

Zacatecas teachers “de pega, de patente and de bombo” and their social impact: Towards an emancipatory legacy in the early years of the 20th century

Maestras zacatecanas “de pega, de patente y de bombo” y su impacto social: hacia un legado emancipador en los primeros años del siglo XX

Norma Gutiérrez Hernández*
Ana María del Socorro García García**

**Professor-researcher at the Universidad Autónoma de Zacatecas (Mexico). She is a doctor in History from UNAM. Among his recent publications are “Knowledge and gender educational practices at the beginning of the 20th century. An analysis based on the text ‘Corazón. Diary of a girl’ (2022) and “History, education and gender: knowledge, protagonists and perspectives, XIX-XXI centuries” (2023). It has recognition of the PRODEP profile and the National System of Researchers. He is a member of SOMEHIDE and the Consolidated Academic Body “Studies on education, society, culture and communication”. Her topics of interest are history of education and history of women, XIX-XXI centuries. Email: normagutierrez17@uaz.edu.mx*

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6861-2690>

*** Professor-researcher at the Universidad Veracruzana (Mexico). She has a PhD in History from the National Autonomous University of Mexico. Among her recent publications are “The soul of the homeland, a book for the personal development of primary school girls. The duty to be of the feminine” and “The reading texts. The Veracruz project. Reading book, from 1919” (2022). She has the recognition of the PRODEP profile and the National System of Researchers, Level I. Her topics of interest are the history of education and women. Email: mgarcia@uv.mx*

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5641-1955>

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Abstract

The present text has as its guiding theme, the Zacatecan teachers of the late 19th century and the early years of the 20th. In this way, the work alludes to primary and secondary sources, and to the school culture that defined these teachers, especially their knowledge and some educational practices. In regard to this, an asymmetrical study plan is alluded to, from which there is an emerging awareness of gender in some of them, also as a result of the “arrival” of feminism since the last third of the nineteenth century. In connection with the above, the research also deliberates, based on a series of articles with a Catholic tinge in the local press (certainly written by a male pen), the impact of Zacatecan female teachers on the social scenario, not only on quantitative terms, by presiding over the rural squares in the entity, but the qualitative changes in their educational formation and social action at the dawn of the new century, unlike what defined them in previous decades. Thus, a greater presence of women teachers from Zacatecas in the public sphere is noted, which gradually led to a disappearance of the female teaching model of the 19th century.

Keywords: Teachers, school culture, education and gender.

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Resumen

El presente texto tiene como hilo conductor a las maestras zacatecanas de finales del siglo XIX y los primeros años del XX. De esta manera, el trabajo recupera, a partir de fuentes primarias y secundarias, la cultura escolar que definió a estas profesoras, sobre todo sus saberes y algunas prácticas educativas. En torno a esto, se alude a un plan de estudios asimétrico, a partir del cual hay una incipiente toma de conciencia de género en algunas de ellas, también como resultado del “asomo” del feminismo desde el último tercio de la centuria decimonónica. En sintonía con lo anterior, la investigación también refiere, a partir de una serie de artículos de tinte católico en la prensa local (escritos con seguridad por una pluma masculina), el impacto de las profesoras zacatecanas en el escenario social, no tan sólo en términos cuantitativos, al presidir las plazas rurales en la entidad, sino los cambios cualitativos sobre su formación educativa y actuar social en los albores del nuevo siglo, a diferencia de lo que les definió en las décadas previas. Así, se advierte una mayor presencia de las maestras zacatecanas en el ámbito público, detonante que incidió de manera gradual en un desdibujamiento del modelo magisterial femenino del siglo XIX.

Palabras Clave: Profesoras, cultura escolar, educación y género.

Maîtresses zacatecanas "de Pega, de Brevet et de Battage" et leur impact social: vers un héritage émancipateur au début du XXe siècle

Résumé:

Ce texte a pour fil conducteur les maîtresses zacatecaines del fin du XIXe et du début du XXe siècle. Ainsi, le travail récupère, à partir de sources primaires et secondaires, la culture scolaire qui a défini ces enseignantes, surtout leurs savoirs et certaines pratiques éducatives. Autour de cela, on fait allusion à un programme asymétrique, à partir duquel il y a une prise de conscience de genre naissante dans certaines d'entre elles, également à la suite del"éclipse" du féminisme depuis le dernier tiers du XIXe siècle. En accord avec ce qui précède, l'enquête porte également, à partir d'une série d'articles de teinte catholique dans la presse locale (écrits avec certitude par une plume masculine), sur l'impact des enseignantes zacatecas sur la scène sociale, non seulement en termes quantitatifs, en présidant les places rurales dans l'entité, mais les changements qualitatifs sur leur formation éducative et agir social à l'aube du nouveau siècle, contrairement à ce qui les ha définis dans les décennies précédentes. Ainsi, on constate une présence accrue des maîtresses zacatecanas dans le domaine public, détonant progressivement un flou du modèle enseignant féminin du XIXe siècle.

