

# WOMEN AND PRINT CULTURE

A Critical Exploration of the Archives of the  
Border Region of Mexico and the United States



DONNA M. KABALEN VANEK &  
MARÍA TERESA MIJARES CERVANTES

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Recovering the U.S. Hispanic Literary Heritage




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21 22 23

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## Contents

**Acknowledgments, ix**

**Introduction, xiii**

### **Part 1. Exploring the Archives: Women and Written Culture in Northeastern Mexico during the Late Nineteenth Century**

“*La Violeta*, 1887-1894: Un espacio para la enunciación femenina en el noreste de México,” María Teresa Mijares Cervantes .....3

“Women Writers and their Place in the History of Monterrey, Nuevo León: *La Violeta. Quincenal de Literatura, Social, Moral y de Variedades* (1887-1894),” Donna M. Kabalen Vanek .....27

“The Discursive Construction of the Female Figure in Nineteenth-Century Periodical Publications in Northern Mexico,” María Teresa Mijares Cervantes and Nora Paola González Solís.....51

“Mujeres tamaulipecas: vida cotidiana y literatura en el siglo XIX,” Francisco Ramos Aguirre .....75

### **Part 2. The Cultural History of Women and Print Culture**

“The Social Apologetics of *La Revista Católica*: Church, Race, Gender and Mexicanidad,” A. Gabriel Meléndez .....97

“Miradas sobre las mujeres prostitutas que se asoman a los archivos Municipal de Saltillo y Generales Estatales de Coahuila y Nuevo León (1890 a 1935),” María de Guadalupe Sánchez de la O and Mixely Martínez Mata .....131

“María Luisa Garza (Loreley) y Hortensia Elizondo: Modernismo y naturalismo escrito por mujeres en el diario <i>El Porvenir</i> de Monterrey (1929-1933),” Paulo de la Cruz Alvarado .....	153
“Monterrey Industrialism and the Construction of a “Community of Knowledge”: <i>Trabajo y Ahorro</i> (1921-present),” Donna Marie Kabalen Vanek and Roberto Lozano Mansilla .....	181

### **Part 3. A Transcultural View of Women Writers in Northern Mexico and Texas**

“Poéticas de la identidad narrativa: Subjetividad femenina en los textos de las hermanas Villarreal (1904-1944),” Griselda Zárate .....	211
“Writing Transnational Life Experiences on the Border: Leonor Villegas de Magnón and Jovita Idar,” Donna M. Kabalen Vanek .....	233

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—Donna Kabalen de Bichara

\* \* \*

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—María Teresa Mijares Cervantes

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reflected in the newspapers and magazines produced in northeastern Mexico and Texas, constitute the main interest of this project.

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*The Editors*

*Donna Marie Kabalen Vanek*

*María Teresa Mijares Cervantes*

## Introduction

*Women and Print Culture: A Critical Exploration of the Archives of the Border Region of Mexico and the United States* is based on research that has focused on the examination of periodicals published in the US-Mexico border region during the period between 1850 and 1950 in an effort to bring to light those periodicals on both sides of the border that published essays and literary texts intended for a female reading audience. Positioned in the domestic space, nineteenth-century Mexican women and those of Hispanic descent who lived in the United States assumed a social function inherited from the eighteenth century and the ideas of the Enlightenment. They were assigned the role as man's companion and their responsibility was to care for the home and educate their children. Historically, the link between women and the written word had been through the practice of collective and religious reading. From the nineteenth century and beyond, although collective reading continued to be practiced and religious themes continued to abound, Mexican women, particularly in the privileged classes, had access to secular reading. Editors eventually oriented their publications to capture the interest of an audience of female readers who supposedly required guidance in their choice of reading material. Throughout the latter half of the nineteenth and the early decades of the twentieth century, a number of periodicals were dedicated to the education of the "fair sex." If at first the male voice predominated in these publications, over time women began participating more and more

actively producing their own written material such as poetry, essays, and short stories and their writing was normally introduced in pages explicitly dedicated to them or in literary sections. Finally, during the latter decades of the late nineteenth century, women began to direct, edit, and publish, magazines and newspapers directed and written entirely by women.

