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Atlantic Threads: Singer in Spain and Mexico, 1860-1940

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FLORIDA INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY

Miami, Florida

ATLANTIC THREADS: SINGER IN SPAIN AND MEXICO, 1860-1940

A dissertation in partial fulfillments of the

requirements for a degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

HISTORY

by

Paula A. de la Cruz-Fernández

2013

To: Dean Kenneth G. Furton
College of Arts and Sciences

This dissertation, written by Paula A. de la Cruz-Fernandez, and entitled Atlantic Threads: Singer in Spain and Mexico, 1860-1940, having been approved in respect to style and intellectual content, is referred to you for judgment.

We have read this dissertation and recommend that it be approved.

Bianca Premo

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Date of Defense: May 24, 2013

The dissertation of Paula A. de la Cruz-Fernandez is approved.

Dean Kenneth G. Furton
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Florida International University, 2013

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my Tim.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This dissertation is the product of almost six years of work spanning across the Atlantic, between Spain, the United States and Mexico. During this time a number of admirable scholars and friends from these three countries have made my work possible. I will always be thankful to Aurora Morcillo for encouraging me to continue my graduate education in Florida, to be open to interdisciplinary approaches and to think critically about the role of women and gender in history.

I am grateful to Kenneth Lipartito for introducing me to Business History, for always believing in my project and for our long discussions about how to integrate culture in the study of business. Bianca Premo has opened up and taught me new and amazing ways of theorizing the history of Latin America and of the Hispanic World. I will always be indebted to Mira Wilkins for her patience and encouragement with introducing me to the world of multinationals.

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Without the encouragement and love of my parents, Mercedes and Alberto, and my sister Alicia, I would have never finished this dissertation. And thank to my

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

ATLANTIC THREADS: SINGER IN SPAIN AND MEXICO, 1860-1940

by

Paula A. De La Cruz-Fernández

Florida International University, 2013

Miami, Florida

Professor Aurora Morcillo, Co-Major Professor

Professor Kenneth Lipartito, Co-Major Professor

This dissertation examines the role of Singer in the modernization of sewing practices in Spain and Mexico from 1860 to 1940. Singer marketing was founded on gendered views of women's work and gendered perceptions of the home. These connected with sewing practices in Spain and Mexico, where home sewing remained economically and culturally important throughout the 1940s. "Atlantic Threads" is the first study of the US-owned multinational in the Hispanic World. I demonstrate that sewing practices, and especially practices related to home sewing that have been considered part of the private sphere and therefore not an important historical matter, contributed to the building of one the first global corporation. I examine Singer corporate records and business strategies that have not been considered by other scholars such as the creation of the Embroidery Department in the late nineteenth-century. Likewise, this dissertation challenges traditional narratives that have assumed that Spain and Mexico were peripheral to modernity. I look at Singer corporate records in Spain and Mexico and at regional government and cultural sources to demonstrate how

Singer integrated Spain and Mexico within its business organization. Singer's marketing was focused on the consumer, which contributed to make the company part of local sewing businesses and cultures.

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LIST OF ARCHIVES AND ABBREVIATIONS

Archivo General de la Administración, Madrid, Spain.	AGA
Archivo Histórico del Distrito Federal, Mexico City, Mexico.	AHDF
Archivo Histórico de la Secretaría de Educación Pública, Mexico City, Mexico.	AHSEP
Archivo Histórico Genaro Estrada. Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores (now Secretaría de Relaciones Internacionales), Mexico City, Mexico.	AHRI
Biblioteca Lerdo Tejada, Mexico City, Mexico.	BLT
Biblioteca Histórica, Archivo de la Villa, Madrid, Spain.	BH
Biblioteca Nacional de México, Mexico City, Mexico.	BNM
Biblioteca Nacional de España, Madrid, Spain.	BNE
Fondo Reservado Biblioteca Nacional de México, Mexico City, Mexico.	BNEFR
Hagley Museum and Library. Wilmington, Delaware, United States.	HML
Hagley Museum and Library. Archives, Soda House. Wilmington, Delaware.	HMLA
Hemeroteca Nacional (Paper and Digital) de España, Madrid, Spain.	HNE
Hemeroteca Nacional de México, Mexico City, Mexico.	HNM
Instituto Nacional de Estadística, Spain.	INE
Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía, Mexico.	INEGI
Museo del Renacimiento, Madrid, Spain.	MR
Museo del Traje, Madrid, Spain.	MT

Oficina Española de Patentes y Marcas, Madrid, Spain.	OEPM
Singer Sewing Machine Company Archives, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, Wisconsin, United States.	SSMC
Singer Sewing Machine Company Archives, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, Wisconsin. Unprocessed Microfilm.	SSMC. UM
Textile Collection (Smithsonian Libraries - National Museum of American History)	TCSM
Warsaw Collection of Business Americana (National Museum of American History, Archives Center), Washington, D.C., United States.	WCBA

Introduction

Atlantic Threads, Singer and the Modernization of Sewing Practices in the Hispanic World

Hilvanar in Spanish refers to the first stage in embroidery or making any piece of clothing. *Hilvanado* (baste) are the first and loose stitches that tack two pieces of fabric together and mark where to hem and sew with strong and more-durable stitches. These light stitches outline the sewing project, and are removed when it is complete. These terms may be unfamiliar to anyone who does not sew.

However, drawing, basting, seaming, cutting and sewing are regular steps for tailors, milliners and dressmakers, as well as for girls and women for whom sewing was an important household chore in the nineteenth and twentieth century. By the beginning of the twentieth century, the patterns and models that individuals followed to delineate the sketch and to finish the work in machine dressmaking and embroidery became standardized in Spain and Mexico—and mostly everywhere else where people used sewing machines.

In this dissertation I examine the American-owned multinational Singer, founded in 1851 and incorporated in 1863. Through its global selling organization, Singer played a fundamental role in the modernization of sewing practices in households and in women-led sewing business in Spain and Mexico. Beginning in the 1860s, changes in sewing practices were a transnational, trans-Atlantic phenomenon. And these changes were linked to the international expansion of Singer's coordinated and vertically integrated marketing system that wedded transformations in both sewing consumption and production across the Atlantic.

Regional sewing practices and the economic, social and cultural contexts in Spain and Mexico also influenced the development of Singer. Singer's creation of a globally connected and bureaucratically managed business of sewing was culturally embedded, as locals were at the center of the expansion of Singer's marketing and the use of the sewing machine in various garment and household goods making activities.

This study focuses on the marketing of sewing machines in a transnational perspective. In Spain and Mexico, Singer's main markets were home sewing and women. Sewing was an important female activity in the Hispanic world in the nineteenth and twentieth century because it followed and reflected the strong ideals of female domesticity. Until recently, historians have considered home sewing practices as part of the private sphere and therefore less important in history. Singer marketing strategies, however, were founded in gendered sewing practices that had public, cultural and political significance. The success and worldwide diffusion of this "complex and important economic institution," the multinational enterprise, was connected to perceptions of women's roles in society at the time.¹

My dissertation examines how the evolution of the multinational Singer and the modernization of sewing practices were connected as the company entered Spain and Mexico in the 1860s. The present study shows how both processes

¹ Oliver Williamson, "The Modern Corporation: Origins, Evolution, Attributes," *Journal of Economic Literature* 19, no. 4 (December 1981), 1537. Barbara Burman, ed. *The Culture of Sewing: Gender, Consumption and Home Dressmaking* (Oxford, UK: Berg, 1999).

triggered a variety of outcomes over time, both within the corporation, as well as in local sewing practices and women's lives. As historian Susan Strasser demonstrates, we cannot decouple mass manufacturing and the home. Manufacturers were themselves experts in housework. By producing household appliances, manufacturers "joined the home economists," and, as a result, "most women's lives changed incrementally."² In Spain and Mexico, Singer joined local reformers, home economists and women's interests groups. All the while, these developments also influenced the company, especially when it came to embroidery and home sewing.

"Atlantic Threads" expands our knowledge of the operations of Singer, and is the first study to examine the establishment of the multinational in the Hispanic World. For more than two decades now, Atlantic studies has explored the historical connections across the Atlantic since Christopher Columbus' first voyages in 1492. When it comes to the Hispanic world, however, these studies generally stop in the early nineteenth century, when colonial Spain disintegrated. Nevertheless, the end of Spain's empire was not the end of trans-Atlantic connections in the Hispanic World. Scholars who have focused on the links created by industrialization and modernization in the nineteenth and twentieth century have analyzed the creation of the North Atlantic as a comprehensive geo-political, social and economic space. Spain and Mexico were two different units within Singer's managerial structure, yet the experience

² Susan Strasser, *Never Done. A History of American Housework* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1982), 5-10.

of the multinational company in both countries, as well as Singer's appropriation of regional sewing practices, represents an extraordinary opportunity to explore the multiple linkages that formed the Hispanic Atlantic in the nineteenth and twentieth century.³

My work therefore extends the chronology of the Hispanic Atlantic into the twentieth century.⁴ It does so by studying the lines of connection formed by an institution, the multinational corporation. The multinational corporation coordinated the flow of people, goods, money, business practices, and cultural trends across the Atlantic. My work follows David Armitage's comparative method of "trans-Atlantic history," which says that the Atlantic created "links between regions and peoples" and generated the possibility for historians to "draw meaningful comparisons between otherwise distinct histories." The operations of an American-owned corporation in two Spanish-speaking countries will help us understand the role of the host economies in the building of the multinational, vertically-integrated firm, as well as the particularities and specificities of these two nations within the evolution of the corporation. In examining sources from across the Atlantic, I encountered a culture of sewing

³ David Armitage and Michael J. Braddick, eds., *The British Atlantic World, 1500-1800* (New York: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2002). Victoria de Grazia, *Irresistible Empire. America's Advance through 20th-Century Europe* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2005).

⁴ Work on immigration from Spain to Latin America beginning in the mid nineteenth century reaffirms the idea that a Spanish Atlantic developed well beyond the limits and periodization of empire. See, for example, Jose C. Moya, *Cousins and Strangers : Spanish Immigrants in Buenos Aires, 1850-1930* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

and sewing practices that emerged in the sixteenth century in the Hispanic world and that by the nineteenth century had “form[ed] part of a larger oceanic history.” Since the sixteenth century in the Hispanic world, sewing, and especially embroidery in the *hogar doméstico* (the household), was considered an appropriate practice for women of all social statuses either to demonstrate their industriousness or to take up an honorable trade. Within this culture, Singer became part of a larger global history as it adjusted its managerial structure to accommodate regional practices. Likewise, the transatlantic nature of these developments improves our understanding of the trends in which gender shaped modern economic processes. Cultural perceptions of the home and the role of women in it influenced the meanings of sewing on both sides of the Atlantic and thus shaped the transformations and modernization of sewing practices in the nineteenth and twentieth century.⁵

Singer was one of the first and one of the biggest of these new multinationals. Although other historians have studied Singer, “Atlantic Threads” expands on previous approaches to Singer in three ways. First, I examine the operations of Singer all the way to the mid-twentieth century. With the exception of Andrew

⁵ Rozsika Parker, *The Subversive Stitch. Embroidery and the Making of the Feminine* (London: The Women's Press, 1984). David Armitage, “Three Concepts of Atlantic History,” in *The British Atlantic World, 1500-1800*, ed. David Armitage and Michael J. Braddick (New York: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2002), 3-4, 11-13, 18. Peter A. Coclanis, “Atlantic World or Atlantic/World?,” *William and Mary Quarterly* LXIII, no. 4 (2006). Marta Vicente, *Clothing the Spanish Empire: Families and the Calico Trade in the Early Modern Atlantic World* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2006). Bianca Premo, “On Currents and Comparisons: Gender and the Atlantic ‘Turn’ in Spanish America,” *History Compass* 8, no. 3 (2010).

Gordon's recent work, which examines Singer in Japan until World War II, previous works on Singer's operations abroad end in 1920.⁶ The analysis of the evolution of Singer in Spain and Mexico during later decades provides a broader understanding of how American corporations dealt with Latin American and Spanish governments in times of political upheaval and nationalism. This long-dure approach also allows a better understanding of the relations between the multinational, employees, and consumers across borders. My dissertation emphasizes the role of employees, both men and women, in expanding Singer's marketing and in adapting former sewing practices and goods to machine sewing. For locals, the sewing machine and Singer business practices were tools through which to articulate economic and cultural interests during the nineteenth and the twentieth century. By showing how local contributions to the corporation mattered, my dissertation will reveal how Singer's stability and longevity depended on the company's localization and its integration in Spain and Mexico's culture, economy, and society.

