needed financial help, as well as civic and moral education"<sup>125</sup>. The Association suggested that the United States exercise financial pressure mixed with armed intervention to pacify Mexico. As far as private business was concerned, their propaganda never expressed the need to withdraw U.S. investment from Mexico; on the contrary it was supported.

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<sup>123</sup> "Investigation of Mexican Affairs", United States Senate, Subcommittee of the Committee of Foreign Affairs, Monday, September 16, 1919, pp. 408-409. Testimony of Charles Boynton, Director of the Executive Committee of the National Association for the Protection of American Rights in Mexico.

<sup>124</sup>Álvaro Matute, "El fantasma de la intervención. Los Estados Unidos y México en 1919," *Estudios de Historia Moderna y Contemporánea*, Vol. XVI, 1993, p. 81.

<sup>125</sup> Matute, p. 81. The translation is mine.

The Association also undertook the task of giving out to the press new information on Mexican developments that were not disclosed publicly by the State Department. Other press releases included translations of Mexican newspaper articles that reported conditions, telegrams and other documents from U. S. citizens who had suffered outrages in revolutionary Mexico, and articles identifying the Mexican government with German or Bolshevist spies.<sup>126</sup>

In order to press Wilson's administration to launch a military assault that would guarantee the safety of their possessions in Mexico, the association followed a strategy focused on convincing U.S. public opinion of the dangers of allowing the southern neighbor to sort out its chaos alone. Besides its lobbying activities and public declarations in elite forums, the Association printed brief pamphlets whose targeted readers were common, working class people. Written in a plain language, the purpose of these propagandist texts was to create a consciousness in the readers that the events in Mexico directly concerned them. An example is the leaflet entitled "Plow with Petroleum", that focused on the threat of an oil crisis in the U.S. The text underscored the danger of dealing with the unstable "Bolshevistic-Carranza government" that, enabled by constitutional article 27, could proceed to execute confiscatory policies against U. S. oil facilities.

The narrative explains how that action would inevitably result in the U.S. in a shortage of petroleum, due to the low domestic oil production, which would be devastating for farm production as well as railroad distribution of products. By doing this, NAPARIM avoided the stigma of being an elite organization that only looked after its private

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<sup>126</sup> Lou, pp. 6-10.

interests: "Petroleum is as essential to the prosperity and well being of the small farmer as it is to the captain of industry; to the owner of the 'jitney' as it is to the shareholder of the great railroad; to the small business man as it is to the owner of a great steam-ship line" <sup>127</sup>.

This rhetoric meant to justify the Association's petitions for a strong official response to the Mexican problem and to win the adhesion of the general public to its cause: "you realize now how the anarchy and chaos in Mexico is affecting you and yours. In asking for the protection of their lives and legally acquired property in Mexico, Americans are not seeking anything new. It is a fundamental principle of government and Americans are only pleading for its enforcement" .<sup>128</sup>

Moreover, it appealed for an active attitude of the voters toward a damaging official policy: "This is one phase of how the Mexican situation affects you. Are you in favor of the Government's declaring a firm, definite policy toward the protection of American citizens, whether they be in Mexico, Siberia or Keokuk?" <sup>129</sup> Among all these tactics, NAPARIM undertook the task of gathering as much proof as possible to factually support its claims of outrages suffered in Mexico, demand rightful compensation for them, and force Wilson to enforce due protection for fellow countrymen's interests. In the middle of that process, NAPARIM crossed paths with a woman who had been following the Mexican conflict for quite a long time from afar and intended to give it a closer look: Agnes Laut.

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<sup>127</sup> National Association for the Protection of American Rights in Mexico, *Plow with Petroleum*, p. 9.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12.

## Agnes Laut Travels to Mexico

Mexico seemed to constantly appear in Laut's sphere of interest. Once her commitment to the Allied cause vanished at the end of the European war, she was able to devote her full attention to the Mexican issue. Her personal concerns immediately found an echo with those of the North American interests in Mexico. As she recollected: "When the war closed last November, I was making my plans to go to Mexico, and at that time I was doing all of the financial stuff for the *Financial Post*, of Toronto, and *McLean's*, bearing on financial relations of Canada and the United States, and the Canadian banks were very deeply interested in Mexico".<sup>130</sup>

When organizing her long anticipated trip, Laut met with the Canadian managers of the mining, transportation, railway, and electric light companies constituted by F. S. Pearson with Canadian capital. This corporation and Canadian banks, interested in providing financial help, were deeply preoccupied with a possible confiscatory policy in Mexico.<sup>131</sup> The uneasiness was also felt by the Canadian government representatives.

While in Canada, Laut got together with Sir Henry Drayton, Minister of Finance and, as a result of the discussion, they "decided that it would be a good thing to go down there and get a statement of economic condition and facts".<sup>132</sup> Indeed, for a country like Canada that, despite its relative geographical closeness and financial

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<sup>130</sup> "Investigation of Mexican Affairs", United States Senate, Subcommittee of the Committee of Foreign Affairs, Monday, September 15, 1919, p. 372.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 373.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*

enterprises, virtually knew nothing about Mexico, Laut's vast, though second-hand, knowledge made her somewhat of an authority on the subject.

Laut approached the Canadians who bore interests in Mexico and, in return, they sought her advice and stimulated her voyage plans by connecting her with the foreign community in Mexico: "In fact, the only letters of introduction I took to Mexico were given me by the president of one of those Canadian banks".<sup>133</sup> An expedition that looked like folly -- a woman venturing into a country torn by civil war without full knowledge of its native language -- was greatly smoothed by counting on the support and guidance of the foreign elite. After all, as Agnes Laut herself commented, "going under the surface and getting the real evidence in Mexico is a pretty dangerous game. I have been over a railroad one day that was blown up the next day"<sup>134</sup>. To some extent, the banker-businessmen elite she got acquainted with in Mexico provided some safety measures like sending a bodyguard to protect her during her expeditions.<sup>135</sup>

Without a doubt, the Canadian back-up for Laut's trip was important, but it never acquired sponsorship status. After her stay in Canada, with her Mexican plan in mind, Laut returned to her New York home; there, she got word of an association being formed in New York City, the National Association for the Protection of American Rights in Mexico (NAPARIM). According to the journalist herself, "I had made my plans to go to Mexico before the association was formed. I was asked to meet some members of that association. I did not seek them. I was taken down and introduced to them, and I was asked if I would make a report on

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<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 374.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 376.

the economic conditions to the various members of the protective association” .<sup>136</sup>

In New York City she met with some of the Association’ s board members, and they reached an agreement regarding the expected trip. Laut’ s part was to make an economic and financial report that the Association could use to support its interventionist cause before the State Department. NAPARIM, in return, agreed to pay the expenses of both Laut and her sister, who was to accompany her. Once having covered the monetary requirements for the trip, the Canadian journalist packed and departed for Mexico as a financial writer and investigator doing her usual work.<sup>137</sup>

In January 1919, while Venustiano Carranza struggled to consolidate his presidency, Agnes Laut undertook a two month trip to Mexico.<sup>138</sup> The journalist, along with her sister Georgina, crossed from San Antonio, Texas to New Laredo, Mexico. They traveled by train, in the company of Mexican families returning home after having been driven out by the Revolution years before and foreign bankers, engineers, and oil men who “were scouts for finance looking for investments in land”<sup>139</sup>.

The sisters got to Mexico City where they would establish their headquarters. The central location of the capital allowed them to make short trips to the surrounding provinces. In that way, the sisters

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<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 373.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 374.

<sup>138</sup> The following attempt to put together and analyze the particularities of Laut’ s Mexican experience is partially based on primary documents on her in the archives of the National Civic Association but, mostly, on her deposition before the United States Senatorial Committee on Mexican Affairs. The records of NAPARIM and the report Laut wrote for that association could not be found.

<sup>139</sup> Agnes Laut, “Getting into Mexico” , May 25, 1919, National Civic Federation Records, Series IX: Subject Files-Laut, box 418, folder 2.

covered a significant area of the country during their visit: Oaxaca and the Tehuantepec Isthmus in the South; the oil producing area of the provinces of Veracruz and Puebla in the East; Guadalajara in the West; San Luis Potosí, Guanajuato, Michoacán and Aguascalientes in the center; and Torreón, Saltillo, and Monterrey in the North<sup>140</sup>.

Laut's travel itinerary was certainly well planned; she was able to observe the heterogeneous regional particularities of Mexico during the Carranza administration. She took note of the crowding of urban centers. Due to the insecurity and banditry characteristic of rural areas in the aftermath of the Revolution, people took refuge in the cities, provoking waves of destitution, poverty, pollution and crime.<sup>141</sup>

In the countryside, Agnes Laut visited cattle ranches in the north of Mexico and was informed of the constant raids and smuggling of loot to the United States.<sup>142</sup> Laut also spent time in the provinces of Veracruz and Tamaulipas, in the oil producing Gulf country, where she was told by oil company managers of local chieftains' constant attempts to blackmail them and the delays in transport due to the damaged railroad

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<sup>140</sup> A detailed copy of the itinerary, including the places Agnes Laut and her sister visited, days of stay in each location, and expenses, is found in the National Civic Federation Records, Series IX: Subject Files-Laut, box 418, folder 2. Some details of the particular places she visited are mentioned in her deposition: "Investigation of Mexican Affairs", United States Senate, Subcommittee of the Committee of Foreign Affairs, Monday, September 15, 1919.

<sup>141</sup> Agnes Laut, "Improved Conditions in the City", June 1, 1919, National Civic Federation Records, Series IX: Subject Files-Laut, box 418, folder 2.

