



Title	In Search of the Female Bandit in the Novel of the Mexican Revolution: The case of la Pintada
Authors(s)	Baker, Pascale
Publication date	2012
Publication information	Baker, Pascale. "In Search of the Female Bandit in the Novel of the Mexican Revolution: The Case of La Pintada." Liverpool University Press, 2012. https://doi.org/10.3828/bhs.2012.55 .
Publisher	Liverpool University Press
Item record/more information	http://hdl.handle.net/10197/9174
Publisher's version (DOI)	10.3828/bhs.2012.55

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In Search of the Female Bandit in the Novel of the Mexican Revolution: The case of la Pintada.

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Abstract

In bandit novels from Latin America in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries there is a notable lack of female bandit figures, both real and imagined (especially in leading roles). However, the character la Pintada, in Mariano Azuela's seminal novel of the Mexican Revolution, *Los de abajo* (1915), defies the notion that women bandits did not exist or that if they did they were merely followers of male bandit chiefs. A forceful character, Pintada embodies the role of the *soldada*, as she actively engages in raids, rather than conform to the *soldadera* stereotype, that of the woman who accompanied the soldiers in their campaigns in a servile role. Pintada, a natural leader, challenges band chief, Demetrio, and leaves without punishment, after committing murder. This paper explores the idea that rather than being one of the Revolution's victims, Pintada can be seen to be one of its beneficiaries, a brash northerner representing the new modern Mexico that would wrest control in the post-revolutionary period.

Resumen

Las novelas de bandidos de Latinoamérica en los siglos XIX y XX reflejan una ausencia notable de 'bandidas', especialmente en los papeles principales, tanto reales como imaginarios. Sin embargo, el personaje la Pintada en la novela fundamental de la Revolución Mexicana, *Los de abajo* (1915) de Mariano Azuela, desafía la creencia de que no existían bandidas o que sólo eran seguidoras de bandidos. Poseedora de un carácter fuerte, la Pintada parece ser una soldada y no se somete al estereotipo de la soldadera, en un rol servil, como acompañante de los combatientes. La Pintada es una líder natural y desafía a Demetrio, el jefe bandido y abandona al grupo, después de haber cometido un asesinato sin castigo alguno. Este artículo explora la idea de la Pintada como beneficiaria de la Revolución, en vez de ser una víctima. Ella es una norteña descarada que representa al nuevo mexicano que tomará el poder durante el periodo posrevolucionario.

The presence of women in Latin American banditry has been marginal at best from the time of the Spanish conquest onwards. To some extent, the exclusion of women in Latin American bandit studies follows the same pattern 'of the overwhelmingly male nature of the Anglophone outlaw tradition' (Seal 1996: 194). As the critic, Graham Seal, argues, the likes of Maid Marion, Billy the Kid's Mexican sweetheart and Ned Kelly's younger sister, when they appear at all only do so in a supportive role (1996: 194). The more pronounced patriarchal traditions of Latin America have perhaps conspired to keep female outlaws even further in the shadows, and many bandit studies of the region do not mention *bandidas*. However, after undertaking more detailed research it becomes clear that female outlaws, often in the guise of

rebels and soldiers, were actually present during every major conflict in Latin America from the conquest of Mexico onwards. Even foregoing the use of the term 'bandit', a notoriously slippery word, that has often been employed to denigrate its recipients, there are multiple definitions of Mexican women in warfare: 'warriors, camp followers, *coronelas*, *soldaderas*, and *Adelitas*' (Salas 1990: xi). Elizabeth Salas believes that the lack of a common label 'is a reflection of military thinking, which seeks to use women when necessary but yet keeps them marginal in what is essentially a male preserve' (xi). In line with Salas's assessment, the shifting terminology used to describe female soldiers, and the lack of reporting on their actions can be attributed to prejudiced historiography, which has edited out female involvement in Latin American armed conflicts. For instance, in the case of the conquest of Mexico, Juan Francisco Maura argues that those few female Spanish warriors who were known to have taken part 'no han entrado en la corriente del discurso crítico de la conquista por razones de sexo, poder y falta de información acerca de sus acciones' (2005: 186).

The constant factional struggles and seesawing of power during the Mexican Revolution of 1910-1920 often resulted in a slippage between the concepts of rebels, bandits and revolutionaries. In Mariano Azuela's Revolution-era novel, *Los de abajo* (1915), Demetrio Macías's gang can be seen to start as bandits come rebels, rising to become feted revolutionaries, before finishing once more as the vanquished bandit underdogs. The rise and fall of the gang's fortunes and many other aspects of the novel have attracted widespread critical debate. However, one aspect that remains curiously understudied, despite Clive Griffin's recognition of its potential for feminist scholarship, is a close analysis of the female bandit/rebel in *Los de abajo*, la Pintada (Griffin 1993: 68). This article seeks to fill that gap, by reevaluating Pintada's significance in the novel, as a leader and survivor, as well as placing her behaviour in the context of the role of Mexican women in the Revolution more generally. To do this, the article will analyse cultural representations of women in the Revolution

alongside Pintada, as well as historiographical depictions of such women. Though the Revolution conferred a hitherto unknown degree of freedom and power on Mexican women, the conclusion here is that this was not carried through into the post-revolutionary era, with women struggling to gain recognition for their services to the armed struggle and only gaining full suffrage in 1953. However, the projection for the character Pintada, an indomitable force in the novel, is that she would refuse to be held back by such obstacles and would, as the wild northern outsider in the gang, continue to profit in the post-revolutionary era.