Moreover, one of the important areas of US-Mexico border studies includes the concept of transnational literature that reflects the experience of the flow of ideological paradigms, social practices, ideals, and identities. The literary production by authors writing from border spaces, from both sides of the Rio Grande, presents an imaginary related to identity and cultural practices. As such, there are certain aspects of identity and culture that are maintained despite the geopolitical division of space. These elements, embodied in Hispanic newspapers and magazines that circulated in the US border region, and those published in northeastern Mexico, constitute the focus of this volume.

The study of written material produced for women and by women in the US-Mexico border region is of primary importance for understanding its intellectual and cultural history, especially as a means to further an understanding of the role of women in the history of Mexican and border cultural life. The cultural dimensions related to the education of women are articulated in hundreds of newspapers and magazines that contribute to the construction of gender ideology. The tension between a journalistic vision that promotes an imaginary of the ideal woman together with women's desire to write their own experience, are elements that require extensive archival research. The ten essays that follow are based on the exploration of archival collections, newspapers, and magazines, and they center on the production of discursive meaning that is articulated in various types of texts that reveal the history of beliefs about women and their role in society.

The scholarly interventions that make up this volume are based on archival research and offer detailed discussions of various types of periodical publications and unpublished poetry that contribute to the history of the Mexico-US border region. The essays are grouped

under three thematic subheadings. The four essays included in the first section, "Exploring the Archives: Women and Written Culture in Northeastern Mexico during the Late Nineteenth Century," analyze the role of women in terms of ideology, power, subjectivity and discursive practices in periodicals of the period, which were recovered as a result of extensive archival research. In her contribution to this volume, María Teresa Mijares highlights the work performed by Ercilia García and María Garza González as the two leading voices of "*La Violeta: Semanario de Literatura, Moral y de Variedades*" (1887-1889; 1893-1894), a recently recovered periodical from a private collection. These women were active, not only in maintaining the periodical afloat as editors and directors, but also through their contributions of essays, poetry and prose texts. In her study Mijares includes a history of the materiality of the periodical as well as its editorial practices. She also proposes that the first number of this periodical may well have appeared on September 15, 1887, although that issue has not been recovered as of yet. She affirms that the newspaper had wide circulation with subscribers not only from the state of Nuevo León, but also from neighboring Tamaulipas and Coahuila, as well as Texas.

In her essay, Donna Kabalen analyzes feminine subjectivity through three articles published in "*La Violeta: Semanario de Literatura, Moral y de Variedades*" (1887-1889; 1893-1894). This periodical was dedicated to the female reader and produced by women writers such as Ercilia García, María Garza González, Manuela Martínez Hopman, all of whom were from Monterrey, Mexico. Other contributors included prominent poets such as Julia G. de la Peña de Ballesteros, and María M. Browne, from Matamoros, and Montemorelos, respectively. Through the contributions of these and many other women writers, Kabalen emphasizes that they were able to insert themselves into Mexico's history, and most importantly as writing subjects who proposed their own view on education and the role of women in society. This newly conceived role included the education of women, but periodically made clear that this in no way would detract from those activities and skills appropriate for the private sphere of the home. Kabalen argues that the press during the

Porfiriato tended to be dominated by men who set a cultural agenda that imposed limits on women of late nineteenth-century society. *La Violeta*, however, contested these impositions through writings that underscored the significance of educating women beyond the realm of the home including instruction in the sciences, as their own right for intellectual enlightenment.

In “The Discursive Construction of the Female Figure in Nineteenth-Century Periodical Publications in Northern Mexico”, María Teresa Mijares and Nora Paola González analyze the use of discursive strategies in the press to portray a specific idea of the Mexican woman, one that stands in sharp contrast to that of women in the United States. Their study relies on a selection of texts published in periodicals such as *La Tertulia* (1864), *El Faro de Monterrey* (1865), *La Revista de Monterrey* (1883 and 1884) and *La Voz de Nuevo León* (1890-1899). Mijares and González point out that the perspectives of these periodicals mimicked continental European views, mostly Spanish and French, regarding the place and role of women in society through certain discursive strategies. The authors point out that the continental European vision stood in opposition to those of England and the United States, and these views were repeated in local newspapers. Moreover, editors, publishers, and contributors, such as Antonio Margil Cortés, Ignacio Martínez, and Desiderio Lagrange promoted the traditional role of Mexican women. Mijares and González further indicate that by the late nineteenth century, positivist discourse was incorporated in the press. Their discussion of the article “Breves consideraciones sobre la educación de la mujer Mexicana” (“Brief considerations on the education of Mexican women”) (1897), published in *La Voz de Nuevo León*, demonstrates a positivist viewpoint that justifies denying Mexican women the right to an education because they were considered as inferior beings, not only by men, but also by their counterparts in Europe and the United States.