Mots-clés: Enseignantes, Culture scolaire, Éducation Genre, Enseignantes.

Nauczycielki z Zacatecas "na pokaz, patentowane i z bębniem" oraz ich społeczny wpływ: ku dziedzictwu emancypacyjnemu w pierwszych latach XX wieku

Streszczenie:

Niniejszy tekst ma na celu skoncentrowanie się na nauczycielkach z Zacatecas pod koniec XIX wieku i w pierwszych latach XX wieku. Praca ta przywraca do życia kulturę szkolną, która określiła te nauczycielki, w oparciu o źródła pierwotne i wtórne, zwłaszcza ich wiedzę i niektóre praktyki edukacyjne. W związku z tym odnosi się do niesymetrycznego programu nauczania, który dał początek się rozwijającej świadomości płci wśród niektórych z nich, również jako rezultat "zaświatów" feminizmu od ostatniej trzecji dziewiętnastego wieku. Zgodnie z tym, badania odnoszą się również do wpływu nauczycielek z Zacatecas na scenę społeczną, nie tylko pod względem ilościowym, pełniąc role w wiejskich miejscowościach w regionie, ale również zmiany jakościowe w ich edukacji i działaniach społecznych na początku nowego wieku, w przeciwieństwie do tego, co określało je w poprzednich dekadach. W ten sposób zauważa się większą obecność nauczycielek z Zacatecas w przestrzeni publicznej, co stopniowo wpłynęło na zacieranie się żeńskiego modelu nauczycielskiego z XIX wieku.

Słowa kluczowe: Nauczycielki, kultura szkolna, edukacja i płeć.

Introductory framework

The 19th century provided Mexican women with the opportunity for academic education, which allowed them to enter the workforce as wage earners based on their educational capital. Gradually, they acquired greater parameters of independence, not only in economic terms but also in terms of social recognition. This gradually led to their increased involvement in the public sphere.

In this regard, it is important to note that women during this period gradually gained access to better and more educational opportunities. This was set within the context of a rich framework of progress and modernization that also called upon them, thanks to an educational state that made education compulsory, free, secular, and uniform, however, not with the same opportunities as men (Gutiérrez, 2013). Consequently, schools became an extension of the social order, reproducing the gender¹ asymmetries that prevailed within it.

In reality, it could not have been otherwise since the guiding principle was the enlightened legacy of the 18th century: "According to the prevailing educational ideas at that time, men and women were created by God to fulfill different social roles, and therefore their education had to be highly differentiated" (Subirats, 1994, p. 50). As a result, female education focused on the roles of mother, wife, and housewife, particularly as educators of citizens.

In this perspective, a notable educational influence in Mexico and other geographical areas was the Genevan philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau, considered "the father of the pedagogy of women's subordination [...] (who) will have a decisive influence on the pedagogical proposals of the next two centuries" (Subirats, 1994, p. 51).

In this regard, it is important to clarify that in the last third of the 19th century, in the context of the emergence of feminism (Tuñón, 1998), some figures of this gender, and a few men² as well, raised their voices against the educational content assigned to Mexican women. They

questioned the approach and noted certain differences compared to men, all of which had repercussions in the following century.

Thus, the 19th century witnessed an incipient female incursion, mainly from sectors of the middle class, and with gender nuances. The arrival of women in the classrooms of educational institutions became a catalyst for greater presence and visibility in the public world, with a decisive impact on their fellow women by “clearing the way,” driving and motivating them to navigate it, despite the strong obstacles and limitations they encountered. However, ultimately, it became a distinct path that they began to forge, triggering significant educational development with a feminine face, especially in the second half of the 20th century. This development was instrumental in the achievements they attained during this period and stands as one of the most important triumphs of the past century that continues to this day: the struggle of women and feminism.

This research aims to shed light on the reality of women from Zacatecas in the early years of the 20th century. It analyzes the education they received and the school culture that characterized them, with a particular emphasis on female teachers, in order to understand the path they took and the impact it had. Additionally, the research aims to reclaim some of their legacy as part of the historical memory of women and feminism in the region.