Second, I explore the gendering of the process of selling and using the sewing machine. The lack of attention to sewing in the literature on Singer, as well as the lack of interest in how Singer's managerial strategies appropriated local traditions in the so-called "private" sphere, has misled readers to think that Singer was an imposing and all-transformative force. "Atlantic Threads," however, combines the analysis of the public sphere of business and management with the

⁶ Andrew Gordon, *Fabricating Consumers. The Sewing Machine in Modern Japan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011).

study of practices and cultures of domestic (in-the-home) sewing. These two supposedly-“separate” spheres developed together. Singer’s manufacturing and marketing strategies were founded on gendered perceptions of sewing and women’s labor in the home. I employ gender as an analytical category to understand the changes in domestic practices of sewing over time and how these affected the evolution of Singer.

Third, my dissertation challenges assumptions that Spain and Mexico were peripheral to modernity. Singer entered and integrated both markets into its global operations at the same time it did with other countries that are conventionally defined as industrialized, like France and Great Britain. The challenges related to transportation, business culture, low consumer income, and political turmoil that Singer faced in Spain and Mexico shaped Singer’s corporate structure as well as its further expansion. Likewise, “Atlantic Threads” questions assumptions about Spain and Mexico’ economic “backwardness” and the supposedly-lost (and long) nineteenth century, which were founded in studies that emphasized industrial growth and the examination of foreign direct investment over the analysis of the variety of realms of society and culture upon which capitalism its built on.

SINGER IN SPAIN AND MEXICO

Spain and Mexico had been two of Singer’s markets ever since the company first expanded outside the United States in the 1860s. The early success of basting markets abroad by sending Singer representatives and using local independent dealers to sell sewing machines led to the establishment of Singer’s rigorously-

connected and hierarchically-coordinated selling organization by the 1890s.

Between 1902 and 1912, Singer sold an average of 30,000 sewing machines per year in Mexico and 49,000 per year in Spain. Sales in Mexico were as high as those in Canada in this decade. Mexico was Latin America's largest market for sewing machines until the early 1910s when sales in countries like Argentina and Brazil reached, and later exceeded, those in Mexico. Meanwhile, the cumulative sales of sewing machines per population in Spain were equal or maybe even higher than average in France or Germany, which were Singer's most important markets in the late nineteenth century.⁷

The spread of Singer's shops also reflected the increasing presence and significance of the company in local sewing practices. Singer opened 305 shops in Mexico and 152 in Spain by the turn of the twentieth century. Singer shops and agents in every state and province in Spain and Mexico supplied machines, as well as the accessories and materials, such as thread or scissors, needed to

⁷ Mira Wilkins, *The Emergence of Multinational Enterprise: American Business Abroad from the Colonial Era to 1914* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1970). Andrew Godley, "Selling the Sewing Machine around the World: Singer's International Marketing Strategies, 1850-1920," *Enterprise and Society* 7, no. 2 (2006)., table A6. See appendices. Singer Sewing Machine Company Archives, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison Wisconsin (hereafter SSMC) World Results, 1902-1912; Unprocessed Microfilm (hereafter UM), AP 93-0444 Source 2; Project 56; Reel 1.

sew. These were convenient. And in some locations Singer shops and stations were the only suppliers.⁸

Figure 1. (chart 1) Singer sewing machines sales between 1892 and 1948 in Spain and Mexico. Peak of sewing machine sales in Spain before World War I is 1912 (80,745 sewing machines) and 1912 in Mexico (34,728). Spain's office peak after 1920 was 1922 (95,170 sewing machines) and Mexico's was 1925 (37,652 sewing machines). Sources: Godley and SSMC UM.⁹

⁸ Singer never manufactured in either Mexico or Spain. In 1863 Singer opened a manufacturing plant in Bridgeport, England, with an output of 1,400 machines by the beginning of the 1870s. In 1885 the Kilbowie factory in Scotland opened and replaced the production of sewing machines in Bridgeport. In Germany, a foundry was inaugurated in 1883, and in Russia the factory in Podolsk opened in 1900. Robert Bruce Davies, *Peacefully Working to Conquer the World: Singer Sewing Machines in Foreign Markets, 1854-1920* (New York: Arno Press, 1976). Fred V. Carstensen, *American Enterprise in Foreign Markets: Studies of Singer and International Harvester in Imperial Russia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984); David A. Hounshell, *From the American System to Mass Production, 1800-1932: The Development of Manufacturing Technology in the United States* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984).

⁹ The data for Spain between 1892 and 1902 refers to net sales (gross sales minus repossessed machines) and is taken from Andrew Godley, "Selling the Sewing Machine Around the World," Godley, "Selling the Sewing Machine around the World: Singer's International Marketing Strategies, 1850-1920.", table A2. Until 1907 Singer Spain also reported the sales of Italy and Lisbon as both offices worked through Madrid's central office. For the rest of the years I have collected the data of gross sales, rather than only net sales, as I consider that

Figure 2. (chart 2) Population of Spain and Mexico, in millions. Source: Tortella, Brea, INE, INEGI.¹⁰

Singer development in Spain and Mexico is key to understanding the establishment, growth and feminization of home sewing between the second half of the nineteenth century and during the first half of the twentieth century.

Sewing machines became important working tools for *modistas* (professional dressmakers)—more than *sastrerías* (tailors' shops). In Spain and Mexico, sewing machines were also fundamental in the home. Furthermore, Singer supplied standard instructions and patterns for using the sewing machine in dressmaking and embroidery in both rural and urban locations. In doing so, the

some of the reposed machines might have been used. World Results, 1902-1912 SSMC UM, AP 93-0444 Source 2; Project 56; Reel 1.

¹⁰ Gabriel Tortella Casares, *The Development of Modern Spain: An Economic History of the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000). Jorge A. Brea, *Population Bulletin. Population Dynamics in Latin America*, vol. 58, 1 (March 2003). Censos y Resúmenes históricos, Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas, Spain (hereafter INE) and Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía, Mexico (hereafter INEGI).

company facilitated the access to machinery and new production methods that propelled the democratization of sewing practices among women in Spain and Mexico.

Figure 3. Singer trade card, ca. 1890. Spain. The text reads: "In the humblest corner of the world, where there is a woman, there will be a Singer machine!" Lithography, S. Durá, Valencia, Spain. Author's personal collection.

By the turn of the twentieth century, women's and children's clothing and house linens in Spain and Mexico were fundamentally produced, sold and repaired in three different spaces. First, there were *talleres* (workshops) that opened in large urban centers like Mexico City, Madrid, and Barcelona. In these factory-like locations, *costureras* (low-skilled seamstresses) were the main labor source that produced to meet an increasing demand for mostly male and female *ropa blanca hecha* (casual clothing, and ready-made). Second, women sewed *ropa blanca* in their own home, for the family and the market. *Coser ajeno* or doing the sewing of families who could afford to hire a *costurera* was a common practice in both Mexico and Spain during the nineteenth and twentieth century. In their own home and in other families' homes, *costureras* made, seamed, hemmed and repaired all kinds of garments and house linens as everyday housework. Third, *modistas* (sometimes also called *sastres*), but not *sastres*, produced to satisfy women's interest for fashionable clothing, which had expanded in the mid-to-late nineteenth century, as Spain and Mexico's middle class became avid consumers. The *modista* produced fashionable clothing fundamentally at home or at a small female-owned *modisterías* (seamstress fixed shops), or in the back of stores or *talleres*.

By the 1910s the sewing machine had made its ways into all-female sewing businesses. As opposed to countries like the United States where women's ready-made clothing was widely available in urban centers, custom-made clothing was the norm when it came to women's clothing by the 1920s in Spain

and Mexico.¹¹ *Modistas* measured their customers on an individual basis.

Sewing for *ropa blanca* and children's clothes at home was still the standard in Spain and Mexico in the 1940s. Between 1900 and 1940, two trends defined sewing in both nations. First, the sewing machine had become a common household appliance as well as the *modistas'* tool of choice for production. The "demise of [this] female economy," happened in Spain and in Mexico only in the late 1970s when department stores proliferated and more and more people could afford to buy ready-made clothing.¹² Second, Singer had adjusted and integrated the selling organization within regional contexts, ensuring the company's success despite political upheaval, nationalism and increasing protectionism.

Another aspect of female sewing practices in Spain and Mexico was embroidery. Since the sixteenth century, Christian moralists had recommended embroidery to

¹¹ Nancy L. Green, *Ready-to-Wear and Ready-to-Work : A Century of Industry and Immigrants in Paris and New York* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997)., 20-1, 138-150. For the case of France see Clare Haru Crowston, *Fabricating Women : The Seamstresses of Old Regime France, 1675-1791* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001)., 384-390.

¹² In the United States, as Wendy Gamber explains, "ready-made dresses and mass produced millinery would not be available until the twentieth century." In addition, studies of garment workers show that large garment factories were, and still are today, highly concentrated in urban centers. Wendy Gamber, *The Female Economy: The Millinery and Dressmaking Trades, 1860-1930* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997)., 9-10, 201-207, 229. Fiona Wilson and Patricia Arias, "Clothing, Identity and Consumption in a Mexican Region," *Center for Development Research - Working Paper* 95, no. 9 (November, 1995), 15-28. Pilar Díaz Sánchez, "Del taller de costura a la fábrica. el trabajo de las mujeres en la confección textil madrileña," *Cuadernos de Historia Contemporánea* 21 (1999): 283-286. Joel Seidman, *The Needle Trades, Labor in Twentieth Century America* (New York & Toronto: Farrar & Rinehart, Inc., 1942). Judith G. Coffin, *The Politics of Women's Work : The Paris Garment Trades, 1750-1915* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1996).

women of honor from all classes in the Hispanic World. The nineteenth-century turn toward rationalizing housework, or the “revival of housework” as Judith Coffin defines it, as well as the culture of domesticity, upheld embroidery as an activity largely performed in the house.¹³ Embroidery was squarely in the woman’s sphere because of the goods they produced were mostly household goods and ornaments. In the eighteenth and nineteenth century, household manuals showed women and girls in the home making goods like tablecloths and bed sheets and how to adorn them to decorate different spaces of the home. Meanwhile, the demand for embroidery grew in the second half of the nineteenth century as fashionable garments required embroidered ornamentation and the household became more and more a space to adorn.

Singer’s experience in Spain and Mexico demonstrates that home sewing practices and multinational business were connected. They also provide further clues to help us understand Singer’s global growth, as well as regional aspects of women’s lives and cultures of sewing. Through Singer, which monopolized the sewing machine market from the turn of the twentieth century until 1940 in Spain and Mexico, we can examine home sewing, a sector that is too often dismissed as an activity in the “private” sphere.

SEWING MACHINES

Few studies have highlighted the transformative role of the sewing machine in the nineteenth century’s industrializing societies. Historians Nancy Green, Judith

¹³ Coffin, *The Politics of Women’s Work. The Paris Garment Trades, 1750-1915.*, 121.

Coffin, Susie Porter and Rosa María Capel Martínez demonstrate that the sewing machine led to the emergence of the ready-to-wear clothing sector, in which thousands of women were employed in New York, Madrid, Paris and Mexico City. These studies challenged narratives that only looked at heavy industry like steel and thus precluded the participation of women in industrialization.¹⁴ The development of the clothing industry, to which the sewing machine greatly contributed, was based on the move of women workers from the home to the *taller* or the factory. Many historians have assumed that the productive role of the home gradually vanished. However, several have demonstrated, that a large part of garment production and its mechanization remained in small factories or cottages in less urbanized regions of France, for example, as historian Judith Coffin has shown, and at home where, as historian Susan Strasser points out, housework was industrialized. As “households had to adapt to industrial workers’ new schedules,” Strasser explains, “factories had begun to produce goods that

¹⁴ Louise A. Tilly and Joan Wallach Scott, *Women, Work, and Family* (Routledge, 1989). Coffin, *The Politics of Women's Work : The Paris Garment Trades, 1750-1915.*, 7-9. Green, *Ready-to-Wear and Ready-to-Work : A Century of Industry and Immigrants in Paris and New York.*, 20-22. Susie S. Porter, *Working Women in Mexico City: Public Discourses and material Conditions, 1879-1931* (University of Arizona Press, 2003). Carmen Ramos-Escandón, "Mujeres Trabajadoras en el México Porfiriano. Género e Ideología del trabajo Fememino 1876 -1911. ," *Revista Europea de Estudios Latinoamericanos y del Caribe* 48(1990). Carmen Ramos Escandón, *La Diferenciación de Género en el trabajo textil en México* (Mexico: El Colegio de San Luis, 2004). Rosa María Capel Martínez, "Daily Life of Working Women in Spain at the Beginning of the Twentieth Century," in *New Women of Spain : Social-Political and Philosophical Studies of Feminist Thought*, ed. Elisabeth de Sotelo (Münster: Piscataway, NJ: Lit Verlag, 2005).

helped people to adapt to urban industrial life.” These goods included the frying pan, lighting and heating tools, and the sewing machine.¹⁵

During the last three decades of the nineteenth century, more and more women found work in garment factories, while others sewed at home for garment contractors or as private proprietors in Mexico City, Paris, Boston and New York. In the garment sector, historians show, a persistent gendered perception of women’s labor shaped and sustained work and power relations. Gendered social norms made women’s work outside the home amoral, as it seemed to prevent them from being proper mothers and wives. These values benefitted garment manufacturers, who could pay women lower wages than men. Wendy Gamber and Mary Lynn Stewart argue that gender-specific perceptions about women’s labor also shaped women’s professionalism in dressmaking and millinery. For example, mechanization spurred the growth of dress patterns, which potentially made any woman a professional dressmaker.¹⁶

Home sewing mechanization has been largely unexplored, especially in the Hispanic world. Sewing machines, and especially Singer’s, however, went beyond city limits and they were put in use in a variety of activities besides making of *ropa blanca*. By examining the expansion of Singer’s selling organization and the multiples uses of the sewing machine in the house and for

¹⁵ Strasser, *Never Done. A History of American Housework.*, 5. Coffin, *The Politics of Women's Work : The Paris Garment Trades, 1750-1915*.