<sup>142</sup> Agnes Laut, "Getting into Mexico", National Civic Federation Records, Series IX: Subject Files-Laut, box 418, folder 2.



system.<sup>143</sup> In the South, she perceived the abandonment and unproductiveness of former agricultural estates.<sup>144</sup>

The way in which Laut decided to carry out her Mexican adventure is a key factor in making sense of her particular vision of the country's situation. Sponsored by NAPARIM and, thus, mandated to investigate the economic and financial problems of Mexico, she spent a considerable time in the company of bankers and businessmen involved with the tramway companies: "between 11 in the morning and 3 in the afternoon I was dined and wined and shunted about."<sup>145</sup> This may lead one to think, erroneously, that her perception was entirely shaped by the perspective of the foreign interests that provided her with the economic information she needed to author her report.

Indeed, if that had happened, the outcome of her research and, especially, her recommendations would have coincided with aims of NAPARIM. However, as Laut herself admitted before Senator Fall, her report she produced was different from what the Association expected<sup>146</sup>: it did not advocate U.S. military intervention to protect foreign interests in Mexico. The nature of her expedition itself provides an explanation for Laut's particular vision.

Laut's upbringing as a reporter, her habit of gathering facts in situ, and her determination to get first-hand evidence led her to carry

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<sup>143</sup> Agnes Laut, "Has the Revolution Improved Conditions for the People?", June 8, 1919, National Civic Federation Records, Series IX: Subject Files-Laut, box 418, folder 2.

<sup>144</sup> Agnes Laut, "Getting into Mexico", National Civic Federation Records, Series IX: Subject Files-Laut, box 418, folder 2.

<sup>145</sup> "Investigation of Mexican Affairs", United States Senate, Subcommittee of the Committee of Foreign Affairs, Monday, September 15, 1919, pp. 375-376.

<sup>146</sup> "Investigation of Mexican Affairs", United States Senate, Subcommittee of the Committee of Foreign Affairs, Monday, September 15, 1919, pp. 375 and 391.

out almost an anthropological investigation at the same time she was interacting with the high business spheres. She recalled: "When I was not being taken around and given economic and financial and industrial facts by the bankers and by the tramway interests, I got up early in the morning and went out on little excursions of my own. Those excursions were, I think, quite the saddest thing that I have ever encountered in my life."<sup>147</sup>

Her interest in establishing a link with the locals and her visits to different regions of the country allowed Laut personally to interact with very heterogeneous people. This modeled her perspective of the revolutionary conflict and directed her attention to certain issues that were not the primary interests of NAPARIM. While her meetings with bankers and businessmen provided her with the numbers and statistics NAPARIM expected and her contacts with foreigners living in Mexico gave her the anecdotes that proved the outrages committed against U.S. citizens, her encounters and talks with indigenous women, children turned beggars, and teachers on strike added another dimension to her considerations. During her Mexican trip, Laut reaffirmed her conviction that the solution to Mexico's troubles should come from abroad but not involve the use of military force. She pleaded for a different kind of intervention, a humanitarian one.<sup>148</sup>

Agnes Laut's thoughts on Mexico followed her back to the United States, and she continued to dwell on her experience long after she met with the members of NAPARIM to file her report. Laut also expressed her reflections in published articles, public lectures and charitable

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<sup>147</sup> "Investigation of Mexican Affairs", United States Senate, Subcommittee of the Committee of Foreign Affairs, Monday, September 15, 1919, p. 376.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 379.

enterprises. Upon her return, she also presented her views before a U.S. Senatorial subcommittee created exclusively to analyze the Mexican situation.

### **A Senator from New Mexico Investigates Mexican Affairs**

In 1919 the tense relations between the U.S. and Carranza's government in Mexico provided a favorable basis for the U.S. Congress, controlled by the Republican Party, to establish a senatorial committee "authorized and directed to investigate the matter of damages and outrages suffered by citizens of the United States in the Republic of Mexico, including the number of citizens of the United States who have been killed or have suffered personal outrages in Mexico, and the amount of proper indemnities for such murders and outrages..."<sup>149</sup>

Authorized by Warren Harding, the Subcommittee of the Committee on Foreign Affairs of the United States Senate in Charge of Conducting the Investigation on Mexican Affairs was organized in Washington, D.C. on August 8, 1919 and held its first hearing a month later. The number of witnesses summoned by the Subcommittee reached 257; the testimonies were collected in several prominent cities, mostly along the border, in the states of New York, Texas, Arizona, and California. This Subcommittee was headed by Senator Frank Brandegee of Connecticut, Senator Marcus Smith of Arizona, and Senator Albert B. Fall, who acted as chairman.<sup>150</sup>

Albert Fall<sup>151</sup> had been interested in Mexico since the late 1800's when, along with other pioneers like Edward Doheny, he became an oil

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<sup>149</sup> Lou, p. ii.

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. i-iv.

<sup>151</sup> Practically all academic literature concerning Senator Fall's involvement in U.S.-Mexican foreign policy defines him as a fervent interventionist, that is, a prominent

prospector. Fall's Mexican expeditions were not successful, and so he decided to follow the paths of law and politics instead. This turn, however, did not distance him from Mexican interests; he became the lawyer of William C. Greene, landowner and miner with important businesses in Sonora. Fall's 1912 entrance into the political arena, as Senator from New Mexico, kept him close to border politics. As far as his political stand went, "He seems to have fit in well from the beginning with the Republican old guard, who shared his views on foreign policy (keeping the world safe and open for U.S. business) and conservation (permitting the unrestricted use of resources for private gain)." <sup>152</sup>

Between 1919 and 1923 Albert Fall was, undoubtedly, the most active and influential U.S. politician in everything connected to his country's Mexican foreign policy. <sup>153</sup> From the time he arrived in

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figure who adamantly lobbied for military intervention in revolutionary Mexico. After translating and analyzing a considerable part of his Subcommittee's "Investigation on Mexican Affairs", I support this view and, thus, this thesis will follow that affirmation. One author, however, disagrees with this interpretation. Mark Gilderhus, in his article "Senator Albert B. Fall and 'The Plot Against Mexico'" (*New Mexico Historical Review*, 48:4, Oct. 1973), rejects the depiction of Fall as an interventionist; his analysis concludes that the Senator never vouched for military intervention, but instead he pushed for gradual policies that would end Carranza's government peacefully. For a refutation of Gilderhus's views, see Clifford Trow's "'Tired of Waiting': Senator Albert B. Fall's Alternative to Woodrow Wilson's Mexican Policies, 1920-1921", *New Mexico Historical Review*, 57:2, April 1982, pp. 159-182.

<sup>152</sup> Hall, *Oil, Banks and Politics*, p. 38.

<sup>153</sup> This thesis will make exclusive reference to Fall's 1919-1920 activities on Mexico, mainly his participation on the senatorial subcommittee investigating Mexican affairs; however, his political interventions in U.S.-Mexico relations continued during the early 1920's. During this period, President Harding appointed him as Secretary of the Interior, and he devoted some of his efforts to guiding U.S. oil policies and negotiations with the Mexican government of Alvaro Obregón. During those years Fall also starred in the so-called Teapot Dome scandal: he was accused of receiving bribes from oil tycoons in exchange for leases on oil reserves that were property of the U.S. Navy. This incident finished his political career. See David

Congress, Fall publicly attacked President Woodrow Wilson's Mexican policy in the most fierce way. Behind this attitude there were, in part, very personal motives: after all "given his interests in Sonora and Chihuahua, it is not surprising that in 1913 he publicly supported the annexation by the United States of the northern Mexican states."<sup>154</sup> Indeed, his repeated actions advocating U.S. military intervention in Mexico were openly questioned at the time, forcing him to publicly discuss his personal interests in said country.<sup>155</sup> Despite the polemic, Fall kept campaigning against Wilson's ambiguous Mexican policy.

Fall was determined to display before U.S. public opinion what he considered to be the obvious, hostile, and dangerous attitude of Carranza towards the U.S., and, to achieve his end, he took advantage of the widespread post-war paranoia known as the "Red Scare", accusing Mexico of Bolshevist tendencies. His stance was supported by the constant denunciation of Carrancist conspiracies seeking, it was said, to provoke a rebellion in the U.S. southwest and of Carranza's communications with U.S. working class organizations. Fall's schemes proved successful to some extent: "By insisting upon a connection between the revolution in Mexico and social unrest at home, Fall exploited America's postwar paranoia and won ever more support. Ambassador Fletcher moved closer to Fall's position. So did Secretary

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Stratton, *Tempest over Teapot Dome: The Story of Albert B. Fall*. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1998).

<sup>154</sup> Hall, p. 38.

<sup>155</sup> On January 17, 1920, he himself bore testimony before the Subcommittee to answer those accusations, the brief monologue intended to clarify his "sincere affection" towards the Mexican people and his position as representative before Congress of his Mexican and U.S. friends in that country.

of the Interior Franklin K. Lane, and Robert Lansing also became increasingly sympathetic.”<sup>156</sup>

The “Investigation on Mexican Affairs” that Albert Fall launched under the Senate’s auspices in September 1919 became the best forum he could have found to publicly defend his stand and press President Wilson to order, once and for all, a military occupation of Mexico. Senator Fall summoned before him a large and well considered group of witnesses whose testimonies were partially reproduced in some newspapers, thus reaching a wider audience.<sup>157</sup> In broad terms, those who appeared before the Subcommittee can be grouped into three different categories considering the nature of their general statements: the ones who strongly advocated armed intervention, the ones who testified against armed intervention, and, the ones who neither favored nor opposed armed intervention, who were the majority.<sup>158</sup>

Certainly, the Subcommittee consumed a lot of Senator Fall’s efforts: “In preparing for the hearings, Fall began to build an intelligence network as well, not only to investigate Mexican affairs but also the activities of those who were testifying before the committee.”<sup>159</sup> He hired the services of intelligence agents in order to have the deepest knowledge possible of the witnesses who would appear before him, particularly those known to be anti-interventionists and to hold a favorable opinion of the Carranza regime.