While camp followers or *soldaderas* had long been a fixture on Mexico's battlefields (Salas 1990: 11), the Mexican Revolution (1910-1920) is significant in that for the first time in Mexico's history, large numbers of women took part in the armed struggle, not just as companions to male soldiers, but as combatants. Sometimes they rose to become leaders of battalions.¹ Many more were involved 'as coronelas and generalas and rieleras' (ASU 2009).² However, despite this record and the willingness of many troop battalions on all sides of the Revolution to accept help from *soldaderas* and *soldadas*³, their role was, it seems, downplayed in official historiography following the conflict.⁴ This reflects the way that the existence of

1 Critics dispute the numbers of women who rose to become leaders of armies. Elena Poniatowska (1999: 20) indicates that in comparison to the *soldaderas* or camp followers, female band leaders were relatively few, but Anita Brenner, who witnessed some of the fighting, disagrees and has insisted that 'casi todas las tropas tenían una coronada o capitana famosa' (Brenner in Poniatowska, 24: 1999).

2 According to the *Diccionario de la Real Academia Española*, *riellero/riellera* was a term that came into usage during the Revolution to describe a person who worked on the railways (RAE 2010).

3 Karen Anel Botello Verzañez distinguishes between a *soldadera*, who accompanied a soldier, often as a cook, cleaner and companion, and a *soldada*, who actively fought in battle (2008: 10- 11). David E. Jones adds that female warriors who rode collectively in a battalion were known as *guachía* (1997: 100). Elizabeth Salas however claims that to distinguish between a *soldada* and *soldadera* is often unhelpful in the context of the Revolution. With constantly changing battle lines, circumstances dictated that in the heat of a battle a *soldadera* may have to take up arms to survive, while female soldiers might take on a caring role to the soldiers in their troop (1990: 73). However, fighting and looking after the domestic needs of the troop were not the extent of the roles taken on by women. Botello Verzañez emphasises the breadth of their work as 'participantes en complots, sirvieron para mandar correos, telegrafistas, espías, cargaron con armas, abastecían de comida a la tropa, buscaban alimento, ropa y medicinas, fueron enfermeras, hijas, esposas y madres' (2008: 12).

⁴ This lack of published information on the input of the *soldaderas* and *soldadas* during the Revolution has been counterbalanced in the last twenty five years or so with a resurgence of interest in these women and a subsequent 'uncovering' of their actions during the Revolution. Many distinguished Mexican cultural critics, such as Elena Poniatowska

bandidas in general has been largely suppressed in post-conquest Latin American history (Chang-Rodríguez 1981: 99, Poniatowska 1999: 17, Soto 1979: 27, Botello Verzañez 2008: 12). It is perhaps unsurprising that female participants should have been ignored in official records. Even during the Revolution some generals 'insisted that women brought bad luck' and, like Francisco Villa, tried to minimise their involvement (Poniatowska 1999: 17). Others, such as Venustiano Carranza, were keen to exploit female fighting prowess during the Revolution, but also to expel women from their armies once the conflict was over. This culminated in the formal banishment of women from the federal army in 1925.⁵ General Joaquín Amaro, who passed the law, reportedly considered *soldaderas* 'como principal causa del vicio, las enfermedades, el crimen, el desorden' (Chang-Rodríguez 1981: 99). Many women combatants sought recognition as official veterans of the Revolution, which would give them not only 'social prestige' but the right to 'tangible benefits', such as a pension (Rocha 2007: 16). However, this was a protracted process and only a handful were successful in being awarded the title of *veteranas*. This acknowledgment of their services to the Revolution by the Mexican Ministry of National Defence was a limited gesture, and one which did not reflect the full extent of female participation.

Such prejudice has led to historians and critics seeking to redress the balance, with coverage of women in the Revolution undergoing a resurgence in recent decades. However, perhaps in an effort to counterbalance negative representations of women during the Revolution, much contemporary criticism has tended towards unbridled praise of female revolutionaries. Both Elena Poniatowska and Karen Anel

(1999) and Carlos Monsiváis (2006) have highlighted the positive and significant contribution to the Revolution of *soldaderas* and *soldadas*.

⁵ Raquel Chang-Rodríguez states that women were formally banished from the federal army in 1925, when Joaquín Amaro 'reformó el ejército y hizo lo que esperaba de él: prohibió la presencia de las soldaderas en los cuarteles' (1981: 99). But Martha Eva Rocha gives an even earlier date, of 1917, 'when women were expelled from the military as an institution' (2007: 17). One reason for the discrepancy could be that although women were officially banned from 1917, this was not strictly enforced until the 1920s when the Revolution was over.

Botello Verzañez stress the critical role that women played in maintaining the Revolution, by providing care and sustenance to troops (1999: 14-15 and 2008: 15). In fact, for Poniatowska, 'sin las soldaderas no hay Revolución Mexicana: ellas la mantuvieron vivas y fecundas, como a la tierra' (1999: 14). David E. Jones highlights the importance of the valiant and noble woman warriors of the Revolution (1997, 100-101). Meanwhile, Shirley Anne Soto and Julia Tuñón Pablos document the, often heroic, if ultimately unsuccessful, struggles of women for greater social and political rights during the course of the Revolution (1979: 29-36, 1987: 144-5). Several critics have nonetheless observed that popular culture, or at least the popular culture that has been promoted, for instance in *corridos* and murals, has also tended to compliment rather than criticise *soldaderas* (Coerver, Pasztor and Buffington 2004: 472, Castillo, 1998: 5). Benjamin C. King explains that 'in art and photography, *soldaderas* are most often valiant, yet feminine, warriors or tragic, earthy peasants' (King 2010). This glorification of *soldaderas* in culture has, it could be argued, contributed to their iconisation in the historiography of the Mexican Revolution, itself influenced by the powerful myth-making which continues to surround the armed struggle.