¹⁶ Gamber, *The Female Economy: The Millinery and Dressmaking Trades, 1860-1930*. Mary Lynn Stewart, *Dressing Modern Frenchwomen : Marketing Haute Couture, 1919-1939* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008).

women's fashion and ornamentation interests, my dissertation extends our geographical understanding of industrialization in Spain and Mexico. On the consumption side, my work parallels recent studies on middle-class culture that question the stagnation and elitism of capitalism in Spain and Mexico by demonstrating how production and consumption of technology and western-styled clothing along with traditional goods grew since the mid of the nineteenth century.¹⁷

MULTINATIONALS

The multinational is a crucial link to understand these Atlantic threads. The multinational is a business enterprise that has branches in various countries (called host economies) that are controlled and managed from one location (the home economy.) The first American-owned multinationals appeared in the nineteenth century and were important to the development of the firm in the United States. There, diverse companies in a variety of industries expanded as they integrated distribution and manufacturing activities under a single management. Companies became organizations of specialized divisions. They were multi-unit organizations of "semi-autonomous operated divisions." As Alfred Chandler explains, the development of a bureaucratically-managed enterprise was driven by cost advantages and the need for an "effective administration" to

¹⁷ Jesus Cruz, *The Rise of Middle-Class Culture in Nineteenth-Century Spain* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2011). Steven B. Bunker, "'Consumers of Good Taste:' Marketing Modernity in Northern Mexico, 1890-1910," *Mexican Studies / Estudios Mexicanos* 13, no. 2 (1998). Vicente, *Clothing the Spanish Empire: Families and the Calico Trade in the Early Modern Atlantic World*.

coordinate the increasing opportunities of mass production and mass distribution, which were the hallmark of the Second Industrial Revolution. Corporations were created to explore new effective ways to sell and produce abroad.¹⁸ As Mira Wilkins and Geoffrey Jones have demonstrated, other issues like ownership, entrepreneurship, and the political, social, and economic conditions of the host economy shaped the evolution and growth of American multinational business.¹⁹ The multinational corporation matured to become a centralized economic institution that fostered economic activity both in the United States and globally, as it expanded and moved its operations abroad. The growth of the multinational was generally directed by managerial decisions of top executives in the home economy, i.e. the United States. These managers wanted to improve their business in different locations. From the 1860s to 1910, more and more operations such as advertising and distribution were undertaken under a single management. As a result, global distribution and production activities became integrated, into what Jones defines as the first global economy.²⁰

¹⁸ Alfred D. Chandler, Jr., *The Visible Hand : The Managerial Revolution in American Business* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 1977). Williamson, "The Modern Corporation: Origins, Evolution, Attributes.", 1560. For more about internalization as a business strategy of the multinational see John H. Dunning and Sarianna M. Lundan, *Multinational Enterprises and the Global Economy* (Cheltenham, UK ; Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar, 2008).

¹⁹ Wilkins, *The Emergence of Multinational Enterprise: American Business Abroad from the Colonial Era to 1914.*, 15-31-33-37. Chandler, *The Visible Hand : The Managerial Revolution in American Business.*, 15-49. Geoffrey Jones, *Multinationals and Global Capitalism : From the Nineteenth to the Twenty-First Century* (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2005)., 5-7, 26-27.

²⁰ Ibid.

The American multinational emerged in the second half of the nineteenth century in the North Atlantic, as enterprises expanded production to England and industrializing European nations to better distribute their production and to cope with nationalism. As American industries like mining and oil grew, American corporations expanded into Latin America, too. Because of its proximity to the United States, Mexico experienced the incipient presence of American mass-manufactured goods in the late nineteenth century.²¹ The presence of American machinery in Spain, as my dissertation will show, dates back to mid-to-late nineteenth century. During the 1920s, and especially after the 1960s, the consumption of American goods, such as cars and household appliances, also increased in western European nations.²²

²¹ Wilkins, *The Emergence of Multinational Enterprise: American Business Abroad from the Colonial Era to 1914*. Thomas F. O'Brien, *The Century of U.S. Capitalism in Latin America* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1999).

²² *The Maturing of Multinational Enterprise: American Business Abroad from 1914 to 1970, Harvard Studies in Business History* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1974)., 56. Victoria De Grazia, *Irresistible Empire: America's Advance through Twentieth-Century Europe* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 2005), 337-350. Enrique De Miguel Fernández and Vicente Sanz Ronzalén, "US Investments in Spain (1889-2005)", in *American Firms in Europe: Strategy, Identity, Perception and Performance (1880-1980)* (Genève: Librairie Droz, 2009), 187-191. Ruth Oldenziel and Karin Zachmann, *Cold War Kitchen : Americanization, Technology, and European Users*, Inside Technology (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2009); Angel Calvo, "State, Firms and Technology. The Rise of Multinational Telecommunications Companies: Itt and the Compania Telefonica Nacional de Espana, 1924-1945," *Business History* 50, no. 4 (2008).

American foreign direct investment in Spain increased after 1914. Studies about American multinationals show that the 1920s was a positive and optimistic decade for American companies like Ford and General Electric in this country. Other European countries like Great Britain, France, Germany and Italy were bigger borrowers and recipients of US foreign investments, which explains why consumer goods and manufacturing had less influence in Spain, at least between 1939 and 1959, the year that General Francisco Franco enacted the Stabilization Plan to open the country to foreign investments.²³ In Latin America, Mexico was among the countries that had received the most American direct investments since the 1870s. As Latin America embraced liberal economic policies to industrialize, American firms received concessions to develop railway networks and especially to invest in extracting industries such as mining and oil. As Thomas O'Brien shows, Mexico exerted "higher efforts to attract US investments" and by 1910, American firms owned "around 100 million acres" in this country. The Mexican Revolution (1910-1920) and the policies of the nationalist governments that followed, however, limited the market for American firms. Nevertheless, in both manufacturing and retailing, American companies

²³ De Miguel Fernández and Sanz Ronzalén, "US Investments in Spain (1889-2005)," and Adoración Álvaro Moya, "Foreign Direct Investment, Economic Aid and Modernization: US Firms in Spain (1920-1975)," in *American Firms in Europe: Strategy, Identity, Perception and Performance (1880-1980)*, Hubert Bonin and Ferry de Goey, eds. (Genève: Librairie Droz, 2009). Adoración Álvaro Moya, "Inversión directa extranjera y formación de capacidades organizativas locales. Un análisis del impacto de Estados Unidos en la empresa española (1918-1975)" (PhD diss., Universidad Complutense de Madrid, 2011).

continued to exert great influence within the Mexican economy and lead Mexico's integration into the world economy.²⁴

As it expanded its operations, the multinational integrated and adapted to a variety of cultural and social contexts. While in the nineteenth century and early twentieth century, nationalism gave birth to national borders and national cultures, the multinational was nonetheless able to maintain and expand local and global connections as well as regional development in the host economies. Foreign companies became part of national economies and cultures as they adapted to local economic contexts and negotiated with governments. Although protectionism and nationalism at times restricted American investment in Spain and Mexico, both countries favored industrialization and economic modernization.

To be sure, the multinational enterprise is a strict managerial organization that seeks economic success wherever the company operates. The construction of vertically integrated structures was not uniform, however. To better understand the relationship between the multinational and the local context my work borrows from Mary Kay Vaughan's approach to twentieth-century Mexican national educational policy. Vaughan's explains the idea of "negotiation as an organizing concept" instead of as a constant and even process of policy implementation. In post-revolutionary Mexico, a variety of elements came in to play when

²⁴ Victor Bulmer-Thomas, *The Economic History of Latin America since Independence* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 101-106. O'Brien, *The Century of U.S. Capitalism in Latin America*, xi, 14, 30, 77. Wilkins, *The Emergence of Multinational Enterprise: American Business Abroad from the Colonial Era to 1914.*, 114-125, 208-9, 215.

implementing policies in Mexico that were meant to help develop a national and public education system. Teachers and the general population who contested the Mexican government officials' goals to modernize and transform society through education, Vaughan argues, shaped public and institutionalized education nationwide.²⁵

Recent accounts of multinational corporations that focus on the host economy tend to emphasize the fundamental role of politics and culture in shaping the operations of the company in a given region and, thus, the overall strategy of the corporation. Contemporary historians Myrna Santiago and Marcelo Bucheli challenge narratives that understood the multinational as an always-imposing entity. With foreign companies came new ways of production, new land ownership models, new consumption habits and new labor routines. These in turn led to new power relations that impacted the corporation.²⁶

Meanwhile, scholars who have analyzed the advertisements produced by multinationals have tended to emphasize the role of culture in business. Some note how advertisements shaped local and global cultures. Historian Victoria De

²⁵ Mary K. Vaughan, *Cultural politics in revolution: teachers, peasants, and schools in Mexico, 1930-1940* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1997) 4, 8.

²⁶ Thomas F. O'Brien, *The Revolutionary Mission: American Enterprise in Latin America, 1900-1945* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996). Lara Putnam, *The company they kept: migrants and the politics of gender in Caribbean Costa Rica, 1870-1960* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2002). Marcelo Bucheli, *Bananas and Business. The United Fruit Company in Colombia, 1899-2000* (New York: New York University Press, 2005). Jones, *Multinationals and Global Capitalism*. Myrna I. Santiago, 2006. *The ecology of oil: environment, labor, and the Mexican Revolution, 1900-1938* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

Grazia has shown how advertisements promoted consumerism in Europe during the twentieth century and how advertisers created new needs that were to be satisfied by mass-consumer goods. As De Grazia explains, consumption became a way to participate in a democratic society. And so the multinationals that supplied such goods became “civilizers” of a sort. Advertisers needed to understand and adapt to regional contexts and lifestyles. For example, after 1917 in Mexico, both foreign and local advertisers “tapped into the notion of progress” when portraying Mexico, Julio Moreno explains, “as a country that was moving ... toward a promising future in which scientific development and industrial growth provided the basis for a prosperous society.” This formed part of a businessmen discourse that portrayed foreign companies in Latin America as developers and reformers. These companies some times adapted to their new circumstances. But also many locals adopted certain foreign consumption patterns and business practices to serve their own plan to modernize.²⁷

Recently, scholars have examined on multinational operations in host economies as a way to understand patterns of cultural acceptance, knowledge transfer, and the workings of a multinational’s regional business practices. For example,

Andrew Gordon’s recent work on Singer in Japan, titled *Fabricating Consumers*:

²⁷ Thomas F. O'Brien, *The Revolutionary Mission* and O'Brien, *Making the Americas: The United States and Latin America from the Age of Revolutions to the Era of Globalization* (Tucson: University of New Mexico Press, 2007). Coffin, *The Politics of Women’s Work. The Paris Garment Trades, 1750-1915.*, 84-90. Julio Moreno, *Yankee Don’t Go Home! Mexican Nationalism, American Business Culture, and the Shaping of Modern Mexico, 1920-1950* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 113. De Grazia, *Irresistible Empire*. Domosh, *American Commodities in an Age of Empire*.

the Sewing Machine in Modern Japan (2011), looks at the local context, and shows how Singer spurred consumerism and commercialization in Japan in the first half of the twentieth century. Gordon's work describes Singer marketing as an "aggressive" and often imposing system that led to fundamental changes in consumption and selling patterns that at the same time fostered Japan's integration into the modern capitalist world. Gordon demonstrates that Singer's expansion into the Asian market was not automatic, however, as regional values and perceptions toward selling and buying clothing clashed with American's own standards and practices at the end of the nineteenth century. And although Singer proved successful in Japan by the 1920s, it faced nationalism, as well as competition from Japan's own sewing machine industry.²⁸

The most comprehensive study of Singer's international operations is still Robert Bruce Davies' *Peacefully Working to Conquer the World*. Davies examined the early work and growth of Singer around the world, comparing legal, economic and social obstacles that Singer faced when entering markets in other continents. Davies showed how Singer's growth was peaceful. He claimed that Singer adapted to each region's particularities, even as nationalism advanced across Europe. Davies also emphasized the role of Singer's own salesmen or canvassers. As Geoffrey Jones put it, "by 1890 Singer's sewing machines were

²⁸ Andrew Gordon, *Fabricating Consumers : The Sewing Machine in Modern Japan* (Berkeley, Calif: University of California Press, 2012).

sold virtually worldwide and almost entirely by its own employees.”²⁹ This was a powerful and deliberate marketing strategy that used the local agent to build the multinational.