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<sup>156</sup> Mark Gilderhus, “Senator Albert B. Fall and ‘The Plot Against Mexico’,” *New Mexico Historical Review*, 48:4, Oct. 1973, p. 304.

<sup>157</sup> The *New York Times* reviewed the Subcommittee’s hearings. Agnes Laut’s deposition was also commented upon in *The Newark Advocate*, *Reno Evening Gazette*, *Ogden Standard* (a newspaper from Utah), *Kansas City Star*, and the *Winnipeg Free Press*.

<sup>158</sup> Lou, p. iii-iv.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 40.

Besides pinpointing the weaknesses of those opposed to his convictions and even rejecting requests to testify, like the one repeatedly made by Robert Hammond Murray, a journalist who had spent significant time in Mexico and who sided with the revolutionary cause, Fall searched for witnesses who would be favorable to his purposes.<sup>160</sup> In general, the Senator let the interventionist witnesses speak their minds without further questioning, while he constantly interrupted, challenged, and questioned the patriotism of the anti-interventionists.<sup>161</sup>

After the exhausting period of interrogations, a report summarizing the Subcommittee's conclusions appeared on May 28, 1920. In it armed intervention, for the sake of humanity, was recommended if unstable conditions prevailed under Carranza's rule or if Mexico failed to guarantee protection of American life and property.<sup>162</sup> The Subcommittee's records along with the final report, which ultimately did not have any effect on Wilson's policies, were published in two volumes; the testimony of Agnes Laut was included within.

### **Laut Faces Senator Fall's Committee**

On the evening of Monday, September 15, 1919, Agnes Laut appeared before Senators Fall and Brandegee. During the hearing, held at the Senate Office Building in Washington, D.C., Laut, rather than being interrogated, was allowed to report her Mexican knowledge. Both Fall and

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<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 41.

<sup>161</sup> Two testimonies that exemplify this situation are the ones given by oilman Edward Doheny (September 10, 1919), on the one hand, and Reverend Samuel Guy Inman (September 9, 1919), on the other. The most prominent advocates of the opposing points of view, their testimonies are representative, as well as the most lengthy.

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.*, p. iv.

Brandegge paid special attention to publicly proving that her position was “neutral” ; that is, that her judgments and opinions were, by no means, biased due to her links to NAPARIM. After assuring that the aforementioned Association had covered the expenses of both the journalist and her sister during their Mexican trip without ever forcing her to give false statements or manipulate the facts, she proceeded, with few interventions by the senators, to narrate her most impressive recollections.<sup>163</sup>

Laut’ s approach to the issue was first and foremost a feminine one: her testimony shows a marked interest in the conditions women and children survived in a country devastated by wars. Together, the topics she underscored, her targeted audience, and even the language she used before the Committee, revealed her very unique perspective.

The Canadian, like all of the other witnesses, was exhorted by Senator Fall to reveal any cases of abuse against U.S. citizens in Mexico. Laut complied, but instead of focusing on the pillage and banditry suffered by foreign property owners or managers of U.S. businesses, as most of the male witnesses did, her stories of outrages centered on women and children, Mexican and foreign alike. Not only did she feel empathy towards the women she talked to ( “I could not sleep for three nights, thinking of the suffering of young American and Mexican girls” ), but she also believed that her womanhood provided a natural connection that made her interviewees unconditionally trust her regardless of her status as a foreigner:

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<sup>163</sup> “Investigation of Mexican Affairs” , United States Senate, Subcommittee of the Committee of Foreign Affairs, Monday, September 15, 1919, p. 375.



I think of the case of a woman whom I heard talking, and I said to her, "Is that story true about such and such a girl?" The tears came in her eyes and she said, "Yes. There is much worse than that. Are you going to tell all the truth about Mexico?" I said, "I have been in this game over 20 years and I have not tried to lie yet. I am going to tell the truth." She opened her heart.<sup>164</sup>

Among the cases Agnes Laut recalled were the kidnappings of two women from the United States by Yaqui Indians in the province of Sonora; the torture and blackmail of a 16 year old Nebraska native by revolutionaries during an assault on her parents' ranch in Veracruz, and the attack on an Englishwoman and her two daughters in Zacatecas<sup>165</sup>. Neither class nor nationality nor race biased Laut's concern with outrages towards women. Her testimonial on this subject is completed by the account of the suffering of an Indian mother who did not even speak Spanish and needed her daughter to translate for her, a mutilated 13 year old Mexican girl who was "very well known and very much beloved by the community", and the murder of 18 charity sisters who worked on an estate in the province of Morelos<sup>166</sup>.

Laut acknowledged that her womanhood inclined her to center her attention on the situation of women and children, therefore embracing the responsibility to act for the welfare of fellow Mexican women. Businessmen and politicians sought a pragmatic solution that would save their material interests but usually forgot the essential, moral role women played in the "correct functioning" of a society. Mothers, teachers, wives and nurses performed the quiet but crucial chores of educating, nurturing, and taking care of everyone: "A man's work stops

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<sup>164</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 377.

<sup>165</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 378-379.

<sup>166</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 377-378.

at set of sun but a woman' s work -especially pioneer work- is never done" .<sup>167</sup> Because men tended to disregard this important social element, women themselves had to support one another:

I may have spoken too feelingly as a woman, but I always consider that a nation will rise just exactly so high and no higher than the safety and purity of its womanhood. I may see red. If I see red, I see red, and a lot of woman in America are seeing much redder than I see on this Mexican problem.<sup>168</sup>

Laut' s testimony was a call for attention that resorted in an alarmist rhetoric; her hyperbolic language, detailed depictions of human suffering, and strong words were intended to awaken the public' s conscience at what she defines as "a thing for pathological study"<sup>169</sup> by using rhetoric and examples familiar to U.S. society immediately after the First World War: "As to the stories of the suffering of American and foreign women and children from Vera Cruz to Tampico, I do not think there is anything in Belgium or Armenia that exceeds it."<sup>170</sup> Her multiple references to the revolutionaries' "nationalization of women" (meaning the looting of women in the exactly same way as they pillaged horses, vehicles, and money) did support Fall' s purpose of exposing the Carranza government as a deficient, chaotic and lawless

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<sup>167</sup> Agnes Laut, "In the Hells of Tehuantepec," *Forum*, 61:6, 1919, p. 645.

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 390.

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 377.

<sup>170</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 378. Laut refers to the trying experience of the Armenian population during the 1918 Ottoman invasion of Armenia. The Belgian comment is a reference to the devastation after the German occupation during WWI. In her articles, she constantly refers to Belgium' s tragic situation during the German occupation. See Agnes Laut, "How Mexico Can Be Saved Without Shedding Another Drop of Blood," June 22, 1919, National Civic Federation Records, Series IX: "Subject Files-Laut" , box 418, folder 2.

administration before Wilson and the Congress. Her main intention, however, was to appeal to other actors: “When I gathered a certain number of these cases and had begun to get keen on it, I said, ‘I am going to get the women of America interested in this thing’, and the churches.”<sup>171</sup>

From Laut’s perspective, the unbearable Mexican situation was fomented by the United States and, as such, its solution relied on decisions made by Mexico’s neighbor. To her, Mexico was full of a hard-working, peace-loving, population capable of self-government that was forcefully oppressed by a handful of corrupt, selfish “leaders” who were indirectly supported by advantages given by the U.S. government to the Carrancista group. Laut was convinced that: “by the American Government keeping its fingers on affairs in Mexico as it has, that is in that action sustaining the corruption in Mexico.”<sup>172</sup> In this respect, her assessment was in complete agreement with that of NAPARIM, other foreign financial interests, and Senator Fall himself who expressed the same criticism of President Wilson’s Mexican policy.

Moreover, according to Laut’s perception, the U.S. government had the responsibility to bring about peace and stability in Mexico, not only because its own citizens wanted this but also because the Mexican population wanted help. She confessed that most of her encounters with Mexican people during the trip ended with a similar plea: “Are you going to get help for the woman and children of Mexico?”<sup>173</sup> In this respect, too, her considerations were similar to those of the U.S. progressive reformers.

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<sup>171</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 378.

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 397.

<sup>173</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 378.

Laut's testimony, therefore, expressed coincidences with the groups that pressed for armed intervention in Mexico. Her horrifying accounts of misery, abuses and chaos supported Senator Fall's argument of Carranza's inability to control Mexico and the need for U.S. action to establish order and protect the interests, rights and lives of U.S. and Mexican people alike. Laut and the Senator, however, did not see eye to eye when it came to discussing the solution to the problem. Declaring her absolute rejection of armed occupation, Laut surprised the Subcommittee by expressing the following point of view: "I think that if the churches of the United States and the churches of Mexico, irrespective of sectarian differences, would get together on this thing they could launch a campaign for the redemption of Mexico that would stop this sort of thing."<sup>174</sup>

Laut told Fall that, after analyzing Mexico's situation, she had concluded that the solution to Mexico's troubles lay in charitable action rather than political or military action. The real solution was in the hands of wealthy U.S. capitalists who could finance humanitarian programs and the religious organizations that could carry them out, rather than in Wilson's policy-making. Her beliefs were questioned, mocked, and attacked by the Subcommittee; Senator Brandegee concluded that he did "not really see clearly the ultimate success of this sort of charitable intervention as guaranteeing ultimate stability."<sup>175</sup>

This negative reaction did not intimidate Laut. After rendering her testimony, Agnes Laut continued with the work she had embarked on since the end of her trip: an effort focused on the idea of bringing

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<sup>174</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 379.