The Revolution was also notable in that it marked the first occasion that the female presence in an armed struggle in Mexico was documented by the newly available technology: in photography and on film reels. The involvement of women was also documented in more traditional forms, such as in the ballads or *corridos* about the conflict and in the literature about the Revolution.⁶ The literary prototypes ranged from Azuela's creation, the *bandida* la Pintada, in *Los de abajo* (1915), who will be examined in greater detail here, to the character of the feisty *coronela*, Angustias, in Francisco Rojas González's novel *La negra Angustias* (1944). There is also the

⁶ Some of the revolutionary *corridos* to feature women as the main protagonists are: 'La Adelita'; 'Las Huachas'; 'Las Comadres' and 'La Jesuita' (Botello Verzañez 2008: 2). The *corridos* represent women both positively and negatively, as a soldier's sweetheart in 'La Adelita', and as opportunists who have betrayed the cause of the Revolution in 'Las Huachas', which refers pejoratively to women judged to have prostituted themselves to enemy *federales* or *huertistas*.

protective mother-figure in Nellie Campobello's *Cartucho* (1931) and *Las manos de mamá* (1937), who extends her care to injured *villistas* as well as to her own family. Despite these apparent variations, Elizabeth Salas believes that most revolutionary literature, together with other forms of cultural production, such as film and music, have, in their portrayal of *soldaderas* and *soldadas*, never succeeded in bypassing 'shallow notions of good and bad women' (Salas 1990: 85). Indeed, this is a charge she levels at Azuela's characterisation of women in *Los de abajo* (86). Thus we are all too often presented with a stark choice between 'sweetheart Adelitas or wizened old cucarachas', which does not accurately represent the full gamut of women's revolutionary experience (Mitchell 2007: 13). As mentioned above, with the passing of time, the image of the *soldadera* has become increasingly 'romanticised' (Salas 1990: 87). The *corrido* in particular has been credited with contributing to the mythology surrounding the Adelita type, who, according to the ballad of that name, faithfully served her *soldado* or Juan through the tribulations of the Revolution without complaint. Meanwhile, the battlefield exploits of *soldadas* are barely mentioned in *corridos* (Salas 1990: 91). When such a woman does make an appearance in novels or on film, often initially displaying leadership and strength, she is almost inevitably 'tamed' by a male protagonist, and as Salas puts it, 'becomes more like Adelita in her behaviour' (1990: 82). An example of a *mujer bravía* being neutralised in this way is the primary character Angustias, in Francisco Rojas González's 1944 novel, *La negra Angustias*. Angustias converts from a career as a successful *coronela* in the Revolution to the more traditional role of 'esposa sumisa y madre abnegada' (Chang-Rodríguez 1981: 101). In films that feature *soldaderas* the *hembra bravía* is, ultimately, also rarely allowed to prosper. For instance in *La Cucaracha* (1958), the tough *soldada* played by María Félix, who made her name in such roles, loses the hero, *coronel* Zeta, to the more traditional passive female character, Isabel. In *Enamorada* (1946), the character Beatriz, again played by Félix,

is won over to the cause of the Revolution by José Juan, a rebel commander, and follows him into the fray.⁷

Less palatable revolutionary women than the idealised Adelitas and reformed tough women discussed above undoubtedly did exist. There were those who enjoyed the fighting, swearing, drinking, violence and general mayhem that characterised the conflict as much as men, and could even be said to have outdone their menfolk in many of these activities. The character la Pintada, in Mariano Azuela's *Los de abajo* is one such example. In this reading of *Los de abajo*, through Pintada, the figure of the *mala mujer*, *bandida*, rebel and even leader is re-inserted back into the discourse about women in the Mexican Revolution, a discourse that has become dominated by romanticised female stereotypes. The same could be said of José Clemente Orozco's 1928 engraving, 'La Cucaracha', an image that is unflattering to both men and women, revealing the lascivious excess of the Revolution, as prostitutes cavort with soldiers and a pistol is fired casually in the background. For Poniatowska, the women who populate the image are 'la viva imagen de la Pintada' (1999: 24). However, what is unusual about Pintada, in the context of the feisty *mujeres bravías* in the literature and culture of the Revolution, is that she does not change, to come under the authority of a male character, nor, after committing the murder of a fellow *soldadera*, does she even receive punishment. Pintada is allowed to walk away, 'muda y sombría, paso a paso' and we are told that 'nadie se atrevió a detenerla' (Azuela 1999: 183). And, distinct from la negra Angustias and María Félix's bandit characters, Pintada is shown not to be a noble bandit in that, unlike them, she is not motivated to enter the Revolution on the side of social justice. Pintada fights for purely selfish motivations: to loot and rob and take maximum advantage of the social and political disorder unleashed by the Revolution.

⁷ The plotline of *Enamorada* is described as 'akin to Shakespeare's *Taming of the Shrew*', in that it involves a headstrong women who is 'tamed' by a revolutionary commander and won over to the cause of social justice. In this way, the protagonist is seen to reject the *hacendado* class to which she belongs (ASU 2009).