Russia represents another extraordinary case of Singer’s expansion abroad in the late nineteenth century. Fred Carstensen’s *American Enterprise in Foreign Markets: Studies of Singer and International Harvester in Imperial Russia* and Irina Potkina’s “The Singer Company in Russia: 1897-1917” show how Singer built an efficient selling system that spanned the world. They explain how the firm’s investment in manufacturing plants abroad lowered transportation costs and facilitated growth. Their work also shows how Singer negotiated with local political elites and adopted local labor practices to foster their operations in Russia at the turn of the twentieth century.³⁰

²⁹ Robert Bruce Davies, *Peacefully Working to Conquer the World: Singer Sewing Machines in Foreign Markets, 1854-1920* (New York: Arno Press, 1976). Jones, *Multinationals and Global Capitalism*. Godley, *Selling the Sewing Machine Around the World*, 266. Mark Casson and Andrew Godley, “Revisiting the Emergence of the Modern Business Enterprise: Entrepreneurship and the Singer Global Distribution System,” *Journal of Management Studies* 44, no. 7 (2009).

³⁰ Fred V. Carstensen, *American Enterprise in Foreign Markets : Studies of Singer and International Harvester in Imperial Russia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984). Irinia V. Potkina, “The Singer Company in Russia: 1897-1917.” For more information about the introduction of the sewing machines in the Middle East and in Dutch Indonesia see: Jean Gelman Taylor, “The Sewing Machine in Colonial-Era Photographs: A record from Dutch Indonesia” *Modern Asian Studies* 46, 1 (2012), and Uri M. Kupferschmidt, “The Social History of the Sewing Machine in the Middle East” *Die Welt des Islams* 42, 2 (2004).

THE EARLY HISTORY OF SINGER AND SEWING PRACTICES IN THE UNITED STATES

Although the original purpose of the sewing machine was to mechanize casual garment and uniform making, early developments in sewing machinery looked to embroidery practices to develop the technology. In the process of embroidery, Frank Godfrey explains, “the eye needle was altered to make stitching easier, becoming a fine steel hook.” In embroidery, the needle went one way and back, without fully penetrating through the cloth. It hooked a thread from below, and drew it through the cloth, forming a loop. On the next stitch, the needle had the movement, hooking the thread from below one more time and drawing it through the previous loop. The result was a line of single chain stitches. To become successful, the sewing machine’s most important attribute was to avoid that the needle fully penetrated the cloth, which created embroidery, and also gave rise to a second principle, the continuous feeding of thread.³¹ A machine that used the embroidery chain stitch allowed the operator to make long chains of stitches, with different shapes, curved or straight. Such a mechanism took more than thirty years to invent. The first person who tried to mechanize sewing was a French tailor named Barthelemy Thimonnier (1793-1857) in 1825. Later, in the 1840s in both Europe and the United States, several inventors developed a mechanism to feed a second thread through a shuttle. Elias Howe’s lockstitch mechanism, which he patented in the United States in

³¹ Frank P. Godfrey, *An International History of the Sewing Machine* (London: Robert Hale, 1982), 22.

1846, allowed machines to feed a second thread through a shuttle. His machine, however, had little success; the operator still had to repeatedly stop to add thread. And so seamstresses were still able make chains of stitches faster by hand than the machine. In 1851, Isaac Merritt Singer (1811-1875) patented two important additions. The first was “a reciprocating shuttle” or “feeding-wheel ... which had a yielding spring that would permit of passage over seams, or would sew different thicknesses without requiring any change in its adjustment.” Second, Singer invented a mechanism that controlled the tension with which the shuttle fed the thread.³²

By then, however, there were multiple mechanisms patented in the United States. And all followed similar versions of the same lockstitch mechanism. At least twenty inventors had registered multiple additions and components that were essential to make a sewing machine work properly. Yet those mechanisms that were workable were still too expensive for the average consumer in the early 1850s. Also each inventor made different versions of the mechanism, which meant that they needed to provide different instructions for each machine. This complicated any attempt to educate the consumer.

Similarities between mechanisms also led to an intense patent litigation that was expensive for manufactures and raised the price of sewing machines for

³² US patent No. 8294. Ibid., 28, 35, 48, 62-75. Frederick G. Bourne, "American Sewing Machines," in Chauncey M. Depew (ed.) *1795-1895: One Hundred Years of American Commerce ... A History of American Commerce by One Hundred Americans* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1968), 529-531.

consumers.³³ In 1854, Howe sued Singer and won the license for the lockstitch mechanism. Under this license, every other manufacturer using the lockstitch had to pay Howe a twenty-five dollar fee for every machine they sold. This fee was expensive. And so Howe's competitors continued to spend more money on litigation. In 1856, Singer, Howe, and two other growing sewing-machine manufactures, the Grover and Baker Company and Wheeler and Wilson, agreed to form a patent pool. Under the Albany Agreement, Howe only received five dollars for every machine sold with his 1846 patent, while companies outside the pool had to pay the poolers fifteen dollars for every machine they sold that used their patented technology.³⁴

The Albany Agreement removed Singer's legal obstacles and improved its financial status. Between 1868 and 1874 Singer had collected \$1,449,982.08 (roughly \$23 million in today's currency). Singer continued making modifications to make the sewing machines more useful to the clothing industry, improving both the tension device and the thread feeder.³⁵ With these innovations, Singer pitched the new machine to tailors, but many were content with traditional

³³ For a list of all the patents from Singer and other companies see Grace Rogers Cooper, *The Invention of the Sewing Machine* (Washington D.C: The Smithsonian Institution Press, 1968), 19-38. For a detail description of the multiple mechanisms see Godfrey, *An International History of the Sewing Machine*. See also Robert Bruce Davies, *Peacefully Working to Conquer the World: Singer Sewing Machines in Foreign Markets, 1854-1920* (New York: Arno Press, 1976), 1-6. And Frederick G. Bourne, "American Sewing Machines."

³⁴ Ibid., 71, 75-6, 79-82. Davies, *Peacefully Working to Conquer the World*, 13-15. Bourne, *American Sewing Machines*, 525, 529.

³⁵ Davies, *Peacefully Working to Conquer the World*, 54-7. Relative value of USD calculator in <http://www.measuringworth.com/uscompare/>

craftsmanship. While tailors were unenthusiastic, women entrepreneurs and women who sewed at home became used to the machine. Most women who sewed, however, worked in the home. And so marketing the sewing machine to women in the home was important. Since the late 1850s, making a machine that was ideal for domestic use was Singer's focus. In 1865, Singer improved the company's product line with the "New Family," a variety of machines to be used for dressmaking and general sewing in the home.

1856	The Turtle Back	1889	The First Electric
1859	Letter A	1902	The 66 Model
1865	New Family	1911	First Motor Bell Drive
1879	The 15-22 Model	1917	B T Motor
1885	The Improved Family	1931	The 15-91 Model

Figure 4. (table 1) Singer family sewing machines models, 1856-1931.³⁶

While sewing machines allowed for greater garment production, many social reformers believed that the machine was an industrial tool that would only distract women from their traditional responsibilities of raising children and maintaining the home. They saw the domestic appliance as a noisy device that would disturb the household peace, much like the bustle of industry in urban areas. Some voices in these circles would have agreed with feminist and labor

³⁶ *The Singer Light*, 1940. SSMC Records. Box 1. For more information about sewing machine models and their technology see Godfrey, *An International History of the Sewing Machine* and Cooper, *The Invention of the Sewing Machine* (Washington D.C: The Smithsonian Institution Press, 1968) See also the sewing machine collectors' website, http://www.ismacs.net/singer_sewing_machine_company/singer-sewing-machine-models.html

historian Ruth Schwartz Cowan, who believed that household appliances like the sewing machine only “reorganize[d] the work processes of housework,” and generally increased housework for women.³⁷

To defy these views, manufacturers like Singer insisted that there was a link between technology and the art of sewing. In doing so, they connected the machine to the virtues of domesticity and female respectability. For example, *The Weekly Sewing Machine Journal*, a publication for mostly American audiences, reminded readers that “little accessories,” like the hemmer and the embroiderer, served “ornamental” functions that “may not [have been] apparent at first sight.” Nonetheless, these accessories would make the operator an “artist” with “artistic taste.”³⁸

At the same time, manufacturers created ornate sewing machine cabinets that resembled household furniture and made the machine seem more at home in domestic spaces. In the United States, Singer began its production of a variety of wood cabinets in the 1860s. And in advertisements, Singer described the cabinets as beautiful furniture that served every housewife well, as mothers could

³⁷ Ruth Schwartz Cowan, *More Work for Mother. The Ironies of Household Technology from the Open Hearth to the Microwave* (Basic Books, 1983).

³⁸ “The sewing machine as an educator” *The Weekly Sewing Machine Journal*, (New York : C. A. Lovejoy) November, 1884. Hagley Museum and Library (hereafter HML), Imprints.

sew while taking care of the children. With the machine in the home, women did not have to sacrifice their responsibilities to serve the family.³⁹

Singer specialized in the production of the household sewing machine in response to gendered cultures of sewing in places like Spain and Mexico. Since most women and men needed instruction in how to use a sewing machine and the sewing machine continued to be an expensive appliance for the general public, Singer's marketing strategies focused on giving one-on-one demonstrations, maintenance services and financing. In 1852, Singer and his lawyer, Edward Clark, agreed that Singer would be in charge of the manufacturing, while Clark would focus on the legal and financial issues of the company.⁴⁰ Historians agree that Clark led the company to success of the business with the development of a branch office system and the implementation of installment payments, which attracted new customers. Branch offices opened in different locations and supplied sewing machines directly to consumers. They employed a bookkeeper, a cashier, a salesman and a female instructor. There were employees in charge of reporting and registering the sales made various

³⁹ Singer postcards, ca 1870. Warsaw Collection of Business Americana (National Museum of American History, Archives Center) (hereafter WCBA); Box 3, Singer; Folder 6 and 16. *Instructions for Using Singer 12k "Family" Sewing Machine* (Singer Manufacturing Company, 1860-1902). Robert Bruce Davies, *Peacefully Working to Conquer the World*, 12. Don Bissell, *The First Conglomerate: 145 Years of the Singer Sewing Machine Company* (Brunswick, ME: Audenreed Press, 1999), and Paula A. De la Cruz-Fernandez, Isaac M. Singer, 1811-1875. Forthcoming 2013, Immigrant Entrepreneurship. German-American Business Biographies, 1720 to the present. Vol 2. See also http://www.ismacs.net/singer_sewing_machine_company/model-list/classes-1-99.html

⁴⁰ Frederick G. Bourne, "American Sewing Machines," 528-9.

sub-offices under their supervision. In the branch office and the sub-office, traveling agents and a “station agent,” as they were, received a small salary and commission, along with their “horse and wagon,” which helped them promote and distribute sewing machines throughout the territory. Clark made clear that all employees could only sell Singer machines in their stations and branch offices. In 1856, Clark introduced the hire purchase system, in which consumers could acquire the appliance by making weekly or monthly payments. Clark’s travelling agents became key to this new system of payments. As Andrew Godley demonstrates in his work on England, travelling agents became payment collectors as well in the 1860s. The canvasser-collector was Singer’s most efficient marketing strategy to reach consumers both in the United States and abroad.⁴¹

⁴¹ Ibid. 528-9. Davies, *Peacefully Working to Conquer the World*, 18-21, 68-69. Godley, *Selling the Sewing Machine Around the World, 1850-1920*, 266, 280-6.