<sup>175</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 395.

together financiers, civil organizations, and religious groups in the making of her Mexican humanitarian enterprise.

#### CHAPTER IV

From Observation to Action: Laut' s Endeavors to Redeem

Mexico

Agnes Laut was finally able to appease her long-standing curiosity about the Mexican situation in 1919, when she embarked on her research trip. Her observations translated to a very particular viewpoint on the Mexican Revolution. Once back in the U.S., Laut perceived that the public held a general misconception of the conflict, so she assumed the responsibility for correcting wrong impressions spread by people who either manipulated the information or had no direct knowledge of the issue.<sup>176</sup> She proclaimed herself the “medium for the enlightening of facts”, arguing that the facts she had collected first hand were to provide her unquestionable credibility.<sup>177</sup> Her writing skills and publishing contacts became the most appropriate means to achieve her goal.

As soon as she came back, Laut devoted her time to writing articles that were printed in popular publications, such as *Canadian MacLean's*, *Forum* and *Current Opinion*. Laut also traveled throughout the U.S. giving public lectures and conferences on the subject of Mexico. These efforts intended to bring the importance of the Mexican situation to a massive audience; however, as important as “awakening” the U.S. public was, she knew that the key element to put into effect what she preached resided elsewhere.

Laut's work went beyond issuing public analyses of the Mexican situation; she felt the need to contribute to righting all the social wrongs she had witnessed in Mexico and to peaceful conciliation between the U.S. and Mexico. Unlike Senator Fall and NAPARIM, Agnes Laut was committed to avoiding war at all costs and, thus, she projected a

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<sup>176</sup> Agnes Laut, “Why Mexico Needs Our Help?,” *Forum*, 64:4, 1920, p. 405.

<sup>177</sup> Agnes Laut, “The Facts as to Mexico. Getting into Mexico,” May 25, 1919, National Civic Federation Records, Series IX: “Subject Files-Laut”, box 418, folder 2.

different scheme, a humanitarian one, to end the instability that made Mexico hostile to the foreign, civilizing presence of the United States. While the so called “interventionists” appealed to official authorities for the solution of the Mexican threat, Laut appealed to civil society, represented in civic organizations, to achieve the same end.

### “Why Mexico Needs Our Help?” : Laut’ s Interpretation of the Mexican Revolution

After her two-month stay in Mexico, Agnes Laut was convinced that Mexico was at a fork in the road. The uncertain outcome was distressing to both Mexico itself and the U.S.: either it would cave in to “Bolshevist” promises that Laut saw reflected in the new Constitution or join the family of democratic, capitalistic nations<sup>178</sup>; either it would bear a peaceful succession of political power or sink into revolution once more. War or regeneration, Mexico had no other option and, whatever happened, the U.S. had to lead the way.<sup>179</sup>

Mexico faced this crossroads after nine years of a revolution that, from Laut’ s perspective, was nothing more than a failed, irrational enterprise. Following the same line as her mentor, Ethel Tweedie, Laut celebrated the foreign presence in Mexico during the Porfiriato; in contrast to the revolutionary, nationalist discourse, she argued the positive economic and educational conditions fostered by the

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<sup>178</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>179</sup> Agnes Laut, “How Mexico Can Be Saved Without Shedding Another Drop of Blood”, June 22, 1919, National Civic Federation Records, Series IX: “Subject Files-Laut”, box 418, folder 2.

foreign community: “If this was what the malefactors of great wealth were doing, let them do some more! If this was gringo work, all power to it!”<sup>180</sup> At the same time, she acknowledged the corruption and exhaustion of the Díaz regime.<sup>181</sup> The revolutionary movement, however, never righted these minor aspects of a system that, overall, led Mexico along the path of progress; on the contrary, it made them worse.

Carranza’s government boasted an avant-garde Constitution whose social content successfully embodied the causes fought for since 1910; for Laut, Carranza’s government was but the ultimate expression of a conflict that covered up its real motives with a fake rhetoric of social justice inherited from the destructive penetration of Bolshevik influence.<sup>182</sup> For Laut, Revolution was an inappropriate term to describe Mexico’s strife, “Revolootion” was the exact word.<sup>183</sup>

Laut considered that, contrary to the generally accepted interpretation, the rusty Díaz dictatorship was not the cause of the social explosion, but rather it provided the proper conditions for the real motors of the Mexican chaos. On the one hand, European anarchists who arrived in Mexico were the first agitators who championed the destruction of every institution, the abrogation of property rights, and the redistribution of wealth; Laut’s acid criticism gives them voice:

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<sup>180</sup> Ibid.

<sup>181</sup> Agnes Laut, “How Bolshevism Has Worked Out in Mexico,” June 15, 1919, National Civic Federation Records, Series IX: “Subject Files-Laut”, box 418, folder 2.

<sup>182</sup> Ibid. Also see Agnes Laut, “How Carranza Headed his Own Downfall by Double-Crossing the Unions and Gompers Dealt Him a Death Wallop”, July 27, 1919, National Civic Federation Records, Series IX: “Subject Files-Laut”, box 418, folder 2.

<sup>183</sup> Agnes Laut, “Cattle Running on the Border -- How the Game of Systematized Loot Was Worked Which Crucified a Nation”, July 20, 1919, National Civic Federation Records, Series IX: “Subject Files-Laut”, box 418, folder 2.



“Redistribute every thing -even women!”<sup>184</sup> On the other, a small group of dispossessed Mexicans who desired the wealth and prosperity achieved by the industrious foreign community and Mexican elites alike but were not willing to work for it, moved the rest of the ignorant population to help them rob what did not belong to them.<sup>185</sup>

No ideals of attaining social justice justified the fight; the promise of looting did.<sup>186</sup> No intentions of ending a corrupt regime propelled the conflict; the uncontrollable wave of illegal activities did so.<sup>187</sup> No betterment of living conditions, the economy, and social rights came out of the violence; the poverty, insecurity, and repression Laut witnessed made this evident to her.<sup>188</sup> Laut concluded that the armed movement had not improved social conditions in Mexico, and so she challenged and refuted the revolutionary reforms that ultimately acquired legal status in the 1917 Constitution. To her, land redistribution, acknowledgement of labor rights, and regulation of the educational system were, at best, empty rhetoric never applied and, in the worst case, damaging measures.

Laut recalls an incident related to the forced dismantlement of a big rural property, its agricultural lands as well as its small factory. She denounced the negative effects of the policy of breaking up big

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<sup>184</sup> Agnes Laut, “How Bolshevism...” , National Civic Federation Records, Series IX: “Subject Files-Laut” , box 418, folder 2.

<sup>185</sup> Agnes Laut, “What is the Matter with Mexico” , *World Outlook*, July 1919, p. 3. Found in the National Civic Federation Records, Series IX: “Subject Files-Laut” , box 418, folder 2.

<sup>186</sup> Agnes Laut, “In the Hells of Tehuantepec” , *Forum*, 61:6, p. 646.

<sup>187</sup> Agnes Laut, “Cattle Running...” , National Civic Federation Records, Series IX: “Subject Files-Laut” , box 418, folder 2.

<sup>188</sup> Agnes Laut, “Has the Revolution Improved Conditions for the People?,” June 8, 1919, National Civic Federation Records, Series IX: “Subject Files-Laut” , box 418, folder 2.

estates, a policy implemented, according to her, “by people who never saw a farm nearer than a pen point”<sup>189</sup>: peons were left out of work, at the mercy of local bandits who stole their crops. The options left for former peasants were to join the ranks of either the army or the bandits, or else, to sell their lands to some wealthy general at a ridiculous price. This virtually halted agricultural production, and the result was terrible for both the peons and the country as a whole.

Workers’ rights and the condition in which teachers survived had no better outcome than the land reform. Before the 1917 Constitution, laws regulating work hours, workers’ conditions, salaries, unions, and the right to strike were non-existent. In Laut’s experience, the promulgation of labor rights as constitutional rights was useless. She comments, “The teachers of Mexico City had to go on strike for their pay. It seems to have been a crime to tell that the guns were turned on them in the street for going on strike for their pay.”<sup>190</sup> This incident was even more insulting when money flowed into the hands of revolutionary leaders who were getting immensely rich but were “not able” to pay the teachers, one of the professions considered of utmost importance for the country’s development.<sup>191</sup>

Agnes Laut’s experiences led her to challenge the widespread revolutionary rhetoric that justified years of civil war, arguing better conditions had come out of the new social reforms. Using sarcasm, Laut states that:

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<sup>189</sup> Investigation of Mexican Affairs”, United States Senate, Subcommittee of the Committee of Foreign Affairs, Monday, September 15, 1919, p. 383.

<sup>190</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 381.

<sup>191</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 382. Also see Agnes Laut, “How Mexico Can Be Saved...” , National Civic Federation Records, Series IX: “Subject Files-Laut” , box 418, folder 2.