Francisco Ramos Aguirre’s “Mujeres Tamaulipecas: Vida Cotidiana y Literatura en el Siglo XIX” is based on extensive archival research, and provides an historical overview of daily cultural practices during the nineteenth century as well as the literary and jour-

nalistic work produced by Ignacia Padilla de Piña (1838-1912) and Julia de la Peña de Ballesteros (1855-1928). Through an examination of travel narratives, archival information, and periodicals he highlights the activism carried out by a number of women in Tamaulipas during the War of Independence (1810-1821). In this direction Ramos Aguirre notes the insurgent efforts of brave women, notably Ysidora Ovalle, who was executed in 1814 and whose head was exhibited publicly in the Plaza of the town of Santa Barbara (currently Ocampo, Tamaulipas). Ramos Aguirre points out that after the Mexican War of Independence (1810-1821), foreign and national visitors to Tamaulipas narrated their impressions about women and culture in Tamaulipas. He also mentions Joel R. Poinsett from the United States, during the 1820's, and fashion photographer Louis de Planque, from Prussia, writer Manuel Payno, Guillermo Prieto, who served in the administration of President Benito Juárez (1858-1872), and Manuel Jacinto Guerra, an *hacendado* from the state of Jalisco. These travelers to Tamaulipas include their impressions in various types of writings about life in the region. According to Ramos Aguirre a literary and journalistic endeavors by women in Tamaulipas during the Nineteenth Century were scarce. He further mentions his discovery of a note in *El Diario del Hogar* in 1888 that mentions "El Lirio," a literary weekly published in Ciudad Victoria; unfortunately, the publication has yet to be recovered. Names such as Albertina G. de González, Dolores G. Barragán, Delfina A. de Ramírez, and Luz Enríquez, among others, are mentioned as women contributors to this literary publication. Nevertheless, Ramos Aguirre stresses that there are only two cases of feminine journalism and literature in Tamaulipas during the nineteenth century: Ignacia Padilla de Piña (1838-1912) and Julia de la Peña de Ballesteros (1855-1928).

## Part 2. The Cultural History of Women and Print Culture

The essays included in Part 2, "Exploring the Archives: The Cultural History of Women and Print Culture," analyze diverse recovered publications that promote ideological and discursive practices regarding the relationship between cultural history, women, and the

press. In his essay, “The Social Apologetics of *La Revista Católica*: Church, Race, Gender and *Mexicanidad*,” A. Gabriel Meléndez makes a case for the significant role played by *La Revista Católica*, during its publication in Las Vegas, Nevada (1875-1919), a magazine originally intended for Mexicans incorporated as US citizens following the US War of Intervention, and the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. Meléndez notes that the traits of the Jesuit editors—discipline, order and organization—were of crucial importance in establishing *La Revista Católica*’s prominent position in the press of the region. The editors were strongly in favor of publishing the magazine so as to contribute to the construction of the identity on the Mexican community. The author also analyzes the Catholic-centered views in the periodical in opposition to the secular and Anglo-Saxon Protestant views in terms of the education rights of *mexicanos* making up most of the local electorate and as such, they had decisive power in defining how their children were to be educated. Furthermore, his study draws attention to the numerous articles in *La Revista Católica* condemning Anglo-American racist treatment of Mexicans, Native Americans, and people of African descent. Regarding the role of Mexican women, the author expresses that the magazine portrayed traditional views, highlighting their virtues that stood in opposition to secular values of Anglo America.