Figure 5. Singer Branch Office system and international organization by 1878. Singer's marketing system was decentralized before 1889. New York and London were the central offices to manage manufacturing and distribution worldwide. George Woodruff was the head of London's Central Office. Hamburg's Central Office was created soon after Singer representative George Neidlinger was appointed to the region in 1865. The three main central offices created and opened branch offices in different countries where they also appointed managers and recruited other employees.⁴²

OUTLINE OF CHAPTERS

In my dissertation, the different steps that are part of the embroidery and dressmaking processes serve as structure to explain how Singer's role in the modernization of sewing practices in Spain and Mexico intensified gradually. The first chapter of my dissertation examines how Singer entered Spain and Mexico between the late 1860s and the late 1880s. During these decades Singer merely surveyed (or baste) what consumers wanted and started to build its business. Its experiences shaped its corporate structure that took shape in

⁴² Davies, *Peacefully Working to Conquer the World*. Chandler, *The Visible Hand*, 303-307.

the early years of Frederick Bourne's presidency between 1889 and 1905.⁴³ The second chapter shows how Spain and Mexico became important markets for Singer, which incorporated both regions into its vertically integrated multinational organization. It did so because the company knew locals' participation was fundamental for its success. This dependence made women and men who knew about local sewing practices essential for Singer's corporate structure. Singer's response to local contexts in Spain and Mexico included its advertising, which I examine in Chapter Three. Embroidery in particular became Singer's most advertised activity in exhibits and manuals until the 1920s. Singer penetrated the so-called private sphere by making the home and women's home responsibilities a space and practices to be mechanized, and, thus, "civilized." Nineteenth-century tenets on domesticity upheld house ornaments as an extension of women's roles as mothers and wives. And so Singer created departments that were dedicated to home-embroidery and dressmaking. These departments mostly employed women, as they were seen as the connoisseurs of

⁴³ Between 1852 and 1863 Isaac M. Singer and Edward Clark were both partners and presidents of the Singer Company. In 1863 Inslee Hooper became the president until 1876, one year after Singer died, when Clark become president. Between 1882 and 1889 George McKenzie presided the already international corporation until Frederick Bourne came to office to stay until 1905. Douglas Alexander was the next president and he stayed for more than forty years. The lawyers Milton Lightner and Donald Kircher took over Singer's presidency in 1949 and 1958 respectively. They were the last presidents of the U.S.-only incorporated company. In 1987 Paul Bilzerian "broke the one-great company into 12 parts and sold off ten to the highest bidders, making an almost \$1.5 million in for months." Davies, *Peacefully Working to Conquer the World*, 31-37. Don Bissell, *The First Conglomerate. 145 Years of the Singer Sewing Machine Company* (Harvest Lane Press, 2010). And Heather Carmen Martin, "Singer Memories," <http://singermemories.com>.

home embroidery. This practice helped Singer's social image and reputation as well as the company presented itself as a protector of domesticity and as the expert in home sewing.

The emphasis on local markets allowed Singer to survive periods of political upheaval and nationalism in Spain and Mexico. In Chapter Four I examine Singer's organization around the time of the Mexican Revolution (1910-1920) and the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939). In part, the former integration into local markets helped Singer's fourth president, Douglas Alexander (Singer's president from 1905 to 1949) reorganize Singer's selling organization, which eventually returned to normal when the armed conflict in Spain and Mexico subsided. By the 1920s, vocational schools for women had developed in both Spain and Mexico with special emphasis on professionalizing women's dressmaking, hat making and machine embroidery. Spanish and Mexican women contributed by publishing their own dressmaking manuals and opening dressmaking schools for women. *Modistas* and women sewing at home used Singer's machines to pursue their own interests. The company also opened its own sewing schools for women and continued publishing embroidery by machine and dressmaking manuals.

CONCLUSIONS

In 1951, Singer's president, Milton C. Lightner, celebrated the company's centennial. Singer organized a play and a luxurious luncheon for nearly four hundred invitees who represented various magazines, mostly on housekeeping and pattern making. Singer prepared for them a large exhibition. The first

section displayed the three latest models of Singer's industrial sewing machines. In this section Singer also touted at the company's contribution to the Allies' war efforts during World War II.

As it had done throughout the nineteenth century, Singer went on the show demonstrating that the home was the ideal space for the sewing machine. The remainder of the exhibit proudly displayed its role in "the growth of home sewing" by showing women's increasing attendance at its sewing centers. Women demonstrators were also a part of the exhibit. They made "fashion stitches" and showed off their advanced skills as they even worked "without [the] use of Sewing Machine Attachments." Singer's main sewing machine attachments on display were the "buttonholer, zigzagger, hemstitcher, blindstitcher." These were put to use to demonstrate the utility when making both home linens and in dresses.⁴⁴

A third exhibit displayed women's dresses from Burma, Indonesia, Iran, New Zealand, Sweden, Panama, Belgium, Brazil, Singapore, Ecuador, France, Greece, Holland, India, Lebanon, the Philippines, Thailand and Turkey. This exhibit revealed Singer's international influence and served to entice those who may have been interested in working overseas. Most importantly, the display was in accord with Singer's rhetoric that the American sewing machine was a civilizing tool. The exhibit also demonstrated Singer's work to improve sewing in homes around the world. From France, Singer displayed a "table runner,

⁴⁴ "A Century of Sewing Service, 1851-1951" Anniversary Exhibit Booklet (Singer Sewing Machine Company, 1951). HML, Pictorials Collection.

napkins, [a] child's dress, [a] slip, and [a] romper in yellow silk with multi-colored cross stitch." From Latin America, it exhibited a "mantilla [with] mauve lace, lace pattern outlined with silver metallic thread" and a linen tablecloth with the "Inca' design embroidered in one of our Peru, S. A., shops."⁴⁵

Finally, the display featured the "Singer Sewing Center Exhibit," which showed all of the tools that Singer's sewing schools used to make dresses. Especially in the 1920s, Singer focused more on dressmaking, as more and more women became professionals. Singer's Educational Department and the International Departments and agencies organized these exhibits, just as their predecessors had overseen Singer's international exhibits since 1876.

The 1951 Singer exhibit was representative of the company's work in home sewing for over a century. It revealed how the history of home sewing and the history of multinational business are intertwined. The ways in which locals in Spain and Mexico used Singer's machines beginning in the 1860s and how these were incorporated in Singer's managerial structure is significant because it shows how business is embedded in culture. "Atlantic Threads" shows how the so-called "private" sphere was intrinsically linked with the development of public entities such as the corporation. It reveals how the modern multinational enterprise is not only a part of economic and political history but also how it shapes, changes, transforms, and nourishes cultural developments both at home and abroad.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

Chapter 1

Basting the World as a Market: Singer in Mexico and Spain, 1860 to 1890

In 1893, Singer's new president, Frederick Bourne, ordered the company's offices abroad to implement a standardized system of distribution. To coordinate Singer sales around the world, Bourne created separate departments to oversee exports, advertisement and trademarks. Bourne hired agents and canvassers in every nation. In every country Singer opened a central office, which coordinated various branches and stores. From 1893 onward, central offices had to report regional business results directly and regularly to New York. There were two reasons Bourne streamlined Singer's operations at home and abroad. First was to recover control over the company, especially from the London's office that had acquired great control over the business in continental Europe and some locations in South America. Second, Bourne intended to end the "persistence of malpractices" within the growing selling organization result of a decentralized expansion overseas.⁴⁶

The early years of the 1890s represent a critical moment in the history of Singer as a multinational corporation. After three decades of expansion, the distribution of Singer sewing machines was decentralized, coordinated by both Singer representatives and independent dealers around the world. Bourne's policies were not a complete departure from earlier practices in countries like Spain and Mexico, however. There, the company's distribution system

⁴⁶ Robert Bruce Davies, *Peacefully Working to Conquer the World: Singer Sewing Machines in Foreign Markets, 1854-1920* (New York: Arno Press, 1976), 60-1, 92-112.

accommodated marketing practices that had evolved over three decades in response to local peculiarities. Between the late 1860s and 1890, the actions of Singer managers and also low-ranking agents in Spain and Mexico—like the experience in other regions—, and the increasing sales of sewing machines in both regions, served as an experiment for the building of the vertically integrated multinational company.

In the mid to late nineteenth century, Singer encountered three challenges to improve sales in Spain and Mexico. Singer representatives and agents had to overcome low consumer income and aggressive competition from other sewing machines suppliers. In both Spain and Mexico, local merchants, supplied by rival manufacturers, competed with Singer over markets. Lastly, undeveloped communication and transportation networks complicated Singer's penetration into provincial markets. While railways connected Madrid, Barcelona and Valencia, in Spain, and Mexico City, Veracruz, and Monterrey in Mexico, consumers in the outer reaches were harder to accommodate.⁴⁷

Singer's international marketing grew between 1860 and 1889 and the challenges experienced in Spain and Mexico were fundamental for Singer to define its international corporate strategies. The examination of the development of subsidiaries, company branches and partnerships in host economies, along with the study of the parent company, unveils the significance of regional

⁴⁷ Adrian Shubert, *A Social History of Modern Spain* (London & Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1990)., 15-19. Stephen H. Haber, *Industry and Underdevelopment: The Industrialization of Mexico, 1890-1940* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1989)., 15-20.

contexts within the definition of the multinational's structure and strategy.

Likewise, an approach to the multinational through marketing and the efforts to sell in regional markets, rather than an emphasis on manufacturing and US-centered and top-down business strategies, also reveals new insights about the role of local Singer salesmen and representatives in shaping the multinational enterprise.⁴⁸

Singer's leaders in Spain and Mexico made their concerns about the business known to their superiors in New York and London. They explained how the business environment was different than in more industrialized nations, where consumers had more money and were more accessible.⁴⁹ In Spain and Mexico, they explained, the key was to meet individual consumers or families and address household needs. To be competitive, the company would have to sell machines on credit and provide services like instructions and maintenance. Also, the company had to rely on canvassers to venture into isolated markets. Come 1889, when Bourne became Singer's third president, these strategies had proven so successful for Singer in Spain and Mexico for its regional particularities, but also in England and the United States, that Bourne incorporated them into his plan to integrate Singer's operations around the world.

⁴⁸ Geoffrey Jones, *Multinationals and Global Capitalism : From the Nineteenth to the Twenty-First Century* (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2005)., 162.

⁴⁹ Andrew Godley, "Selling the Sewing Machine around the World: Singer's International Marketing Strategies, 1850-1920," *Enterprise and Society* 7, no. 2 (2006)., 280-290.

The present chapter incorporates the analysis of local social, economic and cultural contexts in relation to sewing and a close examination of how Singer entered in the Hispanic world from 1860 to 1890 to show how vertical integration was built upon adaption to market overseas. This chapter challenges the idea that Singer—and any other multinational—may have built its selling organization over empty contexts. Furthermore, this chapter parallels recent studies that seek to place Spain and Mexico as part of the nineteenth-century Atlantic and global quest for modernity rather than analyzing these regions as peripheral and simple followers of highly industrialized nations.⁵⁰

SEWING IN SPAIN AND MEXICO AND THE INTRODUCTION OF THE FIRST SEWING MACHINES

At the turn of the nineteenth century, restrictions for women over professional sewing loosened and more women officially entered the profession. Guilds had opened their doors to seamstresses in the eighteenth century in Spanish America. By the early nineteenth century, guilds were disbanded in Spain and in the former colonies. *Sastres* no longer dictated fashion, now women, consumers and also *costureras* and *modistas* had an increasingly

⁵⁰ Albert Carreras and Xavier Tafunell, *Historia económica de la España contemporánea* (Barcelona: Crítica, 2004). Edward Beatty et al. *México y España: ¿historias económicas paralelas?* (México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2007). Haber, *Industry and Underdevelopment: The Industrialization of Mexico, 1890-1940*. Joseph Love, "Structuralism and Dependency in Peripheral Europe: Latin American Ideas in Spain and Portugal," *Latin American Research Review* 39, no. 2 (2004); Stephen H. Haber, *How Latin America Fell Behind: Essays on the Economic Histories of Brazil and Mexico, 1800-1914* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1997).

important role, too. This is not to say, however, that *sastres* and *costureras* and *modistas* were equals.⁵¹ By law, in Spain and Mexico, women were dependents of their husband and father's authorization to be employed and generally needed their permission to work outside the home, even well into the twentieth century. Nevertheless, scholars have demonstrated, women worked to support the family. Their labor was done both in and outside the home, especially in less industrialized nations and less urbanized areas where factory work was only emerging.⁵²

Since the eighteenth century, many women in Mexico worked as *costureras*. Generally, white women in Mexico City worked as professional seamstresses, while nonwhite women were low skill seamstresses or *costureras*. *Costureras* either worked as apprentices of *modistas*, in a *taller*, or at home using

⁵¹ Barbara Burman, ed. *The Culture of Sewing: Gender, Consumption and Home Dressmaking* (Oxford, UK: Berg, 1999). Barbara Burman and Carole Turbin, *Material Strategies: Dress and Gender in Historical Perspective* (Malden, MA.: Oxford; Blackwell, 2003). Clare Haru Crowston, *Fabricating Women : The Seamstresses of Old Regime France, 1675-1791* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001). Marta Vicente, *Clothing the Spanish Empire: Families and the Calico Trade in the Early Modern Atlantic World* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2006).