[...] reference has been made to improved conditions. The conditions are so much improved for the poor that on July 22 the commissioner of the board of health of Mexico City had to issue a permit for the poor to be allowed to eat horseflesh. In Durango 17 out of 22 candidates for governor could neither read nor write. At Zacatecas food is scarce; life is insecure; bandits are universal; the teachers have not been paid for six months.<sup>192</sup>

Laut's understanding of the Mexican Revolution was certainly related to her national background. Her perceptions were partially defined by Laut's deep knowledge of Canada's national features and history. She examined the Mexican reality and assessed the revolutionary movement based on Canadian parameters. The comparison of similar processes in both countries provided Laut with arguments to challenge revolutionary policies and even predict their outcome. In a 1919 article she expressed her outrage at the negative effects of strikes fomented by labor rights leaders ( "agitators" ) in the railroad industry of British Columbia and predicted the same chaos in Mexico.<sup>193</sup> Following the same logic, three months later, she explained before Fall's Subcommittee her interpretation and rebuttal of constitutional article 27:

There was a date when Mexico was making a bid for settlers, the same as Canada, and at that time something between forty and fifty thousand foreign and American settlers poured into the region from San Luis down to the hot country. About the same time 1, 000, 000 Americans poured into the Canadian Northwest; and because they bought that land at \$15 an acre and sold it at \$100 and

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<sup>192</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 381. Also see Agnes Laut, "Improved Conditions in the City", June 1, 1919, National Civic Federation Records, Series IX: "Subject Files-Laut", box 418, folder 2.

<sup>193</sup> Agnes Laut, "How Bolshevism...", National Civic Federation Records, Series IX: "Subject Files-Laut", box 418, folder 2.

\$200 I have never heard anyone in Canada say that land should be confiscated.<sup>194</sup>

Laut's questioning of the material benefits preached by revolutionary discourse was based on the premise that Mexico was, physically, "a Garden of Paradise" in contrast to Canada, and yet the economic situation of both countries was totally opposite:

Canada is a one-crop-a-year land; and one crop a year has enabled Canadians to carry a two billion War Debt and come out prosperous. Mexico can always raise two crops a year, sometimes three, and her foreign debts do not exceed half a billion. Yet her foreign credit is nil. She cannot pay the interest on her foreign obligations [...] Her lands are of the richest alluvial quality in the world. Yet today easily 75 per cent of her lands lie unworked.<sup>195</sup>

These paradoxes exhorted Laut to think not only of a theoretical explanation but also of a practical solution for rebuilding of Mexico's economy and curing its social ills. She hoped to do away with the corrupt minority that oppressed the Mexican population while preventing yet another armed conflict.

### **Laut Conceives a Redemptive Project**

Despite having been publicly labeled an interventionist, "better known as a confidential secretary to financial magnates than an

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<sup>194</sup> "Investigation of Mexican Affairs", United States Senate, Subcommittee of the Committee of Foreign Affairs, Monday, September 15, 1919, p. 380.

<sup>195</sup> Agnes Laut, "Getting into Mexico", National Civic Federation Records, Series IX: "Subject Files-Laut", box 418, folder 2.

organizer of benevolent institutions”<sup>196</sup>, Agnes Laut constantly emphasized her rejection of military intervention in Mexico. Her discourse moves simultaneously on two levels: moral and pragmatic ends intertwine in Laut’s speech. The U.S. had to act directly to counter the military despots without embarking on an armed occupation primarily because this approach would benefit both countries. According to Laut, armed intervention would not only mean bloodshed for innocent people in Mexico but also an unnecessary waste of money for the common taxpayer in the U.S. For both reasons she was convinced that: “If there is any way of averting war, we will avert war, and that is what I have been working on since I came back from Mexico, constantly, pretty nearly day and night.”<sup>197</sup> Indeed she conceived of many other options by which the U.S. could “help” Mexico out of the chaotic conditions she witnessed.<sup>198</sup>

Unlike the public statements of interventionist associations and politicians, Laut did not place the responsibility for solving Mexico’s chaos entirely on President Woodrow Wilson’s administration. She did criticize the official “watchful waiting” policy in her statements and writings and pushed for the use of economic pressure in order to topple

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<sup>196</sup> “Women of Mexico Oppose Projected Philanthropic Intervention from U.S.” , *Oakland Tribune*, Dec. 24, 1919, p. 2.

<sup>197</sup> “Investigation of Mexican Affairs” , United States Senate, Subcommittee of the Committee of Foreign Affairs, Monday, September 15, 1919, p. 379.

<sup>198</sup> For Laut, as was the generalized use of the term at that juncture, the word “intervention” referred exclusively to a military occupation. Therefore, she suggests that “intervention must be taken off the map to help Mexico”, and be replaced by peaceful aid schemes. Of course, either commercial pressure or philanthropic work can be defined as foreign intervention with a specific agenda. In Laut’s conception, however, the two notions (intervention and “help”) have different meanings. See “Investigation of Mexican Affairs” , United States Senate, Subcommittee of the Committee of Foreign Affairs, Monday, September 15, 1919, p. 375.

the corrupt group of Carrancista leaders.<sup>199</sup> Other official methods of dealing with Mexico in a peaceful way, such as diplomatic efforts, Laut regarded as useless and expensive.<sup>200</sup> In Laut's viewpoint, there was not much else the authorities could do without recurring to the armed solution; civil society, however, had the potential to straighten up Mexico.

The establishment of a Mexican government with effective control and a receptive attitude towards the foreign presence in the country was in everyone's interest, and, therefore, it was everyone's responsibility to contribute to its achievement. To her, those with heavy financial interests must cooperate on a much larger scale for the reconstruction of Mexico.

Agnes Laut's observations led her to conclude that U.S. capitalists were not only desperate to protect their Mexican businesses but also to develop new investments. Capitalists were attracted to Mexico due to its natural riches and also because U.S. "finance is being taxed out of its boots by the War, elsewhere."<sup>201</sup> For its part, Mexico also clamored for U.S. capitalists to come, after having recognized that nationalist policies had doomed the country and U.S. finance and credit was the only way to national reconstruction.<sup>202</sup> It was a cyclical win-win situation: by investing in Mexico, U.S. capitalists contributed to improving the economic situation, which would appease

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<sup>199</sup> Agnes Laut, "Getting into Mexico", National Civic Federation Records, Series IX: "Subject Files-Laut", box 418, folder 2.

<sup>200</sup> Agnes Laut, "How Mexico Can Be Saved...", National Civic Federation Records, Series IX: "Subject Files-Laut", box 418, folder 2.

<sup>201</sup> Agnes Laut, "Getting into Mexico", National Civic Federation Records, Series IX: "Subject Files-Laut", box 418, folder 2.

<sup>202</sup> Agnes Laut, "Mexico at the Crossroads," *Current Opinion*, 70:1, 1921, p. 35.

social discontent, extinguish more uprisings and maintain a stable government that would, in exchange, protect their properties and rights. Armed intervention would mean a loss for both sides.

This purely pragmatic approach was complemented with moral rhetoric. To Laut “the Mexican problem is no longer a question of ‘protecting foreign interests’ . It is a question of saving a nation that for seven years has been suffering [...]”<sup>203</sup> She perceived that Mexico’s problem was not exclusively political or economic, but more importantly a moral one. Economic needs and lack of moral behavior interacted in a cycle of negative causes and effects: “Disease is rife. Crime is rife. Kidnapping is an everyday occurrence, and, if the child is not ransomed, it is sold. Morals are simply nil.”<sup>204</sup> This immorality concerned the U.S. At the same time, indulging the Mexican lack of ethics was actually dangerous mainly because of the Bolshevik influence, linked in Laut’s mind to Mexico’s nationalist drive:

Soviet Councils are now being formed in Mexico; and if anyone wants to know exactly how Bolshevism works out in seven years of practical application, Mexico is the best section in the world to get the facts of the case instead of the theories [...] Nationalization of banks, railroads, utilities, mines, lands, schools, churches [...] “Shun the church -it is a pest,” the Soviet card of membership in Mexico reads.<sup>205</sup>

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<sup>203</sup> Agnes Laut, “Are Foreign Interests Financing Revolutions in Mexico?”, p. 6. Typewritten draft found in the National Civic Federation Records, Series IX: “Subject Files-Laut”, box 418, folder 2.

<sup>204</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>205</sup> Agnes Laut, “How Bolshevism...”, National Civic Federation Records, Series IX: “Subject Files-Laut”, box 418, folder 2.

The situation had so degenerated that Mexicans were incapable of reconstructing their national economy, consolidating a democratic government, or acting according to moral principles by themselves. For this reason, once more, foreign action was both essential and justified: “Fortunately, we have come to the place in the world’s history where we don’t accept tragedy as the Will of God. We get to work to put the wrong right. What has to be done to help her?”<sup>206</sup>

Laut was convinced that transforming the moral decay derived from social injustices would provide the conditions for the Mexican population to stand up against the corrupt minority that controlled the country. That scenario would encourage the local elite, mostly educated in the U.S. and friendly to foreigners, to take Mexico in their hands.<sup>207</sup> Of course, the monetary and leadership drive to alleviate the situation had to come from abroad in the reform of credit to reopen the industries and financial resources to carry out humanitarian work focused on changing the Mexican heart, mind, and spirit.

To Laut, the latter was of the utmost importance: “Conditions in Mexico had seemed to me utterly hopeless till I visited the schools, when the first gleam of hope came over a dark horizon. [...] We have tried the diplomatic way and failed hideously. Why not try the educative way?”<sup>208</sup> Through educational missions and humanitarian work, women and children, the moral force and the future of the country, would be

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<sup>206</sup> Agnes Laut, “Getting into Mexico”, National Civic Federation Records, Series IX: “Subject Files-Laut”, box 418, folder 2.