In their essay, “Miradas sobre las mujeres prostitutas que se asoman a los archivos Municipal de Saltillo y Generales Estatales de Coahuila y Nuevo León (1890 a 1935),” María de Guadalupe Sánchez and Mixely Martínez examine the cultural history of prostitutes based on a diverse corpus of primary texts. The authors underline the fact that prostitution as a social phenomenon was linked only to women, and there is no mention of the role played by men. Regulations, statutes, and policies were implemented exclusively to control women as prostitutes. Sánchez and Martínez note that documents about prostitution are scarce in historical archives, both in the States of Coahuila and Nuevo León. However, the authors point out that the available documents reflect a brief overview of the regulation of prostitution in the region. They study regulations, registration records of prostitutes, and, interestingly, reports from US authorities

(in the case of the State of Coahuila), questionnaires from the Mexican Health Council, and a registry book of prostitutes with their faces (also in the State of Coahuila). Furthermore, Sánchez and Martínez emphasize that the voices in these documents mostly belong to the institutions that had the power to control sex work in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

In the last essay of this section, “María Luisa Garza (Loreley) y Hortensia Elizondo: mujeres en el diario *El Porvenir* de Monterrey (1929-1933),” Paulo Alvarado presents a theoretical introduction based on theoretical perspectives on New Modernist studies and analyzes the literary voices of these two Mexican writers. Alvarado points out the impressive journalistic and literary career of María Luisa Garza, Loreley, and he includes an analysis of the recovered short story “¿Por qué la maté?”, published on May 11, 1929, in the Monterrey newspaper, *El Porvenir*. He posits that in this text the reader can detect an evident antagonism that exists between the narrator, who commits the crime, and Helen, the black woman, which stems from their shared colonial past. The author also examines another story published in *El Porvenir* on April 9, 1933, “La única verdad,” written by Hortensia Elizondo, also an accomplished Mexican writer and journalist. Alvarado notes that the literary merit of Ana María, the main character, is that of a woman having broad criteria and who values a mutual understanding of love, but mostly someone who opposes a double bind discourse in bourgeois society.

The essay by Donna Kabalen and Roberto Lozano, “Monterrey Industrialism and the Construction of a ‘Community of Knowledge’: *Trabajo y Ahorro* (1921-present),” provides an introductory overview of the historical context of Monterrey’s industrial expansion as well as background information that focuses on the development of The Sociedad Cooperativa de Ahorros e Inversiones para los Empleados y Operarios de la Cervecería Cuauhtémoc, SA (Cooperative Society of Savings and Investments for Operators and Employees of the Cuauhtémoc Brewery). Furthermore, based on a corpus of archival texts that include topics ranging from local social news, foreign and domestic policy, jokes, literature, hygiene, and sports, Kabalen and Lozano center their analysis on a selection of articles



that demonstrate the use of discursive practices evident in the periodical. They also highlight the magazine's emphasis on socio-cultural knowledge that was transmitted on the basis of paternalistic patterns of control. In particular, Kabalen and Lozano examine how *Trabajo y Ahorro* endorsed a dominant "benevolent" ideology, based on certain "virtues and moral attitudes" with the intention of educating factory workers, employees, and the female reader, who was to assume these attitudes and teach them within the realm of the home.

### **Part 3. A Transcultural View of Women and their Role as Activists and Writers in Northern Mexico and Texas**

The essays included in Part 3, "A Transcultural View of Women and their Role as Activists in Northern Mexico and Texas," examine the worldview of three border women who were prolific writers and who assumed their role as activists. Griselda Zárate's, "Poéticas de la identidad narrativa: Subjetividad femenina en los textos de las hermanas Villarreal (1904-1944)," provides a detailed analysis of a corpus of recovered poetic texts, by writers Andrea Villarreal and Teresa Villarreal, some of which have not been published. Drawing on Ricoeur's concept of narrative identity, Zárate explores discursive formations evident in a number of poems that portray a feminine subjectivity that goes beyond the militant point of view of these activists, especially in terms of individual and collective freedom. As Zárate observes, this gave form to a poetics involving the plurality of narrative identities that represent transnational moments punctuated by crossing between diverse spaces and time.

The final essay of this section is contributed by Donna Kabalen, "Writing Transnational Life Experiences on the Border: Leonor Villegas de Magnón and Jovita Idar," and offers a detailed discussion of a selection of texts written by these two writers and activists. The article ventures into questions concerned with the role of these two women writers whose texts present views on other women, the community, and self. Drawing on a selection of unpublished reflections, newspaper articles and the autobiographical narrative created by Villegas de Magnón, Kabalen underscores the notion offered by Clara

Lomas in her description of the borderland as a place of “cultural exchange and creative ferment.” In this sense, Kabalen emphasizes that both Villegas de Magnón and Idar, were able to translate their life experiences, express them in their written work, and thereby challenge the regulating social structures that attempted to place limits on women in Mexico and the United States border region.

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