As she says: 'Llega uno a cualquier parte y no tiene más que escoger la casa que le cuadre y ésa agarra sin pedirle licencia a naiden' (Azuela 1999: 150).

In many respects, Pintada is no worse than the rest of Demetrio Macías's gang. The gang members also enthusiastically partake of the looting and abuses which characterise Parts Two and Three of the novel. However, whilst we see the gang in Part One relatively unsullied by the Revolution and supported by the country people, the *serranos*, we only ever witness Pintada, from her arrival to her departure over the course of Part Two, involved in destructive behaviour. This lack of redeeming features perhaps contributes to a more damning image of Pintada than the rest of the gang, even though her conduct in Part Two is consistent with their behaviour. By introducing Pintada and fellow northerner el güero Margarito, at the start of the band's moral decline, Azuela seems to be indicating that they in some way precipitate this decline, as a corrupting influence. It is also significant that, ejected from the group, Pintada presumably survives the Revolution, unlike the other gang members. Therefore, with her capacity for self-advancement she could, like the other opportunist in the novel, Luis Cervantes, stand to benefit in the post-revolutionary era. As a northerner and outsider quite alien to *campesino*, Demetrio's experience, Pintada can also be seen as representative of the post-revolutionary northern elite who would go on to grasp power in Mexico. In this reading, Azuela, leaves us with the possibility of the *mala mujer* from the north and the opportunist living to prosper in the war-torn landscape of post-revolutionary Mexico. Conversely, the noble bandit Demetrio and the naïve Camila, who more truly represent the intrinsic values of the Revolution, the struggle for freedom of the underdog from the cruel dominion of the *hacendado*, perish. It was an image that Azuela, embittered though he was by, as he saw it, the abuses and betrayal of the original ideals of the Revolution, did not care to develop. The spectre of la Pintada however, and others like her, 'on the loose and on their own in Mexico', haunts the novel and is unresolved (Castillo 1998: 5).

La Pintada is first introduced to us at the beginning of Part Two of *Los de abajo* during the raucous celebrations following Demetrio's victory at Zacatecas. She is described as 'una muchacha de carillos teñidos de carmín, de cuello y brazos muy trigueños y de burdísimo continente' who immediately targets Demetrio, the man of the hour, and flashes 'unos ojos lascivos' at him (Azuela 1999: 146). This identifies the character as a likely harlot and sure enough, she and Demetrio leave the party together 'abrazados y dando tumbas' (149). In this short scene, Pintada proves that she is more than a match for Demetrio, whom we are told, 'no pudo sostener la mirada furiosamente provocativa de la muchacha y bajó los ojos' (147).

In Pintada, Azuela presents us with a woman entirely without virtue. She is vicious, manipulative, greedy, promiscuous, jealous of her female rival, Camila, and finally, violent without remorse.⁸ This characterisation could be criticised as being overly negative and one-dimensional. However, it is important to note that Azuela, like muralist, Orozco, witnessed the unfolding of the Revolution first-hand. Pintada was drawn from reality, from the author's encounter with a *soldada* who 'tenía fama de lúbrica y se contaba que había provocado muchos lances sangrientos' (Azuela 1974: 132). Meanwhile, the other, more benign women, such as the ingenue, Camila, and gang leader Demetrio Macías's wife, were, as Azuela explains, 'de mi mera invención y como las necesité para la construcción del libro' (134). Added to Azuela's perceptions, are the accounts of the exploits of real-life *soldadas*, such as Margarita Neri. Neri was a rebel commander who led over a thousand soldiers through Tabasco and Chiapas in 1910, vowing to 'decapitate [President] Díaz' and leaving a trail of destruction in her wake' (Jones, 1997: 101). Another *soldada*, known, like Pintada, only by her sobriquet, la Coronela, possibly in an attempt to

⁸ Pintada, presented as an irredeemable *mala mujer*, seems to invite critics to list her flaws. Mónica Mansour writes that she is 'vulgar, intrigante, envidiosa, infiel, autoritaria, tracionera y violenta y, desde luego, ladrona y abusiva' (1988: 265). For Clive Griffin she is 'sexually provocative, syphilitic, forthright in speech and impulsive in action, jealous, a liar, easily moved to laughter by trickery and others' misfortunes' (1993: 67).

hide a bandit past, was as infamous off the battlefield as on it.⁹ According to historian Anna Macías, this *soldada* ‘smoked, drank, gambled and feared no man’ (1982: 43). With these historical figures allied to Azuela’s impressions of revolutionary women, the reader is confronted with an uncomfortable possibility. It is that the brazen Pintada was a more truthful image of reality, in the tumult of war, than the noble *soldaderas* and *soldadas* commonly propagated by Poniatowska and others in contemporary criticism.