<sup>207</sup> “Investigation of Mexican Affairs”, United States Senate, Subcommittee of the Committee of Foreign Affairs, Monday, September 15, 1919, p. 394.

<sup>208</sup> Agnes Laut, “How Mexico Can Be Saved...”, National Civic Federation Records, Series IX: “Subject Files-Laut”, box 418, folder 2.



“trained to decency and the meaning of liberty and what friendship with the United States means.”<sup>209</sup>

Laut came up with a concrete plan to help pull Mexico together. Since U.S. financial interests were desperate to fix Mexico’s instability and capable of providing the monetary cooperation needed to do so, Laut envisioned their participation as sponsors of the humanitarian program. Those financial interests, however, were not the appropriate media to organize and carry out the charitable enterprises.

Such direct participation could become a way to lobby in favor of the enterprises’ interests or, at least, could be misinterpreted in this way by the public. Rather, Laut considered that the program should be put into effect by a united front of Christian churches because they sought no material profits in Mexico and they possessed the moral authority and know-how to perform that kind of humanitarian work. Laut, who had personal bonds with both parts of the equation and the empirical knowledge to devise the most adequate humanitarian program for Mexico, was to become the hinge that joined everything together: “I am the connecting link between those churches and the financial interests. [...] The condition of the churches going to work was that there should be no mention of intervention or nonintervention and no sectarian proselytizing.”<sup>210</sup>

After arguing against military intervention and presenting her humanitarian project to NAPARIM members, Laut was convinced that she had “succeeded in getting the big financiers to put up about two million

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<sup>209</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>210</sup> “Investigation of Mexican Affairs”, United States Senate, Subcommittee of the Committee of Foreign Affairs, Monday, September 15, 1919, p. 387.

dollars a year to establish clinics and schools”<sup>211</sup>; months later, before the Fall Subcommittee, she commented that “the oil interests had put up \$40, 000 to help the church campaign, the union of Protestant and Catholic churches, to place before the American public the necessity of helping Mexico.”<sup>212</sup>

### **In Search of Sponsorship: Laut and the National Civic Association**

NAPARIM was but the first door on which Laut knocked. The more money received, the better for the charitable program, and so Laut became a fierce negotiator in search of funds. Convinced that the Mexican situation morally touched U.S. society as a whole, and not only those with vested interests there, she turned to civic organizations that, despite their detachment from Mexico and its revolution, had the means to provide help. As soon as she came back from Mexico, between June and August 1919, Agnes Laut undertook a series of meetings and interviews with members of an organization to which she belonged, the National Civic Federation, in hope of acquiring some funding.<sup>213</sup>

The National Civic Federation (NCF) was an organization born from the progressive spirit experienced by the U.S. in the early 1900’ s as a direct result of the 1893 financial depression that precipitated a

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<sup>211</sup> “Memo for Mr. Easley”, National Civic Federation Records, Subversive Activities: German Sabotage- Mexico, Box 443, Folder 2.

<sup>212</sup> “Investigation of Mexican Affairs”, United States Senate, Subcommittee of the Committee of Foreign Affairs, Monday, September 15, 1919, p. 379.

<sup>213</sup> The exchange of correspondence, telegrams, written articles, and secret investigations between Agnes Laut and Ralph Easley, founder of the National Civic Federation and chairman of its executive council, are found in two different series of the NCF records: a folder under the title “Laut” in the series called “Subject Files” and a folder titled “Mexico” in the “Subversive Activities” series.

social crisis, mainly manifested in high unemployment rates.<sup>214</sup> With antecedents in the Chicago Civic Federation, Ralph Easley (newspaper editor, Republican Party enthusiast, and administrator of welfare programs for *Inter-Ocean*, a Chicago newspaper) projected the Chicago model of cooperative organization onto the national scene to form the NCF. Responding to the fact that reform and charitable groups were generally under-funded and governmental agencies were overwhelmed with the depression's effects, the NCF was born with the idea of organizing civic cooperation and directing it to renovate U.S. society. The goal was to gather groups and individuals concerned with the social uneasiness "to understand the causes of economic depression and to initiate policy reforms aimed at both relieving their effects and further preventing them."<sup>215</sup>

Supported by prominent political figures such as Theodore Roosevelt and Howard Taft, the NCF brought together a heterogeneous group of businessmen, journalists, legislators, women reformers, charity organizers, social scientists and clergymen. The membership did not pay dues, but the financial means of New York magnates and wealthy industrialists, like the steel mogul Andrew Carnegie and railroad entrepreneur George Perkins, kept the organization in motion. Their deep pockets not only covered the salaries and operating expenses of the NCF head office on Lexington Avenue in New York City, but also funded for the "impressive research activities" that were the foundation later reform projects.<sup>216</sup>

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<sup>214</sup> Christopher J. Ciphers, *The National Civic Federation and the Making of a New Liberalism 1900-1915* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 2002), p. 17.

<sup>215</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 20.

<sup>216</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 28-29.

Whereas the organization spent its first years functioning almost exclusively as an arbiter in labor conflicts, it was composed of multiple departments devoted to different social issues, such as migration or the well-being of working women. Although not a priority in Easley's organization, the Women's Department of the NCF undertook several reform projects after its inception in 1908. Counterbalancing the practical, vertical approach the NCF stuck to in most of its social projects, the women who led this department (mostly wives and daughters of politicians and businessmen) saw welfare as a moral obligation rather than a requirement for efficient and profitable interaction between employers and workers. Before these women took an active role in reform, the NCF "rarely viewed employee welfare as a moral issue, and rarely did it consider the specificities of welfare work from the employee's perspective."<sup>217</sup>

As an active member of the NCF's Women's Department, Agnes Laut's participation in this organization definitely influenced her attitude towards welfare. The NCF, loyal to its conservative-progressive leaning, advocated the traditional notion of "separate spheres" for each gender. Thus, women's public role in welfare work should reproduce the housewifely chores performed in the private sphere. "From within their 'separate sphere', women proved it possible to affect social reform on a variety of issues, ranging from child labor, to safer food and drugs, to the welfare of women and their children."<sup>218</sup>, Laut adopted this perspective while contributing to the NCF, and later when she

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<sup>217</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 72.

<sup>218</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 70.

projected her humanitarian ideas into Mexico; the welfare of fellow women and the well-being of children were her two main concerns.

Even before going to Mexico, Laut had become involved with the NCF, in particular with the Women's Department. As a member, she contributed to the Association the best way she knew how: with her writing skills. In April 1915, she authored an article published in *The Century* describing the important labor of the NCF to benefit the increasing number of women entering the labor market. Her text rejoiced in the successful creation of a "Vacation Headquarters" in charge of organizing events and opening spaces where working women could find a place to socialize, rest from their chores, and attain the "old spirit of comradeship, of joy in work, of recreation, of social outlet, of protection and cooperation, of realization of self in service, of making ideals real [...]." <sup>219</sup>

Considering the goals of social reform and welfare programs backed by the NCF, its financial capacity for funding research and charity endeavors, and its interest in social issues such as labor relations, the condition of women, and child care, Laut's appeal to the Federation looking for support for her Mexican project seems only logical. Indeed the social problems that, in Laut's assessment, the Mexican Revolution had failed to solve coincided with the areas of welfare interest of the NCF; however, Laut had to work hard to drive the Federation's attention towards social problems outside U.S. borders.

The aims and efforts of the NCF were confined to a domestic frame of action. It was devoted to researching social issues, designing

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<sup>219</sup> Agnes Laut, "The New Spirit Among Women Who Work," *The Century*, 89:6, 1915, p. 928.

effective welfare programs, carrying them out, and cooperating with the U.S. government in the making of official policies. Yet, the organization's national priorities brought up certain topics of interest on an international level. The concern for national security moved the NCF to get involved in other countries' internal politics, in particular those of Canada and Mexico, whose geographical proximity implied a possible tangible threat to U.S. territory. This paranoia of endangered national security reached a high in 1916, when U.S. relations with both Germany and Mexico turned hostile.<sup>220</sup>

The NCF grew interested in Mexico's revolutionary upheaval when rumors began of German and Japanese activities in Mexican territory. Between January and July 1916, a secret investigator hired by the NCF "established close relations with officials of the German Embassy [in the U.S.]. He was also in touch with leading anarchists [in the U.S.]. [...] He was so far in the confidence of the Germans that they gave him the names of their secret agents in Canada and elsewhere."<sup>221</sup> The reports the investigator gave to Ralph Easley in 1916 included material informing on German links to the Mexican revolutionary leaders, Pancho Villa and Venustiano Carranza.

The reports described German control over Carranza's de facto government, German monetary and military support of revolutionary factions, Japanese soldiers training in the north of Mexico, and the attacks on the Mexican Catholic Church following German orders. The

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<sup>220</sup> The documents reporting on the secret research financed by the NCF outside the U.S. are found in the Federation's records in the series "Subversive Activities".