The methodology employed in this research is historical in nature, particularly relying on the analysis of primary sources, especially newspapers and other relevant materials. By combining these sources with specialized bibliographic frameworks, the research builds a historical interpretation that explores the interplay between the past and the present, highlighting the influence of 19th-century Zacatecan female teachers in the early decades of the 20th century and even in contemporary times.

School Culture: Elementary Notions

The term "school culture" has a pioneering exponent in the historian Julia (1995), who defines it as follows: "a set of norms that define the knowledge to be taught and the behaviors to be instilled, and a set of practices that allow the transmission of this knowledge and the incorporation of these behaviors" (p. 131. Emphasis in the original).

According to the author, these norms and practices serve specific purposes that vary according to contexts. In this regard, it is important to note that they "cannot be analyzed without taking into account the professional body of the agents [...] (who establish) the pedagogical devices responsible for facilitating their implementation, that is, instructors and teachers" (Julia, 1995, p. 131).

In this sense, the concept of school culture is crucial for understanding the configurations of individuals in educational contexts, as it serves as a socializing device that articulates guidelines, knowledge, and educational practices that reflect a specific social context. Furthermore, it is important to highlight that school culture requires educational definitions based on gender, as the education of generations has not followed a single project but rather two, corresponding to a gendered social order.

Aligned with the above, school culture contributes to a deeper understanding of educational processes, as it allows for the historicization of processes of regulation, discipline, and the formal and "hidden³" curriculum that intersect educational content.

In this way, as emphasized by Meschiany (2016), school culture as a category of analysis is structured in two dimensions: time and space. The characterization provided for each dimension is timely. The first of these is time:

It refers to the distribution of knowledge and the organization of schooling within a *chronosystem* that shapes the life of the educational institution and relates to the social construction

of the curriculum and school disciplines. The prescriptions of this “order of time” in education shape childhood and its sociability, in addition to regulating the teaching profession (p. 9. Emphasis in the original).

On the other hand, regarding space, the author points out that it refers to:

the materiality of the school, that is, the arrangement, distribution, and uses of the school space. The classroom, but also the playgrounds and other places where education takes place. The teaching materials, the teaching aids used by the teacher (*and the female teacher*) and the instructional materials used by the student (*and the female student*); the school architecture and its furniture: the desks, chairs, blackboards, and the entire framework of impositions and arrangements that prescribe it (Meschiany, 2016, p. 9).

Seen in these terms, school culture refers to a specific historical context, as the dimensions of time and space vary from one geographical and temporal setting to another. Therefore, today’s female school culture differs from what Mexican women experienced in the first half of the 20th century, and undoubtedly, it will also be different for future generations of women.

However, it is important to note that since schools are an important part of the State, the school culture implemented in a specific context by its agents implies social control, which in turn determines power relations. It is important to highlight this observation, especially concerning women, as there is a greater imprint of such control in school processes and practices.

Finally, it is worth noting how school culture determines different participation between men and women in the public sphere. This greatly explains their presence and educational development in educational formations, as well as the resulting social definitions, such as their participation in decision-making positions.

Knowledge and gender practices of women from Zacatecas in the last third of the 19th century: a starting point.

Chronologically, the last third of the 19th century corresponds to the Porfiriato, a period in national history characterized by a project of modernization and progress. This had a significant impact on education, causing it to be considered the beginning of modern education in the country. However, as Bazant (1993) rightly points out, the focus was more on quality than quantity, as there was some increase in school enrollment, "but the literacy rate barely increased. The growth did not occur there, but in the myriad of ideologies and debates that transformed and embraced modernity in education" (p. 15).

Regarding the school culture of women in Zacatecas in the late 19th century, gender learning was centered around the domestic and family sphere. The educational premise for women, as promoted by the State, focused on the roles of mother, wife, and homemaker (Gutiérrez, 2013), which had significant correspondence at the national and international levels.

The emphasis on women's educational project primarily stemmed from their role as shapers of citizens, albeit not citizens⁴ themselves, in accordance with the changes that had taken place during Independent Mexico.

The process of secularization of the State and society that occurred after the Laws of Reform had a significant impact on women's lives. The triumph of the liberal project implied the dismantling of surviving New Spanish provisions. The model of marianismo, which had prevailed during the New Spanish period, began to change. Women were no longer expected to embody the image and likeness of the Virgin Mary or procreate children for the Holy Mother Church, but rather to bear citizens for the State. In order to change the remaining colonial structures, women's participation was required, and

they needed to educate themselves to strengthen the Mexican State (Galeana, 2018, pp. 78-79).