That said, Pintada cannot be described as a fully realised character of any psychological depth, and in *Los de abajo* Azuela does not develop any of his female characters in this way. Clive Griffin believes that this reflects women’s subordinate position in the Revolution (1993: 66), but it also reflects the wider Mexican cultural tendency to dichotomise women into either virgin or whore. The division was memorably elaborated by Octavio Paz who described the expected female model as a passive being whose function was ‘hacer imperar la ley y el orden, la piedad y la dulzura’ (1994: 41). This female type could be personified in “‘la abnegada madre”, de “la novia que espera” y del ídolo hermético, seres estáticos’ (43). These are roles which can be seen to apply to Demetrio’s long-suffering wife and the innocent *soldadera*, Camila. Their polar opposite is of course Paz’s ‘mala mujer’, a good fit for la Pintada in that, ‘la “mala” va y viene, busca a los hombres, los abandona [...] Actividad e impudicia se alían en ella y acaban por petrificar en su alma’ (43). Between these extremes there seems to be little in-between. Demetrio’s wife remains silent, unnamed, passive, whilst Camila is the epitome of the benign *soldadera*: a helpmate and companion to Demetrio. In contrast, Pintada embodies the active and malevolent *soldada*.

⁹ Both the Arizona State University webpage on *bandidas* (<http://noblebandits.asu.edu/Topics/RevWom.html>), and the critic, Karen Anel Verzañez Botello (2008: 11), ascribe the common use of pseudonyms for female rebels during the Revolution to the need to disguise a criminal and possibly bandit past prior to the conflict.

Yet whilst Azuela creates these types, he also to some extent undoes them in the figure of the disease-ridden young girl that the rebels encounter in one of their raids in Part Two, Chapter Two. She is ‘una chiquilla de doce años, ya marcada con manchas cobrizas en la frente y en los brazos’ (Azuela 1999: 151). This child should be innocent and pure, but is already well used, a casualty of the horrors of the Revolution, where rape was commonplace. The events of the Revolution therefore dissolve Azuela’s whore/virgin dichotomy and the female characters themselves become projections of male anxieties. There is a sense of innocence lost during the Revolution, where women are seen primarily as the spoils of war.¹⁰ Luis Cervantes, the middle-class *curro* who has joined the gang, finds that his intended young teenage girlfriend, ‘una muchacha de rara belleza’, soon becomes prey to certain members of Demetrio’s band during the looting of a grand home in Part Two, Chapter Three (154). Cervantes then procures Camila for Demetrio and even the indomitable Pintada is half-jokingly offered to a peasant in exchange for maize, as el Meco cries ‘ai traímos a la Pintada, y te la pasamos al costo’ (180). As for Demetrio’s wife, the contrast between idealisation and reality could not be starker. Demetrio imagines a wife of ‘aquellas líneas dulces y de infinita mansedumbre para el marido’ (176), but instead, when he finally sees her after a gap of two years he is met with ‘su mujer envejecida como si diez o veinte años hubieran transcurrido ya’ (206). We can only imagine the misfortunes to have befallen Demetrio’s wife, but as Niamh Thornton comments, this incident is an indictment of the way the Revolution has breached the supposedly safe space of the home and illustrates that no woman or child is immune from the ravages of war (2006: 67). Similarly, Camila, the embodiment of virtue, falls victim to the malice of Pintada, who is jealous of the affection developing between the *soldadera* and Demetrio and angry that she, Pintada, has been sidelined. Camila successfully intervenes on behalf of a peasant whose grain has been taken by the rebels, and admonishes Demetrio for ignoring his

¹⁰ This idea has been explored by Juanita Barreto Gama in relation to recent factional violence in Colombia, where she has observed that ‘los cuerpos de las mujeres son parte integrante del botín de guerra’ (Barreto Gama 2001: 87). The concept of women as war booty then can be seen to apply across countries in Latin America and across historical epochs.

complaint, '¡Ande, don Demetrio, no sea usted también mal alma!: déle una orden pa que le devuelvan su maíz!' (Azuela 1999: 180). Yet in the next chapter, Camila's protest about güero Margarito's cruel treatment of a prisoner makes no impact, apart from to provoke Pintada, and in fact Camila is last seen dying at the hand of Pintada, 'arroyando sangre a borbotones' (183). Azuela here seems to be implying that there is no place for human, let alone feminine, goodness within the context of the Revolution. The violence of the Revolution is inscribed on the violated, stained bodies of women which symbolically reflect *la madre patria*, the mother country. The feminine model that Paz articulates, 'ser que encarna los elementos estables y antiguos del universo: la tierra madre y virgen' (1994: 39) is blown away by the eruption of the Revolution into the lives of women of all classes.

The one female character to survive and indeed thrive in such an upside-down world is the bandit, Pintada. As Karen Anel Botello Verzañez has surmised:

Se cree así mismo que muchas mujeres preferían vivir la difícil vida de soldadera a sufrir una vida de una mujer 'soltera' en casa, propensa a ser robada, abusada o violada por los rebeldes (2008: 9).

Elena Poniatowka agrees that 'a las mujeres robadas o violadas, prácticamente no les quedaba de otra que convertirse en soldaderas' (1999: 15). Pintada has grasped this call to arms, although she too bears the tell-tale signs of syphilis, 'las manchas cobrizas de la avería' (Azuela 1999: 160). Whether she has suffered previous abuses we do not know, but it is clear that if she has ever been a victim she is not going to continue to be one. Some of the most memorable lines about the changed circumstances of the underdogs fall to Pintada who remarks, '¿pa quién jue la revolución? ¿Pa los catrines? Si ahora nosotros vamos a ser los meros catrines' (150). Her philosophy is one of naked opportunism: enjoy the fruits of the Revolution, the looting, robbery and violence, while it lasts.