<sup>221</sup> "Confidential Memorandum Relating to Certain German Underground Activities," National Civic Federation Records, Subversive Activities: German Sabotage- Canada, Box 442, Folder 9.

central piece of information referred to an alleged German-Japanese plot aimed at precipitating a war between Mexico and the U.S. in order to avoid the latter's involvement in the European conflict and to facilitate a future German attack on U.S. or Canadian soil:

[...] the GERMANS are on their knees praying that the United States will continue to call out troops and bury them in MEXICO, just as far away as possible [...] and keep this up so that every defense of the U.S. is engaged in Mexican strife, so that there will be NO opposition to the invasion of Canada.<sup>222</sup>

Despite such alarmist reports, the NCF never carried out any concrete activities in response to the alleged German threat. In fact, the Federation's interest in foreign events followed official U.S. foreign policy; that is to say, after the tense relations of 1916 with Mexico dissipated and Europe became the priority, the NCF turned its attention to the developments of the Great War and the victory of the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia. Because the NCF was an organization focused primarily on labor issues, the possible spread of socialism replaced the German danger in their eyes as the immediate threat to U.S. national security. This focus, consequentially, strengthened the ties between the NCF and trade unionism, considered the most powerful weapon against Communism.<sup>223</sup>

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<sup>222</sup> "Special Advice by Letter, Cincinnati, Ohio, June, 1916", National Civic Federation Records, Subversive Activities: German Sabotage- Mexico, Box 443, Folder 2.

<sup>223</sup> See Ciphers, p. 81. Samuel Gompers, leader of the American Federation of Labor, became acquainted with Ralph Easley in the late 1800's when they both participated in the Chicago Civic Federation labor arbitration work. Later, when Easley consolidated the NCF, Gompers became its first Vice President. See Ciphers, p. 27. Review of the articles published between 1916 and 1920 in *The National Civic Federation Review*, official organ of the NCF, reveals the Federation's main topics of interest. The domestic activities, promotional tours, and conferences led by Samuel Gompers, as the

The NCF's efforts in support of unionism, American Federation of Labor style, were mostly centered on the U.S. arena. The links between the AFL and foreign labor organizations were also a concern for the Federation. In that very particular niche, the NCF showed, once more, an interest in revolutionary Mexico. In late 1918, the NCF reported on developments at the Pan-American Labor Conference at Laredo, Texas. This meeting among the labor representatives of the U.S., Mexico, and five Central American republics was a success from the perspective of the NCF. The conference closed with unanimous agreement on resolutions concerning the rights of free association, abolition of child labor and the eight hour work day.<sup>224</sup>

This agreement on labor policy between the U.S. and Mexico led the NCF to remove Mexico from the anti-Bolshevist radar. After all, "The benefits derived from extreme radicalism in labor organization are extremely vague and doubtful. This has been especially true of Mexico, but strangely enough the tide has already set strongly in Mexico moving toward a more reasonable, solid type of labor organization."<sup>225</sup> The guarantee that Mexico's labor movement was, despite the 1917 constitutional labor legislation, in the same line as U.S. unionism dissolved any special interest that could have led the NCF to become deeply involved in Mexican issues.

By 1919, when Agnes Laut came back from Mexico with the idea of convincing prominent organizations such as NAPARIM and the NCF to

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representative of U.S. unionism, were extensively reported; very few articles referred to Mexico or other international issues.

<sup>224</sup> "Real Labor Speaks," *The National Civic Federation Review*, Dec. 5, 1918, p. 11.

<sup>225</sup> Chester Wright, "The Pan-American Labor Conference in Laredo," *The National Civic Federation Review*, Dec. 20, 1918, p. 12.



finance her humanitarian projects in Mexico, she encountered several obstacles. In the case of the NCF, she had to rekindle an interest in Mexico that was virtually lost. Moreover, she had to sell the idea in such a way that NCF would decide to prioritize funds for reformist activities outside the U.S., an unprecedented move. Agnes Laut's approach to Ralph Easley was brief and unsuccessful; it illustrates her strategies as a mediator between organizations, the dynamics among different U.S. associations, and the general U.S. climate around the Mexican issue

In general the NCF's involvement with Mexican issues was indirect, indeed second hand. The information the organization obtained was based on chats and interviews with German agents in the United States; the Federation did not finance intelligence operations or other research on Mexican territory.<sup>226</sup> In that sense, Laut's first hand experience represented an extra value for the Federation and conferred on her the status of authority on the Mexican subject. Simultaneously, her personal interactions with U.S. interests, Mexican official

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<sup>226</sup> The only incursion in Mexico financed by the NCF was incidental, as part of research on the conditions of soldiers mobilized to the Mexican border in 1916. While preparing a report on food supplies, camp sanitation and causes of disease of U.S. soldiers stationed at the Mexican border, Dr. Thomas Darlington, former Health Commissioner of New York City, spent a week in the north of Mexico. During his visit, he expressed concern with the attitude of the U.S. press toward his mission; he informs Easley that his work was interpreted as an attack on Wilson's military decision. See "Dr. Darlington's telegram to Ralph Easley", National Civic Federation Records, Soldier's Welfare Committee: Correspondence Darlington Report, Box 271, Folder 9. Dr. Darlington's published report makes practically no allusion to Mexico and its revolutionary conditions. See the published report: National Civic Federation, *Soldiers' Welfare and National Defense*, New York, 1917.

authorities, and the Mexican population in general made her quite suspicious.<sup>227</sup>

The Mexican issue was linked to rumors, mistrust and paranoia; it was difficult to define the genuine interests of those involved. Wilson preached a non-interventionist policy while effectively favoring Carranza's faction; politicians and financial interests denied that they aimed for military intervention in Mexico while issuing a senatorial report recommending that measure; and those who advocated absolute U.S. non-involvement encouraged U.S. educational and missionary penetration. These ambiguous discourses about Mexico generated a state of confusion, and, therefore, when Laut sought the NCF's aid, Easley required certain facts before associating his organization with Laut's humanitarian enterprise.

From May to August 1919 while Laut tried to negotiate funding from the NCF for her Mexican project, she spoke several times in New York City with a man known to her as "Maitland" and whose real name was John D. Maher. Maher, a covert envoy of the Easleys'<sup>228</sup>, was in constant contact with Laut. She was under the impression that Maitland had worked for the U.S. government in Mexican missions, and they periodically got together to exchange information about their respective Mexican

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<sup>227</sup> Laut's intentions were not only questioned by the NCF. During Fall's hearings, Leander De Bekker, a journalist committed to contesting pro-intervention propaganda, testified that Laut was named as a pro-German suspect in a list issued in winter 1918 by the U.S. Department of Justice (See "Investigation of Mexican Affairs", United States Senate, Subcommittee of the Committee of Foreign Affairs, Monday, September 15, 1919, p. 335.) Later that day, Agnes Laut defended herself from that accusation on the basis of her efforts during WWI to contest the stands of pro-German writers. (See "Investigation of Mexican Affairs", United States Senate, Subcommittee of the Committee of Foreign Affairs, Monday, September 15, 1919, pp. 371-372).

<sup>228</sup> Gertrude Beeks, Ralph Easley's wife, was as involved in the NCF dealings with Agnes Laut as her husband was. She also held a high position in the NCF: Secretary of the Welfare Department.

endeavors. Maher, of course, reported Laut' s comments to both Mr. and Mrs. Easley.<sup>229</sup> After several encounters, Maher informed the NCF that "her conversation bristled with contradictions of statements".<sup>230</sup> Maher' s reports probably contributed to the NCF' s reluctance to finance Laut' s projects.

Despite the tense, paranoid environment, Laut did her best to convince the NCF of the pressing need to take action in Mexico. Knowing that labor issues were the main interest of the NCF, she focused her appeal to Easley on that particular topic. Laut wrote two articles for the NCF, one reporting on the strike of railroad workers in Mexico and the other explaining why the "rehabilitation" of Mexico was of utmost importance to the United States.<sup>231</sup> Her intention was to make clear that Carranza' s administration had not been successful in granting the workers improvement in wages and working conditions; at the same time, the feisty unions were out of his control. Laut warned the NCF that this unstable situation was perfect for strengthening the already existing ties between the "Bolshevik I-Won' t-Works" (I.W.W.) and Mexican unions.<sup>232</sup> Laut insisted that by contributing to the rehabilitation of Mexican society and the economy, the danger of Bolshevik ideas crossing

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<sup>229</sup> The state of paranoia and uncertainty about the real interests at stake in the Mexico is clearly illustrated in the NCF' s reaction to Laut' s approach. Maher was not the only one reporting on the situation; a secret agent who signed as "O" informed the Easleys on both Maher' s and Laut' s actions. See National Civic Federation Records, Series IX: "Subject Files-Laut" , box 418, folder 2.

<sup>230</sup> "Handwritten report" , National Civic Federation Records, Series IX: "Subject Files-Laut" , box 418, folder 2.

<sup>231</sup> Both texts are found as typewritten drafts in the Civic Federation Records, "Subversive Activities-German Sabotage/Mexico" , box 443, folder 2.

<sup>232</sup> Agnes Laut, "Labor in Mexico" , National Civic Federation Records, Series IX: "Subject Files-Laut" , box 418, folder 2.

the border to infect the U.S. working class would disappear. This argument, however, was not strong enough to obtain funding from the NCF.