However, it was unquestionable that this liberal task assigned to Mexican women was articulated from the conceptualization of the so-called “weaker sex.” At no time was their emancipation or improvement sought, but rather their integration into the state machinery to conform to one of the two educational projects, in accordance with a social order. To carry out this task, the call to educate women was unquestionable, but it had a different nuance, just as their social status was different.

López (2006) contributes to this reflection.

To understand the meanings and social representations of femininity, it is necessary to comprehend the existence of a normative and symbolic system that permeates everyday life in institutions such as the family and the school, which educate and socialize members of a society. A gender perspective on the history of education can help us identify, for example, devices or school institutions of the State or the clergy that have functioned in different societies to shape the men and women considered socially necessary (p. 6).

In this regard, within the school environment, the curriculum was asymmetrical for boys and girls, as were the educational practices, starting with the classroom composition based on their sex, that is, boys with male teachers and girls with female teachers.⁵

Based on the above, one of the quintessential gender subjects was Domestic Economy, a course that outlined the knowledge girls were expected to acquire for the performance of their social role. It is worth noting that the contents of this subject were not only studied as a separate subject but also served as a gender-transversal axis within the organizational culture of female educational institutions, with a significant impact.⁶

The objective pursued with the Home Economics course was to “make them aware of the role they would play as the builders of the family unit” (Hurtado, 2010, p. 231). Consequently, the thematic program of this subject had a gender correspondence, focusing on family well-being, bodily health, efficient use of economic resources, domestic and familial tasks, among others (Hurtado, 2010; Gutiérrez, 2019).

The approach of this subject was primarily practical, and as mentioned, in addition to the didactic legacy that emphasized a “pedagogy of female subordination,” it also had an economic motive, related to the proper use and optimization of economic resources within the household, which fell exclusively on women.

The learning of this discipline helped the family economy as they themselves produced household cleaning products, personal care items, decorative articles, and household utensils, as well as improving their health and nutrition by making use of natural resources, animal husbandry, and the homemade industrialization of their products (Hurtado, 2010, p. 250).

These gender knowledge and practices during this period were the common denominator in the pedagogical devices par excellence of girls’ schools, namely textbooks and manuals (Hurtado, 2010; Gutiérrez, 2019; Gutiérrez, 2022a). In these texts, true decalogs or “should be” for women within a formal curriculum, their mission in society was gradually outlined, which had a profound impact on their late entry into post-elementary education and undoubtedly their inequitable presence in decision-making positions at that time, even with repercussions to this day.

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In this context, it is important to highlight that these gendered knowledge received by the students were also the curricular support for their teachers in the teacher training schools.

Agents of school culture: Zacatecan teachers in the early years of the 20th century

In general, the presence of Mexican women in the early 20th century had a greater impact in the public sphere, largely as a result of their participation in the Mexican Revolution, as noted by a pioneer in the history of women in Mexico (Tuñón, 1998). However, it is important to shed light on the nuances within the broader historical context, the ones that are not widely known, particularly in terms of local dynamics, as historiography has shown that national guidelines often do not resonate or correspond with the situation within the country.

In this perspective, it is suggested that in the early 20th century in Zacatecas, gender norms from previous years were still prevalent. As a result, the arrival of the new century did not bring substantial changes to the school culture of Zacatecan women until some years later, although there were some criticisms, particularly regarding the existing gender inequality of women in comparison to men.

This situation was also influenced by the contextual backdrop, as feminism had already reached the country (Tuñón, 1998). Therefore, there were some female voices expressing discontent and advocating for emancipation. This is significant because, unlike what happened during the last third of the 19th century when there was a “culture of silence” in the press, on the side of Zacatecan women, in the following century, there were more instances of women raising their voices publicly or making critical remarks in newspapers.

As an example, we can mention Carmen Castro, a student at the Normal School for Women, who in 1910, during the graduation ceremony, delivered a speech titled “The Condition of Women.” In her speech, she called on Zacatecan women to demand educational and wage equality while highlighting the double burden they faced:

She should not only be educated to be a machine that works day and night to earn a meager profit, barely enough to live on, while men, working the same amount or even less, earn

enough for their subsistence and can even achieve a comfortable position. The concern that women should only work in their homes must also be combated, preventing them from ever aspiring to self-sufficiency or creating an independent position for themselves (Historical Archive "Salvador Vidal" of the Distinguished Normal School "Manuel Ávila Camacho" [AHSVBENMAC], cited by Gutiérrez, 2013, p. 380).