Nor is Pintada a mere follower of band leader, Demetrio. This character is loyal to no cause but her own and, unlike in most traditional war narratives, she cannot be dismissed as simply 'sexual interest or prostitute' (Kumaraswami and Thornton, 2007: 17).⁸ As Clive Griffin argues, the novel itself soon reflects the significant impact of the arrival of this character at the beginning of Part Two, by describing the band as 'la Pintada y sus compañeros' (Azuela in Griffin 1993: 67).⁹ This is borne out in the narrative, as Pintada barks out orders during the looting in Part Two, Chapter Two '¡Epa, tú, Pancracio! ... Anda a traerme unas medias azules de mis "avances"' (Azuela 1999: 153), and in the next chapter again "'Epa, tú, Pancracio, anda a traerme un tercio de alfalfa pa mi yegua" - ordenó secamente la Pintada' (156). So adept is she at taking charge of the looting, her sometime companion, güero Margarito mutters that, 'siempre nos gana los mejores "avances"' (156). Pintada's machinations continue, as she helps procure Cervantes's 'novia' for Margarito and plots for Camila to leave the band. Demetrio appears unable to assert himself and admits that 'no tengo valor para despacharla' (167). Even faced with death for murdering Camila in full view of the band, Pintada is defiant as we discover that 'dos soldados se arrojaron sobre la Pintada que, esgrimiendo el puñal, no les permitió tocarla' (183). She challenges Demetrio instead, insisting 'mátame tú', but once again he falters and we read that 'sus ojos se nublaron, vaciló, dio un paso atrás' (183).

In this scene and countless others Pintada, in her aggressive behaviour, outdoes the rest of the band. She departs the novel spouting obscenities that make even the soldiers blush and we learn that:

⁸ This is contrary to the assessment of Libardo Torres that Pintada is 'leal a Demetrio, pero al mismo tiempo quiere satisfacer sus instintos con una participación en la historia' (2001: 38). Her involvement with Demetrio cannot really be described as 'loyalty', as it is based entirely on self-advancement, and, when so inspired, Pintada openly defies Demetrio, such when he orders her to leave the band in Part Two, Chapter Twelve.

⁹ Carlos Monsiváis agrees with the assertion that Pintada is subject to no other character in the novel when he remarks that 'she is a woman fully in possession of herself' (1997: 7).

La Pintada insultó a Camila, a Demetrio, a Luis Cervantes y a cuantos le vinieron a las mientes, con tal energía y novedad, que la tropa oyó insolencias que no había sospechado siquiera (Azuela 1999: 182).

Even though, unlike many female fighters during the Revolution, Pintada does not dress as a man, her masculinisation is obvious from the first moment she greets Demetrio, ‘con fuerza varonil’ (148).¹⁰ In this sense Pintada is something of a paradox. She is described wearing heavy make-up and the stolen finery of rich women, ‘lucía vestido de seda y grandes arracadas de oro’, combined with the rather macho accoutrements of the hardened soldier, ‘revólver al pecho y una cartuchera cruzada sobre la cabeza de la silla’ (160). Her exaggerated masculinisation has been ascribed to Judith Butler’s concept of ‘gender as performance not essence’ (Harris, 2008: conference proceedings).¹¹ In this reading, Pintada has transgressed ‘gender normative behaviour’ to survive and progress (Thornton 2006: 70). This is necessary in the context of the Revolution where, what has been described by Max Parra as a macho ‘war culture’, dominates (2005: 28). Such a culture requires that its men be ‘decisive, dominant and courageous’ and that to survive, ‘a Mexican woman must behave like a man’ (Macías 1982: 158) - cue the aggressive behaviour of Pintada. Whilst Azuela does not provide sufficient character development to ascertain to what extent Pintada’s behaviour is innate and to what extent learned or ‘performed’, the extreme circumstances of the Revolution go some way to explaining her attitude. This is gender as survival. Octavio Paz also alludes to this concept when he writes that, ‘por obra del sufrimiento, las mujeres se vuelven como los hombres: invulnerables, impasibles y estoicas’ (Paz 1994: 42). He re-

¹⁰ Debra Castillo (1998: 4), Shirley Anne Soto, (1979: 27), and Julia Tuñón Pablos (1987: 134) are a few of the numerous critics that mention the common occurrence of women dressing as men during the Revolution.

¹¹ To expand on Butler’s thesis, she writes that ‘gender is a project which has cultural survival as its end, the term *strategy* better suggests the situation of duress under which gender performance always and variously occurs. Hence, as a strategy of survival within compulsory systems, gender is a performance with clearly punitive consequences’ (Butler 2002: 177).

emphasises this a few lines later by stating that 'la "mala" es dura, impía, independiente, como el "macho"' (42-43).

Pintada is shown to need this stoicism, as being female, her position in a bandit gang is always to some extent at risk, as is Camila's, who joins the group only on Demetrio's whim for a new companion. Anastasio Montañés, Demetrio's trusted *compadre*, and then Pancracio, both emphasise the inherent suspicion towards women in a man's world when they each warn Demetrio in Part One about involving women in the lives of the gang.¹² Pancracio cites his own bitter experiences as evidence, '¡Pa las lepras y rasguños con que me han marcao el pellejo! ¡Mal ajo pa ellas! Son el enemigo malo' (Azuela 1999: 138). The message is clear: women are not welcome in this male space and are easily disposable. Pintada must assert herself to remain and does so, in large part by mimicking male behaviour.