⁵² Civil Code of 1889, Spain. Adrian Shubert, *A Social History of Modern Spain*, *A Social History of Europe* (London ; Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1990)., 40-41. Marie Eileen Francois, *A Culture of Everyday Credit: Housekeeping, Pawnbroking, and Governance in Mexico City, 1750-1920* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2006)., 151. The Civil Codes of 1870 and 1884 in Mexico allowed couples "whether to marry under separate or community-property systems. Property such as outfit homes and wardrobes, more important for women." Susie S. Porter, *Working Women in Mexico City: Public Discourses and material Conditions, 1879-1931* (University of Arizona Press, 2003)., 6-7. Vicente, *Clothing the Spanish Empire: Families and the Calico Trade in the Early Modern Atlantic World*.

the putting-out system.⁵³ In places like Madrid, work as a seamstress provided lower-class women with opportunities to advance. Newspapers advertisements called on women who could baste, hem and sew *ropa blanca* (casual clothes and linens). Wealthier families would frequently ask a *costurera* to come to their home to mend clothes and make *ropa blanca* for the family.⁵⁴

The home was a suitable workspace for women to supply demand and also on the basis of gendered perceptions of labor at the time. These were rooted in the definition of gender roles in the Hispanic world since the sixteenth century. In Hispanic culture, the link between needlework in the home and a woman's role in society dated back to sixteenth-century moralists. Catholic moralists like Luis de León, who wrote *La perfecta casada* [The Perfect Wife] (1583), saw sewing as an admirable activity for both aristocratic and poor women. Sixteenth-century moralists had advocated sewing, but not professional

⁵³ Silvia Marina Arrom, *The Women of Mexico City, 1790-1857* (Stanford University Press, 1985), 155-161. Jennifer Scanlon, *Inarticulate Longings: The Ladies Home Journal, Gender and the Promises of Consumer Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 2. Francois, *A Culture of Everyday Credit: Housekeeping, Pawnbroking, and Governance in Mexico City, 1750-1920*, 34. Juanjo Romero-Marín, "Artisan Women and Management in Nineteenth-Century Barcelona," in *Women, Business and Finance in Nineteenth-Century Europe*, ed. Robert Beachy, Béatrice Craig, and Alastair Owens (Oxford: Berg, 2006); Juanjo Romero Marín, *La construcción de la cultura del oficio durante la industrialización: Barcelona, 1814-1860*, *Història del Treball* (Barcelona: Icaria Editorial : Publicacions i Edicions Universitat de Barcelona, 2005), 81.

⁵⁴ *Diario Oficial de Avisos de Madrid*, 1854. Roberto Robert, *Las españolas pintadas por los españoles: colección de estudios acerca de los aspectos, estados, costumbres y cualidades generales de nuestras contemporáneas*, vol. II (Madrid: J.E. Morete, 1872), 22, 214. Roberto Robert, *Mujeres españolas del siglo XIX* (Madrid: Ediciones Atlas, 1944).

labor, for women of honor. Wealthy women, León believed, should behave passively but not have idle time, which they could spend sewing. Meanwhile, poor women had to work for money. And León saw sewing as an appropriate way for both to use their time. The ideal of the *angel del hogar* (the angel of the home) existed in the Hispanic world as an idyllic stage for married women. Women, especially unmarried women, were expected to limit sexual activity and commit themselves to chores like home sewing to be honorable and virtuous.

Throughout the nineteenth century, the race to incorporate Mexico and Spain into modern capitalism and industrialization was arduous but persistent. In Mexico, it began after the Independence Wars with various attempts to stabilize the political arena through constitutionalism. The war against the United States after the declaration of the Texas' annexation in 1846 was a shock for the Mexican economy and the political organization of power. After the war, new governments from 1848 to 1876 continued implementing reforms toward the privatization of land and to cut the ties between the state and the Catholic Church. The disparity of political and economic positions between Conservative and Liberal officials with respect to these reforms brought tension and eventually civil war between 1857 and 1861 (Reform War), when the French invaded the country in economic and political chaos until 1867. Benito Juárez, first indigenous president of Mexico, then became president one more time and continued implementing liberal reforms by allying with key *hacendados* (*hacienda* owners) in different states. Mexico's "first effective and long-lasting dictatorship," however, did not come until president Porfirio Díaz's rose to power (1876-1880

and 1884-1911). Díaz's decades in office were a period of "internal stability," also called the "Pax Porfiriana." Díaz assured peace by welcoming foreign investment from which revenues all states' governors could benefit from.⁵⁵

In Spain, regional political dissent also complicated the transition from a feudal society to nineteenth-century political and economic liberalism. Between 1812 and the proclamation of the First Republic in 1873 (after the 1868 Glorious Revolution), the Spanish *Cortes* (parliament) enacted three constitutions and mapped out—and implemented many—multiple fiscal and land reforms aiming at economic growth. Despite the political turmoil that the political competition between *Liberales* and *Conservadores* brought about, as Raymond Carr affirms, most governments were "concerned ... with every aspect of economic life: afforestation, railways, the electric telegraph, roads, banks." From 1876 to 1923, constitutional monarchy was restored and an "institutionalized electoral corruption" was established in order to maintain peace. Although economic growth was still limited during the nineteenth century, historians agree that there existed a mentality toward the creation of a new working and business set of relations that did not separate Spain from the rest of Europe.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ Leslie Bethell, *Mexico since Independence* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 30-31, 49-84.

⁵⁶ Raymond Carr, *Spain: A History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000)., 214, 223. Carreras and Tafunell, *Historia económica de la España contemporánea*.

Figure 6. (map 1) Map of Mexico. States, state capitals and finished railroads by 1880. Map also shows distribution channels of Singer sewing machines before 1890.

Sources: H. Justin Roddy, *Complete Geography* (New York: American Book Co, 1902) 76. Private Collection of Roy Winkelman, <http://etc.usf.edu/maps/pages/5900/5971/5971z.htm>. University of Texas at Austin, Collection of Historic Maps. Leslie Bethell, ed., *Mexico since Independence* (Cambridge & New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991). 126. [Blank base map from https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Mexico_States_blank_map.svg]

Figure 7. (map 2) Map of Spain. Provinces, province capitals and finished railroads by 1900.⁵⁷

This context of transformation toward market-driven economies impacted the ways in which individuals conceived gender roles. The ideology of the *angel del hogar* accommodated to these possibilities. A woman's household chores were now to be rationalized. Prescriptive narratives, which became household manuals by the mid of the nineteenth century, reconciled a woman's responsibility to the home with a place in the market. For example, in Spain, a

⁵⁷ Sources: Francisco Javier Paredes Alonso, *Historia Contemporánea de España* (Barcelona: Editorial Ariel, 1998), 341. Gabriel Tortella Casares, *The Development of Modern Spain: An Economic History of the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000), 126. Base map based on Moses Abramovitz, "Catching up, Forging Ahead, and Falling Behind," *The Journal of Economic History* 46, no. 2 (1986). *ibid*; Carr, *Spain: A History*, 244 and [\[http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:España_peninsular_\(mapa_base\).svg\]](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:España_peninsular_(mapa_base).svg)

popular author named María del Pilar Sinués insisted that a “real Christian woman always has various occupations.” Sinués believed that women were in charge of “the learning of her family members,” at the same time she attended “household chores and the material well-being of those she loves.”⁵⁸ Like Sinués, Emilia Serrano de Wilson, well known author of advise manuals and who also contributed to various magazines in Spain and Mexico, tried to incorporate Christian values into chores to dignify women’s work in the home. In her book, *Las perlas del corazón* [The pearls of the heart], she stated that mothers and daughters in modern societies should adopt values like “love of work” and “industriousness.”⁵⁹

Manuals on *economía doméstica* (home economics) insisted on a modernity in which women’s work in the home was systematized, ordered, and rationalized. Play writer Joaquina García Balmaseda, for example, published *labores* (chores) manuals as well as magazine articles, and her work was widely read in Spain and Mexico in elite circles as well as schools in the 1860s. In her book, *La mujer laboriosa* [*The Industrious Woman*], Balmaseda praised both practical activities and those related to “recreo” (entertainment). She believed

⁵⁸ María del Pilar Sinués Sinués, *Un libro para las damas* (Madrid: A. de Carlos e hijo, 1876). Valentina Torres Septién, “La educación Informal de la mujer católica en el siglo XIX,” in *Obedecer, servir y resistir: la educación de las mujeres en la historia de México*, ed. Adelina Arredondo (Tlalpan, México, D.F: Universidad Pedagógica Nacional, 2003)., 133.

⁵⁹ Emilia Serrano de Wilson, *Las perlas del corazón: (Un libro para las madres) deberes y aspiraciones de la mujer desde su infancia y en la vida íntima y mundial*. (J. Paz, 1884); Emilia Serrano de Wilson, *Almacén de las señoritas. A las jóvenes españolas y americanas* (Paris & Madrid: imp. de Walder y lib. de Rosa y Bourel, 1860).

that sewing, whether to dress-up the home or clothe one's family, was admirable work that women should pursue. *La mujer laboriosa* combined tradition and new consumption and production practices to make what she believed were part of a practical domesticity, which was God's will for women on this earth.⁶⁰

Current ideologies about women and domesticity favored home-work over factory-work. And, in turn, they facilitated the acceptance of the household sewing machine in Spain and Mexico. Singer sold machines for textile factories in these nations, as the corporation did elsewhere, but a good part of the sales in Spain and Mexico were for household use. Although there is no clear data of the total number of sewing machines exported to each country previous to 1875, some indirect evidence reflects high levels of sales to households and in rural areas where factory-based garment making was absent.⁶¹ More than 3,000 machines were introduced by Singer's independent agent in Mexico *Casa Boker* by 1873 and not only in Mexico City but throughout the country where the

⁶⁰ Joaquina García Balmaseda de González, *La mujer laboriosa: novísimo manual de labores que comprende desde los primeros rudimentos de costura hasta las mas frívolas labores de adorno* (s.n, 1876)., 3-5. Museo del Renacimiento, Madrid (hereafter MR). *El álbum de la mujer* 1885, Mexico.

⁶¹ Beginning in 1902 Singer began collecting sales data worldwide. Foreign offices in Europe reported year and monthly sales to London and New York before 1900 but this information is scattered. In my study I use Andrew Godley's data for the years previous to 1902. These numbers, however, do not include Mexico or Latin America. Singer's data on sales make no distinction between machines that were sold to households and machines that were sold to clothing manufacturers. Nor did Singer collect information about sales on the basis of sewing machine models or even about the number of cabinets—more suitable for household purposes—. Godley, "Selling the Sewing Machine around the World: Singer's International Marketing Strategies, 1850-1920."

opening of small workshops and garment factories was more scarce. By 1897, more than 200,000 sewing machines from all makers made it to Mexico. If sold to households, sewing machines were most likely sold to middle class families, as Susie Porter's argues, as sewing machines were not affordable appliances for working women in Mexico City in the 1870s. In Spain, only Singer had sold in Spain around 50,000 machines by 1880. Although the opening of garment workshops increased in Mexico City (providing employment to an estimate of 1,220 dressmakers in 1900), Madrid and Barcelona, such growth occurred mainly from the 1890s, which demonstrates the spread of sewing technology beyond cities and in other production spaces besides garment factories.⁶²

Local reactions toward the new household technology also demonstrate that the introduction of sewing machines went beyond the factory. Sewing machines advertisements in Spain and Mexico promoted the idea that a sewing machine would serve the ideal woman who was confined to the private sphere. The ads emphasized how the machines were silent, petite, and decorative. In 1857, the "new marvelous invention" was on display downtown on Madrid's Mayor Street. While no one brand was mentioned, the machines were described

⁶² Correspondence Summaries, New York. Luis O. Harnecker, general manager in Mexico. SSMC UM, M87 277 AP 01 – 0041 – 81. 1900. Robert Boker to New York, 1873. SSMC, Micro: 2014 Reel 257 92-9495; and Mexico incoming correspondence. SSMC, Box 103; Folder 5. Exports to date, 1897; *Sewing Machine Times* (New York: E. H. Craige), 1898; HML, Imprints collection. Pilar Díaz Sánchez, "Del taller de costura a la fábrica. El trabajo de las mujeres en la confección textil madrileña," 279-281. Shubert, *A Social History of Modern Spain*, 39-40. Porter, *Working Women in Mexico City*, 32-35. Cristina Borderías, "Women's Work and Household Economic Strategies in Industrializing Catalonia," *Social History* 29, no. 3 (August, 2004).

as a way “to save on time and work.” With a machine, a *costurera* “can do all kinds of stitches on gloves, lingerie, leather ... and *bordados*,” (embroidery [for the family]).⁶³ The highlighting of *bordados* in advertisements demonstrates marketers’ early intention to associate the machine with contemporaries’ definitions of femininity. *Bordados* embodied both old and renovated definitions of domesticity, as they represented women’s labor as well as their dedication to the idea of the home as a separate sphere. Hence, since the 1860s, the idea of the sewing machine was attached to the household and women’s labor in the home.