These words, which serve as an important precedent in the feminine and feminist memory of the women of Zacatecas, echo other guidelines of this nature that were also expressed by normalista students in other geographic settings in the country, such as in Veracruz, in the documents they produced to obtain their degrees (Gutiérrez, 2022b).

In this regard, there are two types of female discourses: those who recognize gender biases in the condition and situation of their sex, and those who emphasize their role as mothers, wives, and homemakers. This distinction is particularly evident in both the educational sphere and the local press, which formed a corresponding pair. Consequently, there was a coexistence of gender guidelines, some emphasizing the confinement of women to the domestic and familial sphere, while others advocated for progressive discourse regarding women's emancipation.

It is also important to note that it was precisely the teachers or normalista students, based on their educational capital, who brought attention to certain gender asymmetries. However, this reality was not uniform among all female teachers, largely because a majority of them lacked formal education during this period. In other words, there was a significant number of "empirical" teachers (teachers who had not attended a Normal School), a situation that was reflected at the national level and coincided with the feminization of the teaching profession, both of which have been extensively documented since the late 19th century (El Colegio de San Luis, 2001).

This is evident in various reports published in the *Boletín de Instrucción Primaria*, (*Primary education bulletin*) a pedagogical publication that provided information on the educational situation in the region since the beginning of the century. For example, from December 1911 to February 1912, there were 194 teaching appointments, of which 129 (66%) were women and only 65 (34%) were men (*El Boletín de Instrucción Primaria, 1912*). Based on these figures, female teachers were represented nearly twice as much as their male counterparts.

Regarding the number of teachers who had validated their work through professional studies, the reality was not very promising, although it is important to highlight that this was a common situation in the country. They were in line with the national situation, as the number of female teachers who had set foot in teacher training colleges was small, a situation that also included male teachers.⁷ It is important to note that this panorama did not exclude those who worked outside the public sphere, meaning in private service. Therefore, there was a demand for improvement in the teaching staff, given the lack of preparation among those who served as educators.

The following article in the local press, particularly of a Catholic nature, referred to this situation, even emphasizing it in the title “Insufficiency of Female Teachers”:

The intellectual, moral, and religious inadequacy of governesses and simple teachers who dedicate themselves to the private education of girls and even young ladies has long been a common source of complaint from many honorable families. Today, we find ourselves in the sad duty of demonstrating how these complaints are often legitimate [...]. Intellectually, there is no need to state the obvious; the inadequacy of a governess who has learned nothing is evident if we consider that knowledge is an indispensable condition for any form of teaching, no matter how simple or basic it may be (*La Academia. Semanario Católico de Educación y Cultura*

Intellectual, "The Academy. Catholic Weekly of Education and Intellectual Culture) 1909, p. 3).

The article in question, which, by the way, is not signed but is inferred to be written by a male author, provides a classification of the type of teachers it refers to. It derogatorily distributes them into the following groups (*described in multiple paragraphs below*): "de pega," "de patente," and "de bombo." The description of these three types of teachers provides an account of the perception of the school culture among teachers from Zacatecas and its social impact. Therefore, the characterization of these groups, in line with what was mentioned above, will be considered.

The "pega" teachers are young individuals from privileged backgrounds or origins but without any preparation in teaching. These teaching figures are generally "recruited women that didn't have any other option socially." The reasons for their entry into the teaching profession are associated with the following factors: they were not deemed worthy of a marital commitment, they were unable to pursue other "appropriate" careers for their gender due to a lack of adequate preparation, or they did not engage in manual labor "due to the prejudices of the environment in which they have lived." Consequently, without a husband, diploma, or interest in engaging in gender-specific occupations like "dressmaking and hat-making," they opt for teaching "when they find themselves compelled to earn a living on their own" (*La Academia. Semanario Católico de Educación y Cultura Intellectual, 1909, p. 3).*

It is interesting to highlight how the article esteems this type of teacher above the other two, as it recognizes in them a greater wealth of religious sentiments and moral education, elements that align with the type of education exalted within a Catholic educational discourse, far surpassing cognitive baggage. Simultaneously, this Catholic positioning also reveals a conflict with the educational authority of the State, which is moving in a different direction, esteeming an educational legitimacy of society based on a concept of education

that, since the late 19th century, has been emphasizing a secular morality over a religious one.