Pintada's promiscuity also reflects that of her male counterparts, as she divides her attention between güero Margarito and Demetrio.¹³ The narrator's disapproval of the rebels' lustful adventures is revealed as he presents them as grotesques, often likening them to animals. Demetrio and Pintada are 'dos perros desconocidos' (147), Demetrio again, lusting after the young girl in Chapter Fourteen, is 'como toro a media plaza' (157), and Cordoniz, with his twelve-year-old, 'buscaba su presa', like a wild animal going for the kill (151). Once more, such behaviour is just a reflection of the changed sexual mores of the times. Whilst Poniatowska

¹² Mónica Mansour draws attention to these passages (1988: 265). She claims that they appear to be commenting obliquely on la Pintada and her negative impact on the gang. However, this is not possible as both passages appear in Part One and Pintada does not enter the narrative until Part Two.

¹³ Diane Marting writes about the tendency in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Latin American fiction to demonise the 'sexual woman', that is the female character who has a series of lovers (2001: 33). She argues persuasively that at that time 'active female sexuality was unacceptable' and therefore 'most sexual women characters in pre-1960s novels were outlaws, whether prostitutes or not, at least metaphorically' (33). In the case of Pintada, who is both a literal outlaw and prostitute, it is difficult to detect bias against her purely because of her sexual escapades. She is presented as being no worse than the male bandits in this respect, in that all of them lose any sense of propriety or control. Her promiscuity is just one of many facets of her behaviour that Azuela presents as deeply distasteful, but it is not, from my point of view, the deciding factor in the negative portrayal of this character.

claims that most *soldaderas* were loyal to one soldier and were not prostitutes (1999: 20), other evidence contradicts this. Apart from the fact that the high casualty rate ensured that *soldaderas* often, out of necessity, took up with more than one *soldado* as a domestic and sexual companion during the course of the Revolution (Tuñón Pablos 1987: 140, Reed 112-115: 2006), prostitution itself grew exponentially. Some scholars estimate that ‘more than half the women of Mexico were forced to turn to prostitution to survive’, though such estimates are speculative given the lack of secure records (Castillo 1998: 4). For Azuela, a child of the Porfiriato, an era when gender norms were enforced, this must have been striking. The genteel prostitution of the Porfiriato, which was kept behind closed doors to maintain an aura of respectability, and which Azuela himself sampled as a medical student in late nineteenth-century Guadalajara (González Llerenas 2006: 45-46), was swept away by the explosion of sex and violence unleashed by the Revolution. In the social turmoil which followed, ‘many Mexican women [shook] loose from their traditional roles’ for the first time (Castillo 1998: 5). Certainly the passive prostitutes of Azuela’s experience, whom he documented in an early diary, *Registro* (1889-97), were now just as likely to be replaced by the brazen women personified by la Pintada.¹⁴ In tandem with the progression of the Revolution and the rise of female independence, feminist leagues and organisations flourished, promoting women’s rights and suffrage in an era when they were not considered full Mexican citizens (Botello Verzañez 2008: 3, Soto 1979: 21-23, Tuñón Pablos 1987: 144-145).¹⁵ A character

14 Azuela’s *Registro* ‘details his encounters with young prostitutes in Guadalajara’ (Castillo 1998: 166). He lists his experiences with them and encourages the women to tell him stories for his diary. However, it is not concern for their plight that characterises the *Registro*, but rather a desire, as Debra Castillo sees it, to collect interesting stories for his compendium (1998: 168). Azuela certainly seems to dominate these encounters and the women, eager to please, try to cater to his every whim, though he is often unimpressed with their storytelling efforts. He writes disparagingly of one, ‘su caída aparece a mis ojos vulgar, su estado no puede ilusionarme, y ya torturará su cabeza con las historias por contar, escogiendo la más verosímil’ (Azuela Obras completas III 1960: 1201). Outlining his view of how a prostitute should behave, Azuela writes that she should be at the complete disposition of the client, both physically and intellectually, ‘la mujer pública debe poner su inteligencia lo mismo que su cuerpo a disposición de los clientes, y jugar un juego parecido al que juegan los muchachos. “¿Quieres ruido?” “Pues ruido”. “¿Silencio?” “¡Pues silencio!” ’ (1205).

15 The nascent womens’ rights movement in Mexico took root in the Porfiriato with the growth of feminist clubs such as ‘Hijas de Anáhuac’, later to be called, ‘Hijas de Cuauhtémoc’, which opposed President Díaz as well as promoting ‘la igualdad política, económica, física, intelectual y moral de la mujer’ (Tuñón Pablos 1987: 144). Such organisations flourished during the Revolution with feminist movements developing such as ‘Regeneración y Concordia’, as well as the feminist journals *Mujer Moderna*, and *La Mujer Mexicana* (ASU 2009, Tuñón Pablos 1987: 145). The renowned liberal and

like Pintada is not remotely interested in female solidarity or in any other political cause for the common good, but she is somehow indicative of the freedoms grasped by many women during the Revolution. Azuela, in his portrayal, seems ill at ease with this new world and uncomfortable with the freedoms such women possess.¹⁶