UNRAVELING SINGER CONSUMERS IN SPAIN AND MEXICO

Aware of local sewing practices, company salesmen promoted the new technology for household purposes. Targeting home sewing was a marketing strategy that made women in the home into potential consumers of new technology. To implement this strategy in Spain and Mexico was not an easy task. In Spain, private houses were not accustomed to door-to-door salesmen and until travel agents were rewarded with commissions their efforts to reach consumers were narrow.⁶⁴ In Mexico, Singer pioneer agents like George Patterson complained that potential salesmen were not instructed on the mechanics of the machine and thus it was hard for them to promote the machine.

⁶³ *La Época*; July, 1857. *La Discusión*; April, 1857. *Diario de avisos de Madrid*; April, 1865; Hemeroteca Nacional de España (hereafter HNE)

⁶⁴ Davies, *Peacefully Working to Conquer the World: Singer Sewing Machines in Foreign Markets, 1854-1920.*, 69.

In both regions, however, managers understood how fundamental this strategy was to reach both urban homes and those not so close to commercial centers. To do so, Madrid and Mexico City assigned veteran Singer agents in the country to districts where they were in charge to supervise canvassers working on commission. The canvassers or traveling agents, indeed, mostly men throughout the nineteenth century, would listen to women and try to meet whatever needs they voiced. Singer canvassers were also assigned within permanent districts that were relatively small. This way salesmen and consumers came to know one another. And the former would teach the latter about the new technology.⁶⁵

While canvassers introduced the sewing machine first in the city, soon they took it further and further into rural Spain and Mexico. Both nations were predominantly rural and their economies based on agriculture even by the beginning of the twentieth century. In the countryside, prices and poverty became more and more an impediment to sales. Income in rural Spain and Mexico was dependent on the harvest. And since there were agricultural crises due to constant droughts in both Spain and Mexico between 1870 and the century's end, Singer's sales increase was not stable. In Spain, Singer's top manager in the country Edmund Adcock explained in 1883, "the south [was] suffering far more from the general dullness of trade." In the early 1890s, just when Singer's *gerente* (general manager) Louis Harnecker became the head of

⁶⁵ Correspondence from George Patterson, Mexico, 1886-7. SSMC, Box 103; Folder 5. John Mitchell's (Singer London examiner) report about Spain, 1882. SSMC, Box 106; folder 4. Ibid., 71.

the company in Mexico, droughts also seemed to be the reason for lower level of sales of sewing machines. For Singer top executives in the United States, however, these “periods of depression or hard times,” Singer president George McKenzie explained to Edmund Adcock, may also be moments of success as individuals may allocated resources to pursue alternative economic opportunities.⁶⁶ McKenzie was suggesting that canvassers promoted the sewing machine as an alternative investment for families or individuals who were experiencing temporary economic hardship.

In both Spanish and Mexican cities, women’s discretionary income was very limited also. The *costurera*, like other women workers, did not receive a fixed wage determined by whatever skill they provided. In addition, “one third of households [in Mexico City] were headed by women,” Marie Francois explained, which meant that a home only had one income. When employed outside the home, women mostly only worked wherever “housekeeping skills” were in demand, which was almost always low-pay work.⁶⁷ In response, Singer allowed consumers to buy machines on credit and pay the company back in installments. Even among more wealthy customers, company credit was a popular way to expand sales.

⁶⁶ John Mitchell’s (Singer London examiner) report about Spain, 1882. SSMC, Box 106; Folder 4. Correspondence between George McKenzie and Edmund Adcock, 1879. SSMC, Micro 2013 Reel 3; P92-9010 (1879-1880). Shubert, *A Social History of Modern Spain*, 11.

⁶⁷ Francois, *The Culture of Everyday Credit*, 31-33., and Shubert, *A Social History of Modern Spain*, 38-39.

Mass production methods lowered the price of sewing machines starting in the late 1850s, prompting sales worldwide even more. In the United States and England, Singer was selling its most basic domestic sewing machine at \$30 (roughly \$500 in today's currency value).⁶⁸ In Spain and Mexico, the price of the sewing machine was unstable, however. Prices varied depending on freight and shipment costs. Singer tried to be different, however. The company supplied Spain and Mexico from England and the United States and never manufactured in any of these countries. Here, Singer generally maintained its policy of not allowing discretionary discounts. In Mexico, Singer's independent agent *Casa Boker* sold Singer machines for \$40 to other purchasing agents and for \$60 for independent customers or when buying on installment payments. In Spain, independent agents advertised Singer machines for prices between 500 and 2,000 *reales* in 1860s, depending the accessories and applications of the specific machine. By 1877, however, Singer advertised its own machines for 500 *reales* or \$25 if these were bought *a plazos* (on installments) or 450 *reales al contado* (paid in full.)⁶⁹ Competition also kept prices low as consumers generally looked

⁶⁸ David A. Hounshell, *From the American System to Mass Production, 1800-1932 : The Development of Manufacturing Technology in the United States* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984)., 84-89. Godley, "Selling the Sewing Machine around the World: Singer's International Marketing Strategies, 1850-1920."

⁶⁹ *Diario oficial de avisos de Madrid*, January 1862. *La Época*, April 1877; HNE. Correspondence from *Casa Boker* to New York, 1879. SSMC, Box 103; Folder 5. The Royal Decree of October 19, 1868 or *Ley Figuerola* unified the Spanish currency system in to use the *peseta*. This currency substituted the *real del vellón* and the *escudo*. In 1868 20 *reales* were 5 pesetas and, approximately, 5 *pesetas* were 1 USD. After 1868 the *peseta* was Spain's official currency. For a

for the cheapest sewing machine. In Mexico, an article in *The Weekly Sewing Machine Journal* assured that “the purchasing public” were “poorer than in the United States” and thus “the price then determine[d] the sale.”⁷⁰ In 1884, Alex McKenzie, an inspector from the London central office, reported that in Spain Singer sewing machines were sold “under all kind of prices.”⁷¹ As demand for sewing machines increased, competition grew more intense as well.

Despite their low and uncertain incomes, poor households in Spain and Mexico were essential customers. They fit the profile of the domestically oriented machines—middle class women who did sewing for families and entrepreneurial poorer women who earned money by working inside the home. The sewing machine increased productivity and thus became essential within household economies. And sewing inside the home was culturally accepted. Singer’s

couple of decades, however, the *real* coexisted along with the *peseta*, making it difficult to know exactly the value of *pesetas* and *reales* at the time. Ernesto Ruiz y González de Linares, *Historia monetaria española: ante el primer centenario de la peseta* (Burgos: Institución Fernán González, 1969), 276-279. See also Tortella Casares, *The Development of Modern Spain: An Economic History of the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries.*, 41, 158. In regards to currency value and exchange I thank Andrés Sánchez Padilla and his patient explanations of the currency system and its changes in Spain from 1868 to 1930.

⁷⁰ Singer president McKenzie to British general agent George Woodruff, 1877. Outgoing correspondence. SSMC, Micro: 2013 P92-9010; Reel 1. *The Weekly Sewing Machine Journal* (New York : C. A. Lovejoy). May, 1883; HML, Imprints. Mira Wilkins, *The Emergence of Multinational Enterprise: American Business Abroad from the Colonial Era to 1914* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1970). Jones, *Multinationals and Global Capitalism : From the Nineteenth to the Twenty-First Century*.

⁷¹ Spanish general agent Edmund Adcock to London, 1886. SSMC, Box 98; Folder 7. Report from Spain, 1884. SSMC, Box 95; Folder 3.

response to these conditions was to emphasize credit and installment payment programs in the Hispanic market. Data on credit accounts in the 1870s is limited to agents' commentaries that highlighted how important it was to sell the machine on this method. In 1887, however, Singer agents in Spain opened five times more accounts than in the previous year, collecting around 13,027,846 *pesetas* or £501,071 and \$2,605,569 of the time. And by 1891 the lowest number of accounts opened in a Spanish city was 51 in the northern and small provincial city of Vitoria and a highest of 5,721 accounts in Valencia.⁷²

The success of Singer's hire-purchase system demonstrated the importance of low-income consumers in the trade. In England and the United States, Singer also pioneered installment credit for the purchase of the new technology. In both regions, Singer introduced the hire-purchase system. The customer bought the machine through small weekly payments. Until the last payment was not made the customer was no owner of the machine. The future owner, however, could use the machine, for example, to help make the following payments to the canvasser that came to collect the payment. Yet Singer was on its entire right to take back the machine, and this happened often when the customer missed payments. In addition, Singer made more profit when offering machines on installment, as no discount was generally applied. Unlike

⁷² Estado comparativo del negocio (business report), 1891-1892; SSMC, Box 106; Folder 5.

customers that paid in cash, those that needed to pay on installments paid the full amount for the sewing machine.⁷³

In Spain and Mexico, a slightly different system of credit rapidly was preferred given the population's income level. Here, Singer used rental agreements or *contrato de alquiler*. Although the *contrato de alquiler* eventually made the customer owner of the machine, if he or she paid, this was not explicit in the actual contract. A hire-purchase contract, on the contrary, assumed that the customer would pay. In Spain and Mexico, a *contrato de alquiler* for a new "sewing machine and a case with all its accessories" required the customer to "preserve [the machine] as a rented thing." In case payments were delayed, the renter should return the machine in perfect condition. To do so, the renter was "the exclusive" user of the machine that "could not be moved from the house ... without previous notice to the company."⁷⁴ The language of Singer *contratos de alquiler* demonstrated that Singer agents distrusted on consumer's ability to pay. Within families, women were Singer main customers—even when they were generally in charge of balancing the household finances to provide the family with food and clothing, their disadvantage in the job market made lenders unsure of their ability to secure enough cash to pay weekly.

Credit was a relatively new payment alternative for Spaniards and Mexicans who generally would have used it on a personal level and not always

⁷³ Godley, *Selling the Sewing Machine Around the World*, 282.

⁷⁴ *Contratos de alquiler, 1903-1913*; Archivo Histórico del Distrito Federal (hereafter AHDF), Sección Empeños. Vol. 1.

using cash. Local multipurpose small stores such as *abarrotes* or *pulperías* in Mexico or *ultramarinos* in Spain provided individual customers with *crédito* (credit) by allowing them to “pay later” when cash or *enseres* (goods) were available.⁷⁵ It was typical to have a *fiador* (guarantor) as well, in case payment was delayed too long. Singer’s introduced this clause in their *contratos de alquiler* as well. The company *contrato* required an *aval* (endorsement). The new customer needed to provide the name of a second person, most likely someone related to the customer, to whom the company could claim the machine or the remaining payments in case the lender was not regularly paying for it.

Although under a *contrato de alquiler* the customer was not the owner of the machine until the machine last payment was made, such a contract allowed mobility and basic ownership rights. Only when payments were not made on time would the company issued a rental agreement, which implied some limitations on who and where the customer may use the machine.⁷⁶ In addition,

⁷⁵ Jesús Mirás Araujo, "The Commercial Sector In An Early-Twentieth Century Spanish City, La Coruña 1914-1935," *Journal of Urban History* 34 (2008): 462-475. Jesus Cruz, *The Rise of Middle-Class Culture in Nineteenth-Century Spain*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 2011), 121-124; For statistics on Spanish retailing see Estadísticas de Contribución Industrial y Comercial (Industry and Commerce Tax Report – Statistics, Government of Spain) 1856, 1879, 1889, and 1909. For Mexico see Mark Overmyer-Velázquez, *Visions of the Emerald City: Modernity, Tradition, and the Formation of Porfirian Oaxaca, Mexico* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2006). Romero Marín, *La construcción de la cultura del oficio durante la industrialización: Barcelona, 1814-1860*.

⁷⁶ Alfred D. Chandler, Jr., *The Visible Hand : The Managerial Revolution in American Business* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 1977)., 290-291, 303-305. AHDF, 1903-1913. Sección Empeños. Vol 1.

no legal structure to protect installment payment options existed in Spain and Mexico by the 1870s and 1880s, which led the Singer Company to reserve its own right to repossess machines if payments were not made in a regular basis.