According to the aforementioned Catholic newspaper, the second group of teachers, the “de patente”, They were those who held a degree, but were also characterized by having less knowledge “in moral resources.” In this sense, there is a clear aversion to the State’s definition of implementing a secular school curriculum at all educational levels, including teacher training programs. At the same time, the ideological influence that the teachers were exerting on the girls becomes evident, particularly those who had the support of an educational background, as the acquired educational capital contributed to an incipient deconstruction of gender. This gradually rendered the Catholic principles that conservative minds sought to perpetuate no longer valid. Therefore, the characterization provided for the second type of teachers is not surprising:

What religious influence can a person have, in fact, who is educated in a school where sterile neutrality is preached? What can be expected from women whose spirits are desiccated, whose hearts are overflowing with bitterness, and in whom charity has not blossomed? They retain some beliefs, it is true, and even observe certain religious practices, but that divine love, that sacred and unknown fire to the soul that they have not experienced within themselves, how could it ignite a spark within them to inflame the tender and innocent souls of their students? (La Academia. Semanario Católico de Educación y Cultura Intelectual, 1909, p. 3).

It is important to mention that Zacatecas, based on its participation in the national congresses of public instruction in the 19th century and the resolutions arising from these forums, established the principles of secularism, uniformity, free education, and compulsory education. These principles were set forth in the Organic Law of Primary Instruction of 1891 and served as guidelines for national education (Gutiérrez, 2013).

The “de patente” teachers were characterized as women from humble backgrounds, “daughters of artisans or second-rate employees,” who, according to the newspaper, had “mediocre intelligence,” largely due to the family context they came from. The newspaper asked, “Who, on the other hand, has educated this young woman? Are her parents worthy? [...] Her father is an honest worker and her mother is a humble woman, without art or letters” (La Academia. Semanario Católico de Educación y Cultura Intelectual, (*The Academy. Catholic Seminar of Education and Intellectual Culture*), 1909, p. 3). These words are valuable in terms of the information they provide: to a large extent, young women from humble backgrounds were the ones who continued studying at the Normal School for Women in the capital, probably thanks to a scholarship, due to the economic incapacity of their family context. The quote also reveals the significant number of illiterate women in Zacatecas.

Finally, the Catholic Weekly of Education and Intellectual Culture showcases the distinctive features of the “de bombo” teachers: they were defined by their supposed wealth of educational training, meaning they possessed encyclopedic knowledge and, in this regard, “they give the impression that they know everything, claiming to have the greatest aptitudes for carrying out their important duties” (1909, p. 3).

The teachers of the *bombo*, or encyclopedic ones, are as the name suggests, those who know everything (*omniscient* or “Marisabidillas,” as we say here). They speak living languages, know history, literature, geography, natural sciences (botany, astronomy, chemistry, physics, cosmography, etc., etc.); they play the piano and do drawing and painting. Usually, they don't have a diploma, but why would they need one when they possess all that scientific knowledge? Furthermore, they have perhaps been educated abroad (La Academia. Semanario Católico de Educación y Cultura Intelectual, 1909, p. 3. Original emphasis).

These “encyclopedic little teachers” or “living encyclopedias,” as they are pejoratively referred to, are considered to have no impact on their students in terms of moral and religious matters. Through their teaching-learning processes, they do not instill “manly characters or souls of great religious strength” (La Academia. *Semanario Católico de Educación y Cultura Intelectual*, (*La Academia. Catholic Weekly of Education and Intellectual Culture*.)1909, p. 3).

Undoubtedly, the main emphasis in the anonymous “analysis” of these types of teachers was their cognitive background in various fields of knowledge, with an important distinction: they were educated women, even without having set foot in a Normal School, and they were familiar with geographical settings outside the country. Therefore, it is very likely that they did not come from a disadvantaged background.

Precisely, their educational capital without a “patent” or diploma was the most lethal danger perceived by conservative individuals since they possibly (as inferred) did not align with Catholic educational approaches and may have been influencing a different formation in their students. This was also in line with the contextual changes taking place and the different perspective gained through knowledge of other places.

Finally, regarding this last type of teachers, it is striking how there is a well-founded fear in the environment regarding the advancement of these “know-it-alls” (“marisabidillas”). Even some of the most important elements of school culture, such as books, referred to them in the same line as the aforementioned Catholic article.

Thus, in one of the texts used during this period (since the late 19th century) in public girls’ schools in Zacatecas, like in other institutions across the country, titled “Rafaelita. History of an Industrious Girl,” teacher Elisa Rodríguez⁸ addressed her students at the end of the school year using these terms:

In school, I have not tried to shape you into bachelorettes or know-it-alls (“marisabidillas”), but rather complete women, that is, good daughters, fulfilled wives, and enlightened mothers: in a word, women of their home [...] a woman should be the priestess of cleanliness, order, and foresight. The school [...] enlightens the girl so that she can excel, with more intelligence and greater perfection, in the tasks appropriate to her gender, not to abandon them; so that she may be an advisor to her parents, a loving and educated companion to her husband, and a diligent mother who, with her knowledge and virtue, educates her children and molds them to be strong in body, sound in intelligence, and upright in heart (Rodríguez, cited by Gutiérrez, 2019, pp. II6-II7).