We may expect that women like Pintada, unnatural as they are to the sensibilities of the narrator in *Los de abajo*, deserve some form of punishment, but Azuela does not inflict this fate on the *bandida*. This is unusual in the context of *bandidas* in Latin American literature and rogue women in the literature and culture of the Revolution. Pintada falls squarely into the category of what has been described as the ‘Carmen archetype’, that is ‘the literary incarnation of the femme fatale’ (Jotcham 1999: xvi). However, unlike the character Carmen, in Prosper Mérimée’s 1845 novel of that name, Pintada does not die, nor is she seen to atone for her crimes. In allowing this character to act with impunity, Azuela has perhaps used her as an allegory for the corrupt course that the Revolution had taken, its original ideals of social justice prostituted to those most able and willing to take maximum advantage of the disorder generated by the conflict.¹⁷ Here it is useful to consider the words of the disillusioned General Solís in *Los de abajo*, who identifies those who would poison the hopes and ideals of the Revolution when he comments that, ‘hay hombres que no son sino pura hiel...Y esa hiel va cayendo gota a gota en el alma, y todo lo amarga y todo lo envenena’ (Azuela 1999: 134). This scene almost

feminist journal, *Vesper*, established by *zapatistas* Elisa Acuña y Roseta and Juana Belén Gutiérrez de Mendoza in 1901, was also influential during and after the Revolution and attracted praise from intellectuals such as the Flores Magón brothers (Botello Verzañez 2008: 7).

¹⁶ Max Parra believes that Azuela registers his discomfort with women like Pintada, by rapidly ‘eliminating her in the most melodramatic scene of the novel’ (2005: 118).

¹⁷ An interesting counterpoint to Pintada in this respect is the character Angustias in *La negra Angustias* (1944) by Francisco Rojas González. Angustias’s role-changing in becoming a submissive wife to an abusive partner after commanding her own battalion in the Revolution, is indicative, according to critic, Raquel Chang-Rodríguez of the wider failure of women and the peasantry to achieve improved rights during the Revolution. Chang-Rodríguez writes that, ‘la Revolución y la mujer, sin otra alternativa, se someterán [...] De la misma forma que Angustias fue sometida por su pretendiente menos digno, la Revolución has sido cambiada y prostituida por sus hijos más aprovechados’ (1981: 103). Using this interpretation, one of those individuals to take advantage of the situation can be seen to be the character la Pintada in *Los de abajo*.

immediately precedes Part Two, with the entrance of Pintada and her partner-in-crime, güero Margarito. In the space of fourteen chapters, both of these characters succeed, as Solís has articulated, in poisoning the tight-knit band from Moyahua, Zacatecas with their brash, northern ways and capacity for sadistic violence.¹⁸ It can be no coincidence that these outsiders arrive at the point at which Demetrio Macías's rebel gang starts to unravel and fall prey to temptation and corruption. By the time Pintada and Margarito depart the narrative the damage has been done, and Demetrio's rebels are on an unstoppable slide to oblivion. We discover that el güero commits suicide, leaving the two most opportunistic characters, Luis Cervantes and Pintada, still on the loose and poised to re-appear perhaps and turn events to their advantage. The triumph of Pintada, a *norteña*, who has taken control and bewildered the hero, Demetrio, could be seen as a portent of events to come, with the takeover of Mexico by the northern generals following the Revolution, and the subsequent social, political and industrial modernisation of the nation.

It is difficult to imagine a character like Pintada relinquishing her new found status as one of the *catrines* and returning to the life of a downtrodden peasant. However, the Revolution did not, in the main, deliver on its promise of increased suffrage and rights for women, and many former *soldadas* and *soldaderas* suffered as a consequence of being 'excluded from the official transcript of war', which often ignored their significant contribution (Mitchell 2007: 13).¹⁹ Whilst Pintada's contribution to the Revolution is self-serving and she gives no notion of being interested in Mexican women's struggle for collective recognition, the abiding impression she leaves is of survivor not victim. We can be sure that a character like

18 Clive Griffin has commented on this aspect of la Pintada, seeing her as 'the epitome of the interloper from the North'. He also believes that Demetrio's contact with outsiders hasten both his and his band's decline (1993: 53).

19 Most scholars concur that the immediate post-revolutionary era did not provide the gains in social, political and economic suffrage to women that had been hoped for (Botello Verzañez 2008: 3, Soto 1979: 33-36, Franco 1989: 102-106, Monsiváis 2006: 18). Although divorce was legalised in 1914, women did not get the vote in Mexico until 1953 (Soto 1979: 33-6 and 107).

Pintada would find an avenue for her rebelliousness, if not through political activism then perhaps through personal expression. One such route for young working-class women in the immediate post-revolutionary era was to adopt the styles and attitudes of the flappers or *chicas modernas*. These women scandalised polite Mexican society in the 1920s with their short hair and dresses, and supposedly dubious sexual morals.²⁰

Regardless of what becomes of Pintada, it is clear that, despite the rather limited roles allotted to women in *Los de abajo* – that of *mujer abnegada* and *mala mujer* – this character makes a lasting impression on the reader and continues to exert an influence on the narrative even after she has exited the story. In Pintada, Azuela forcefully rejects the stock image of the faithful Adelita and the tamed *mujer bravía*, which have proliferated in so much cultural production about women in the Revolution. With the survival and defiance of this feisty northern rebel, Azuela has perhaps pre-empted the post-revolutionary power shift that would occur, with the transfer of authority to the northern elite. In Pintada we have a prototype for those who would prosper during and after the Revolution: the opportunist and the adventurer.

²⁰ Patience A. Schell writes that the *Unión de Damas Católicas Mexicanas* were particularly offended by the flappers, denouncing the typical *chica moderna* as an ‘irresponsible, superficial, sexual creature’ who partook of ‘scandalous dances and immoral fashions’ (quoted in Schell 2007: 111 and 109).

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