Probably the major reason for the NCF's unwillingness to extend Laut official support was her close link to NAPARIM. Easley refused to contribute to a program that was partially backed by an association with such commercial interests in Mexico; he doubted the altruistic nature of the enterprise and feared the NCF would be publicly accused of pushing for military intervention in Mexico. On the basis that Carrancista propaganda, both in Mexico and in the U.S., would attack the NCF for participating in the project, Easley diplomatically informed Laut that "it would never have done for the National Civic Association or the American Federation of Labor to have gotten mixed up in that proposition [...] However, I hope that anything we can do to help ameliorate the terrible conditions in Mexico will be done."<sup>233</sup>

In the end, Laut's bargaining skills and alarmist discourse were not enough to obtain the NCF's financial support. Her request for \$4,000 to cover the expenses of another Mexican trip, to pay for lectures, and to maintain an office for a year was rejected.<sup>234</sup> Despite the fact that this situation caused friction on both sides, the NCF, under the auspices of the Women's Department, did sponsor some of her activities: a "Mexican Conference" organized in the Midwest in June 1919, and a presentation entitled "How to Save Mexico without

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<sup>233</sup> "Letter to Agnes Laut-August/4/1919", National Civic Federation Records, Series IX: "Subject Files-Laut", box 418, folder 2.

<sup>234</sup> "Handwritten report", National Civic Federation Records, Series IX: "Subject Files-Laut", box 418, folder 2.

Bloodshed” in New York City on February 20, 1920<sup>235</sup>. In spite of the NCF’ s rejection, Laut did not give up on her humanitarian enterprise.

### **The Childhood Conservation League Is Formed**

By the end of 1919, relations between Mexico and the U.S. were facing a new panorama. A post-stroke Wilson, tired of dealing with revolutionary Mexico, anxiously waited for his second presidential term to end, leaving the Mexican problem to his successor. At the same time, a new rebellion erupted in Mexico. Before Senator Fall filed the Subcommittee’ s final report recommending a military intervention that would oust the nationalist and unstable Carranza government, Alvaro Obregón, Carranza’ s right-hand man, orchestrated an uprising that ended both Carranza’ s political supremacy and his life.

Obregón, aware of the importance of having U.S. recognition and support, assumed a different attitude towards his northern neighbor; leaving behind Carranza’ s extreme nationalist policy, Obregón showed himself willing to negotiate compensation and concessions with U.S. interests in exchange for credit and diplomatic recognition.<sup>236</sup> This new scenario did not change the social distress Laut intended to relieve or her plan to achieve it; however, it did provide her with a different context and a new set of rhetorical arguments.

After Alvaro Obregón appeared on the scene, Laut’ s articles took a highly conciliatory tone. For her, it was important to underscore Obregón’ s willingness to get closer to the U.S., open Mexico to foreign

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<sup>235</sup> See “Letter to Mrs. Easley-July/24/1919”, National Civic Federation Records, Series IX: “Subject Files-Laut”, box 418, folder 2; and “In the Current Week”, *New York Times*, February 15, 1920.

<sup>236</sup> Smith, p. 270.

penetration once more, and forget Carranza' s nationalist policies: "In fact, his first words in ejecting Carranza from Mexico were that the anti-American policy of Mexico had been 'national suicide' and a 'tragedy' ".<sup>237</sup> At the same time, she explained that his good intentions were not a reality, for he was not the president yet.

Laut was interested in making clear for the U.S. public that "no one knows better than Obregon that Mexico must have peace; and that she must have American friendship to maintain peace; and that she must have American capital to recover from financial ruin"<sup>238</sup> because that would foster a generalized feeling of empathy with Mexico. She also warned that without U.S. monetary, diplomatic and charitable action, Obregon' s government, favorable to the U.S., would not survive. That situation was certainly also favorable for her humanitarian projects, particularly when appealing for funding; the idea of stable, open conditions in a country that needed help would entice philanthropic financiers to cooperate.

Perceiving the openness of Mexico' s post-Carranza era, Laut finally launched her humanitarian program. In December 1919, a dinner was held in New York City to celebrate the creation of the Childhood Conservation League. The main goal of the new organization was to open "rehabilitation centers" throughout Mexico. Hospitals, as well as training schools for nurses and for teachers, were to be erected in all Mexican provinces.<sup>239</sup>

The Childhood Conservation League (CCL) materialized what Laut had envisioned since her return from Mexico: a charity organization funded

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<sup>237</sup> Agnes Laut, "Mexico' s Man of Destiny-Obregon" , *Forum*, 64:1, p. 10.

<sup>238</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 16.

<sup>239</sup> "Plan to Give Mexico a Helping Hand" , *The New York Times*, Dec. 6, 1919.

by financial interests and managed by religious groups. The directorial positions were held by a combination of oil men, Catholic bishops, members of NAPARIM, and Protestant doctors; Agnes Laut was the Secretary.<sup>240</sup> Laut also featured as spokesperson before the press; her personal experience and the research she had conducted in Mexico not only justified the CCL's inception but also implied it was well planned, based on real conditions, and likely to succeed. Laut had excelled in her role of intermediary between the economic elites and the religious groups.

The stigma linked to the participation of an "interventionist" association still haunted the project. Knowing that the misconception of NAPARIM influence could damage the CCL, as had happened with the rejection of NCF support, Laut kept publicly insisting on the good, uninterested intentions of the CCL. At the presentation of the CCL she made clear that:

The entire work of the league will be on a humanitarian basis. There will be no politics in it, and no sectarianism. It will work as far as possible with institutions already organized. Religious work will be left to the churches, each in its own way, following its own lines.<sup>241</sup>

Despite her efforts, Laut's humanitarian work was questioned and even attacked. One of the most remarkable opposition fronts was established in Mexico itself. Laut's claims stating that Mexico

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<sup>240</sup> Norman Bridge, Vice President of the Huasteca Petroleum Co., was the President; Burton Wilson and Ira Jewell, members of NAPARIM, were Vice-presidents. Dr. William Teeter was the Executive Director while Dr. Harry Farmer and William Oldham, Bishop of Buenos Aires, Argentina were on the Advisory Council. See "Plan to Give Mexico a Helping Hand," *The New York Times*, Dec. 6, 1919.

<sup>241</sup> *Ibid.*

repented of its mistaken nationalist attitude and was willing to welcome foreign missions backfired when the Mexican Feminist Council, led by Elena Torres<sup>242</sup>, raised its voice against the CCL. This organization considered that Laut's project was nothing but a scheme to quietly impose U.S. control over Mexico; in their minds, the League's objective was the "establishment within ten or fifteen years of strongholds of sympathy for the United States in the minds of the beneficiaries of this enterprise who would be impregnated with a new culture [...]"<sup>243</sup>

Different views of Laut's enterprise clashed. What Laut defined as help, for the Mexican Feminist Council was intervention, a philanthropic one but foreign intervention nonetheless. What Laut conceived as a foreign responsibility, the Feminists considered a national duty. What Laut regarded as a conciliatory project, for the Feminists was an insult to national sovereignty. The Council called on the Mexican population "to resist this overt attack upon national self-respect and dignity and to find some means themselves of solving pressing problems of national reconstruction."<sup>244</sup>

Laut's project succeeded in its organizational part: despite her failed endeavors with the NCF, she was able to launch the charity enterprise. The actual implementation of the project, however, did not go as smoothly as Laut expected nor have the impact she predicted. The

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<sup>242</sup> References to both Elena Torres and the first expression of Mexican Feminism can be found in Jocelyn Olcott's "A Right to Struggle: Revolutionary Citizenship and the Birth of Mexican Feminism" in *Revolutionary Woman in Postrevolutionary Mexico* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005, pp. 27-59).

<sup>243</sup> "Women of Mexico Oppose Projected Philanthropic Intervention from the U.S.", *Oakland Tribune*, Dec. 24, 1919, p. 2.

<sup>244</sup> "Mexican Women Spurn U.S. Help," *Reno Evening Gazette*, Dec. 24, 1919, p. 2.



U.S. journals that reported on the CCL' s launching did not follow its development or the Mexican Feminist' s actions.

In the end, neither U.S. military incursion nor missionary humanitarian work ended Mexico' s revolutionary progression. During Alvaro Obregón' s administration (1920-1924), diplomatic bargaining did settle some of the claims of U.S. interests in Mexico. The stable conditions that foreign investors desired were not yet achieved and the nationalist sentiment the revolution engendered survived in the official ideology and policies during the following decades.

## **Conclusion**

The study of Agnes Laut' s life is extremely attractive in itself due to its exceptionality: an early twentieth century woman, who stayed

single, wrote bestsellers, traveled to a country torn by civil war, dealt as an equal with powerful politicians and entrepreneurs, explored the sinuous Canadian landscape, and described herself as a farmer. Moreover, her personal story of entanglement with the Mexican Revolution provides new approaches to the historical analysis of North American interactions during Mexico's civil war.

This thesis has stated that Laut's womanhood influenced her assessments of Mexico's problems and differentiated her from her male counterparts. At the same time, Laut's Canadian background also marked her viewpoint on the issues and contrasted with the perspectives of the U.S. public. The topics and opinions she expressed in her articles express a particular view, a feminine reaction to a social revolution that provides a contrast to the volumes of male, political, and business-oriented written testimonies of the Mexican Revolution in the U.S.

In addition, her proactive efforts to solve Mexico's troubles from abroad via philanthropic work suggest the importance of studying the channels followed by U.S. civic organizations with intentions of performing humanitarian interventions in other countries. Her initiatives and strategies for fund-raising and organizing her Children Protection League show one of the methods followed by philanthropists in the U.S. In this sense, the particular case of Agnes Laut provides a starting point for further historical research on this topic.

More questions are to be answered: the contrasting role of religious and civic associations in these philanthropic projects; the importance of gender or social class in philanthropy-making; the different reactions of the society receiving the foreign aid; the continuation and impact of foreign philanthropy in post-revolutionary

Mexico. More sources are to be explored both in Mexico and the U.S.  
There is still a long research path on this topic to carry out.

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