In this perspective, in line with the educational project for women promoted by the educating State, only elementary studies were deemed compatible in order to become better shapers of citizens. Therefore, “women who knew a lot were not seen in a favorable light, as they deviated from the 'ideal' assigned to them by nature and social order. In fact, they were censured and derogatorily referred to as 'marisabidillas'” (Gutiérrez, 2022a, p. 294).

Knowledge empowers, which is why it was so dangerous in female teachers because they were educators of girls, serving as reference points for their students, and acting as role models. Historical and present reality show us the imprint that some teachers leave on their students, particularly the emancipatory character of their gender condition when viewed through a “violet lens.”⁹ It is worth noting that feminism began to emerge during the Porfiriato era (Tuñón, 1998), championed primarily by certain figures leading teaching-learning processes.

Now, based on the aforementioned and in light of the primary source cited, it is important to highlight that the female teaching profession, as a central agent in the school culture for girls and young women in the early years of the 20th century in Zacatecas, was also composed

of women from higher social strata, a situation that did not occur in the previous century, as referred to by Gutiérrez (2013).

However, what did remain a consistent element from the late 19th century to the early 20th century was the feminization of the teaching profession and the disadvantaged work situations that female teachers faced. For example, they predominantly filled positions in rural areas, while urban areas were largely excluded. Thus, rural schools in Zacatecas had a female face during the Porfiriato and the early 20th century (Gutiérrez, 2013; *El Boletín de Instrucción Primaria, (Bulletin of Primary Instruction) 1912*).

The issue of job placement for teachers was significant throughout the 19th century and a large part of the 20th century, not only due to the challenges of working in rural contexts lacking services compared to the comforts offered by urban areas but also because of a salary scale. In this perspective, the Law of Revenues in 1910 classified primary instruction schools into three categories (see Table 1).

Table 1
Types of schools in Zacatecas in 1910

Urban schools of the first category. Elementary and higher education.	
Types of schools	Amount
Schools at the capital	2
Schools outside the capital	7
Second class schools	13
Third class schools	14
Fourth class schools	10
Schools of second order. Elementary instruction	
First class schools in the capital city	10
First class schools outside of the capital	14
Second class schools	17
Third class schools	10
Fourth class schools	24
Third order schools. Rural schools. Limited instruction	
First class schools	17

Second class schools	24
Third class schools	44
Fourth class schools	42
Fifth class schools	120

Source: Preparation of compilation based on the *Revenue Law. Expenditure budget of the state of Zacatecas for the year 1910*, pp. 26-30.

Based on Table I, it is interesting to note the exhaustive classification of educational institutions, along with the salary differences within each of them, as previously indicated by Gutiérrez (2013). Furthermore, it is emphasized that third-class schools, which were also the most numerous and where rudimentary or limited education was provided, were all under the charge of female teachers (*Revenue Law. Expenditure budget of the state of Zacatecas for the year 1910*, pp. 26-30).¹⁰

On the other hand, it can also be observed in Zacatecas at the beginning of the 20th century that there was continuity regarding what had been happening in the previous century in terms of establishing girls' schools after those for boys, which denotes a gender issue. Various primary sources provide evidence of this, such as the one shared in their report by the inspector of the southern district.

As in said school, due to the lack of a directora¹¹ (female principal), only boys from the area received education, and the girls lacked a school, suffering the fatal consequences of ignorance. However, recently, education for girls was established through the free and spontaneous assistance of a young daughter of the establishment's Director (*El Boletín de Instrucción Primaria*, 1907, p. 1).

In general terms, this concludes a brief characterization of the agents of school culture for women in Zacatecas in the early years of the 20th century.

Final Considerations

In light of the above, it emphasizes how in the early 20th century in Zacatecas, there was a gender ambivalence in school culture. On one hand, there was continuity with the educational project for women from the 19th century in relation to their social destiny as protagonists in the domestic and family context. On the other hand, there were also timid or incipient signs of definition among some Zacatecan women, normalistas (graduates of teacher training schools) and teachers who, precisely due to the education they received, demanded better situations and conditions for their gender.

The latter is illustrated, for example, in the discourse of the normalista student, who expressed her dissatisfaction with what she perceived as inequity compared to men. This phenomenon also had other national references, such as the case of some normalistas from Veracruz in their graduation documents, as mentioned in the study. Likewise, attention was drawn to several articles published by a conservative newspaper in the region that characterized the teachers. This highlights how well-prepared teachers, referred to derogatorily as “enciclopédicas” or “marisabidillas” in the newspaper, were making a difference in the school culture of their students. This is one of the interpretations inferred from the reviewed articles.

From this perspective, as discussed in the study, some feminist or emancipatory ideas are present to varying degrees. This gender awareness is of great value and is shared by other women who, from the first professional field they were allowed to enter, teaching, expressed a discourse that clearly went against the 19th-century guidelines. It also became a historical legacy for the struggles undertaken by Mexican women throughout the past century.

Finally, it is mentioned that despite the above, all agents of school culture, including teachers and normalistas, did not blur the educational model of female subordination that was strongly influenced by Rousseau’s legacy. However, some of them did indeed

inaugurate a different history for women in the early 20th century, starting with a central element that empowered them: education.

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Notas

¹ According to Gutiérrez (2022a), "gender conceptualizes individuals in social terms based on sex. This means that men and women are socially constructed through a process of socialization and education that begins before birth and continues throughout life. Thus, the characteristics of masculinity and femininity are not determined by genetic code, but rather they are the result of culture. In this sense, social order is structured based on various prescriptions, including symbolic constructions that differ for each gender and have historical significance, delineating two separate worlds" (p. 275).

² According to Ramos (2007), the main feminist during this period was Genaro García, a native of Zacatecas, who wrote two works about women, particularly focusing on the inequalities they faced, the education they received, and the impact of these factors on social order.

³ Acevedo (2010) conceptualizes the hidden curriculum as follows: "a set of norms, customs, beliefs, languages, and symbols that manifest in the structure and functioning of an institution [...]. It is everything that is seen and heard but transmitted and received unconsciously, at least without recognized intentionality [...]. The hidden curriculum does not develop consciously, whether regarding gender issues or any other [...]. Furthermore, despite not being officially inscribed anywhere, it exists with such strength that it often surpasses the explicit curriculum" (p. 1).

⁴ Galeana (2018) discusses some background information regarding the struggle of Mexican women to obtain their citizenship, particularly highlighting the pioneering action of women from Zacatecas: "Once Independence was achieved, after the fall of the First Empire, a group of women from Zacatecas demanded recognition as citizens from the Constituent Congress of the first federal republic. They would also assert this right before the Constituent Congress of 1857. However, none of the 19th-century Mexican constitutions granted citizenship to women" (p. 78).

⁵ Regarding this, González (2006) explains that since the National Congresses of Public Instruction held in the late 19th century, in which not a single female teacher participated, educational segregation was emphasized in the programs. This was based on moral guidelines and “supposed” intellectual differences and social roles between the sexes.

⁶ In this regard, Bourdieu’s (2012) observation is significant: “The principle of perpetuating this relationship of domination (referring to women) does not truly, or fundamentally, reside in one of the most visible places of its exercise, that is, within the domestic unit [...] but rather in instances such as the School or the State – places where principles of domination are elaborated and imposed, practices that take place within the most private of universes” (p. 15. *Emphasis added*).

⁷ In one of the reports from the first decade of the 20th century, from one of the five districts in which primary schools were distributed in the region, the inspector reported that there were 96 teaching figures in his jurisdiction, of which only 12 had a degree (12.5%). This indicates that a large majority were teaching without professional training (*El Boletín de Instrucción Primaria*, 1906, p. 6).

⁸ Secondary character in the textbook, teacher Rafaelita, protagonist in the book.

⁹ The term is originally from Varela and Santolaya (2019), who point out the following: “The purple glasses is a metaphor. It means that feminism changes your way of looking at the world and society... wearing the purple glasses means realizing the situations of discrimination that women face, and the sexism and machismo that exist in society. When a woman looks at the world through the purple glasses, she no longer judges her own life in the same way as before. Men can also wear the purple glasses and see their position within society in a different way. Feminism changes the lives of all people who approach it” (pp. 13-14).

¹⁰ Elementary instruction referred to grades 1st, 2nd, 3rd, and 4th, while upper instruction encompassed 5th and 6th. The latter, also referred to as secondary education, were mandatory for those who decided to continue with a post-elementary educational formation.

¹¹ The term “directora” does not refer to a position of decision-making without classroom teaching responsibilities, as defined today. Instead, it implied taking charge of the teaching-learning processes of one or more groups and attending to everything related to the school. Often, it also included cleaning tasks.