Even with strict tenure rules, Singer *contratos de alquiler* increased during the first three decades of business in Spain and Mexico. This did not imply, however, that the capacity to pay also improved. As more rental accounts opened, the number of delinquent accounts also increased. Often customers run out of cash to pay or the company lost track of customers who moved or sold the machine without giving the appropriate notice to the local canvasser. In the early years of trade, Singer Spain and Mexico had both commission agents and sometimes also salaried agents. Canvassers on commission only got paid if customers were loyal to their *contratos de alquiler*. As many customers were not on time, commission agents often also disappeared as they came to have large shortages in their accounts.

The increasing demand of machines on credit made evident Singer's need of an extensive and coordinated sales and collector work force. Like it happened in England, we can presume that the goal of Singer agents in Spain and Mexico in increasing the number of collectors was based on the success of rental agreements. And to push collections and the opening of new accounts even further, commission agents also received a percentage of the sale when new accounts were opened. During the 1870s and 1880s, in England and also in Spain and Mexico, the position of the canvasser collector became more defined. The Singer canvasser-collector performed two different functions. They

promoted and sold sewing machines to households; and they collected the rental payments. Both functions soon merged and as Bourne became the president of the company in 1889, such position became the company's most important asset in developing Singer's business worldwide.⁷⁷ As much as possible, Singer headquarters tried to standardize the role of the canvasser-collector everywhere. And as Chapter Two will demonstrate, the evolution of Singer in Spain and Mexico between 1890 and 1910 is good evidence of these efforts.

FIGHTING LOCAL COMPETITION THROUGH SINGER'S SERVICE

Singer's credit system and the development of a canvasser-collector workforce were responses to the limitations of consumers' incomes in Spain and Mexico. Another was the presence of independent selling agents, who sold machines of other makers in competition with Singer. Independent agents purchased sewing machines from different manufacturers, seeking out the best discounts so they could undercut Singer's relatively high price. Until the 1890s, Singer too often had to rely on these independent agents to promote machines throughout Spain and Mexico, particularly in smaller and more remote markets where they were well entrenched. But by the nature of their independence from Singer and willingness to sell machines of any maker, the agents also threatened Singer's plans for dominating the sewing machine business.

⁷⁷ Godley, "Selling the Sewing Machine around the World: Singer's International Marketing Strategies, 1850-1920." Davies, *Peacefully Working to Conquer the World: Singer Sewing Machines in Foreign Markets, 1854-1920*. 70-72.

In 1871, Singer *gerente* for Spain Edmund Adcock, or Edmundo as he became to be known in Spain over the years, moved from London to Madrid to push Singer sales in the country. After two years of exploring the market in Spain, Adcock opened the first Singer office there in Seville in February of 1873. Eight years later, in 1879, Adcock proudly reported that “our business here is coming to our expectations.” By then, forty-nine offices and stores represented Singer in Spain and only sold Singer sewing machines around the Peninsula.⁷⁸

Adcock agreed with Singer top executives that a system of agents and shops, all-coordinated, served the company’s interests and worked to maintain control over *contratos de alquiler* system. Still, Singer faced competition from the independent dealers. In a report to the London central office in 1886, Adcock warned that as a result of increasing demand for Singer sewing machines, independent agents “were coming continually in collision” when Singer travellers were “sent out ... to the village.”⁷⁹ As figure eight shows, independent dealers in Spain sold machines of any brand, generally manufactured in Germany or the United States. In urban centers, they were established right next to Singer only

⁷⁸ Edmund Adcock to London, 1873-1890. SMMC, Box 106, Folder 4; and George McKenzie to Edmund Adcock, 1879. SSMC, Micro: 2013 P92-9010, Reel 3.

⁷⁹ Andrew Godley, "The Global Diffusion of the Sewing Machine, 1850-1914," *Research in Economic History* 20(2001)., 1. Jürgen Buchenau, *Tools of Progress: A German Merchant Family in Mexico City, 1865-Present* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2004). Godley, "Selling the Sewing Machine around the World: Singer's International Marketing Strategies, 1850-1920." Adcock to London, 1886. Singer Organization in Europe. London Office. SSMC, Box 98 Folder 7.

depots. Independent dealers even offered machines on installments and without *fiador*, a clause that certainly many individual consumers appreciated. It is presumable, however, that independent dealers' limited stock, as they depended on various manufacturers, posed some limitations to their credit arrangements. In addition, independent dealers generally assumed that customers would go to the *almacén* to make the necessary payment. Singer stores, on the contrary, generally assured the customer the availability of different sewing machine models as well as replacement and maintenance services. And like in England, the offering and controlling of *contratos de alquiler* required a large sales and collector force, which was being undermined by the independent agents. The full application of such system, however, was still in its infancy in Spain in the mid 1880s, where *gerente* Adcock considered that the system, although effective, was too expensive, and he suggested to work with independent agents and keep some canvassers but not salaried, i.e., not part of the company.

Figure 8. Spanish advertisement for sewing machines in an *almacén* in downtown Madrid, 1873.⁸⁰

⁸⁰ Biblioteca Nacional de España (hereafter BNE). Digital Posters.

Singer president George McKenzie, from 1882 to 1889, gave serious consideration to Adcock's idea but for Singer top executives, to work along with independent agents only harmed the company's name and a product that Singer representatives had already spread out. Local agents had pushed the sewing machine enough to now lose their advantage over the competition. An example was regional ads, as figure eight shows, where the name and owner of the *almacén* is highlighted in rather than the sewing machines' manufacturer.

This counter-marketing strategy was even more prominent in the case of Mexico where Singer's most important independent dealer only sold Singer sewing machines, and thus spread the technology and its multiple applications in sewing, but not the name of the company. In central Mexico, Singer relied on a German appliances' seller, Casa Boker, to sell its machines. Singer provided Casa Boker with over 3,000 machines between 1866 and 1873. Boker contracted with its own agents, to whom they sold the machines for \$40 (approximately \$900 in today's currency). Generally, Boker's agents already worked for other appliances businesses, which furthered the struggle of Singer to gain prominence against other sewing machine makers.⁸¹

Casa Boker opened Mexico's market for Singer but the increasing sales of sewing machines in the country, as it happened in Spain, only benefitted Casa Boker and soon became a threat to Singer. Like independent dealers in Spain,

⁸¹ Roberto Boker to New York, 1873. SSMC, Micro: 2014 92-9495; Reel 257. Mexico incoming correspondence. SSMC, Box 103; Folder 5. Mexico Agreement with Boker, 1881. SSMC, Box 2.

Casa Boker' sales demonstrated Singer the importance of offering *contratos de alquiler*—in the late 1870s, Boker assured that “the machines [in Mexico] are mostly all sold in on the credit system.”⁸² However, the territory covered by independent agents also limited Singer's reach. Casa Boker's coverage of the territory was only partial. The Mexican hardware distributor only had agents in central Mexico and worked with other agents in “Matamoros, Monterrey, Durango and Chihuahua.” To compensate for this lack of coverage, Singer agents, men like brothers George, Victor and Carlos Patterson, had been covering these states as well as the southern states of Chiapas and Oaxaca. During the 1880s, as happened in Spain, and given the success of family machines, Singer opened the branches of Veracruz (Ver.), Puebla (Pue.), Querétaro (Que.), San Luis Potosí (SLP.), Guanajuato (Gua.), León (NLE.), Guadalajara (Jal.), Pachuca (Hid.), and Toluca (Mex.) that operated directly under New York.

Placing agents throughout the Mexican territory was also important given the limited communications between state capitals and within rural towns. Oscar Graham, an examiner sent to oversee Singer's business in Mexico in 1887, found a widespread selling organization yet multiple flaws in its coordination, flaws which were hindering market development.⁸³ Some branches had opened

⁸² Singer agreement with Casa Boker; SSMC, Micro: 2014 P92 9494; reel 255., Micro 2014 P92-9495; Reel 257. Mexico Agreement (by Edward Clark) with Boker, 1876; SSMC, Box 2. Robert Boker to New York. Mexico incoming correspondence, SSMC, Box 103; Folder 5. Buchenau, *Tools of Progress: A German Merchant Family in Mexico City, 1865-Present*.

⁸³ Mexico correspondence, 1887; SSMC, Box 103; Folder 5 and 6. *The Sewing Machine News* (New York: Charles W. Handy), 1887; HML, Imprints.

in well-connected locations such as Puebla (Pue.) The Puebla office employed efficient clerks and bookkeepers and distributed both in the city and the surroundings. Most other territories where Singer representatives distributed Singer sewing machines, Graham warned, did not have well-prepared employees and they had limited contact with central offices such as Mexico City (DF.) or Puebla (Pue.) Likewise, as a consequence to a precarious communication network, in the 1880s, reports of Singer sewing machine sales arrived only occasionally to Mexico City from agents in Oaxaca and Yucatan. Communication between the southern city of Oaxaca and Mexico could take months in 1887.⁸⁴

This situation was harmful for the company as not only could a selling station run out of a stock of sewing machines, but also, to properly keep record of sales, a Singer agent from Mexico City constantly travelled to check on the business. Before the late 1880s, some veteran Singer agents were in charge of transporting, selling and accounting the business of more isolated territories. Singer top executives knew that Singer-hired agents were their best bet to push Singer sewing machines but having a trusted agent in charge all the business in certain locations, traveling back and forth to oversee distribution and supply, was expensive and inefficient.

Profitable offices such as Puebla (Pue.) or Mexico City (DF.) had set up the example of the advantages of enlarging the sales force throughout the

⁸⁴ Mexico correspondence, 1887. SSMC, Box 103; Folder 6.

territory. From Puebla and Mexico City the reports were generally on time as sales had grown and the Singer selling organization had also expanded. Both Puebla and Mexico City counted at least one office and a store dedicated to Singer sewing machines during the 1880s. Mexico City had three district offices by the beginning of the 1890s from which Singer clerks, bookkeepers and agents coordinated the distribution of sewing machines. Reports from Puebla to Mexico City were regular, and most importantly for the company, generally positive. The experience in these two locations made top executives in Mexico and also in New York certain that in more isolated territories, Singer needed to push a well-established system of canvassers and also of offices and shops that would back up the marketing of sewing machines, and also control the finances of the regional office. Also, as regional canvassers became familiar with the company and the machine, opening branches all throughout the territory would potentially alleviate travel expenses for veteran agents.

The dispersion of travelling agents was important for Singer as canvassers were familiar with local sewing practices. The economic and cultural significance of home sewing, especially in less urbanized regions of the Hispanic world, demonstrated the need to offer demonstrations and instructions to continue opening the market all throughout the territory. Furthermore, the literacy rate in Mexico, like in Spain, was extremely low during the last three decades of the nineteenth century. By 1900 Mexico's literacy was around 20%—below countries like Brazil and Argentina, which levels were between 35% and 45% of the population. Spain's illiteracy rates between 1890 and 1910 were still

among the highest in Europe—at the level of Italy, for example. In 1910, 50% of Spain's population was illiterate and 72% of the population of Mexico in 1921.⁸⁵ Written instructions later became part of the package of buying a sewing machine but personal instructions were necessary during the nineteenth century and especially for customers that lacked formal education. Women were fundamental in this role. In stores and also accompanying traveling agents, women were generally the ones in charge of demonstrating how to use the sewing machine.

More than formal education, canvassers were better if aware of local sewing practices. Sewing machine trade journals emphasized the importance of artistic sewing, teaching on traditional knitting and embroidery practices.⁸⁶ For Singer, the canvassers' level of expertise in both the machine and the company was in it itself a promotion strategy. When combined, technical and social qualities, the canvasser became an asset for the corporation. If the canvasser was able to address, in a romantic but respectful tone preferably, the history of the sewing machine and the company's, the changes and improvements on the appliances, and thus make the customer be part of such development, chances

⁸⁵ Leslie Bethell, *Mexico since Independence* (Cambridge [England] ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991)., 208. Tortella Casares, *The Development of Modern Spain: An Economic History of the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries.*, 14, 262. UNESCO, "The Making of Literate Societies," *Education for all. Global Monitoring Report* (2006)., 192.

⁸⁶ "Something about sewing women." *The Sewing Machine Advance*, 1887; "Development of fancy work". *The Sewing Machine Advance*, 1888., Textile Collection at the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History (hereafter TCSM).

of purchase were higher. As historian Regina Blaszczyk reminded in regards to home furnishings, “supply did not create demand, ... but demand determined supply.”⁸⁷ In other words, Singer had to adapt to Spain and Mexico’s local sewing cultures and the particularities of consumers in local markets. For this task, although supervised by veteran Singer representatives, and generally foreign, local canvassers demonstrated to be the most suited for the job after two decades of expansion of business.

In isolated regions Singer opened depots that functioned as offices. A store in a big city employed bookkeepers, instructor, mechanics and clerks, and thus instead of having one agent in charge of selling, instructing and bookkeeping, a store provided the region with every service locally. To supply these services in small cities and villages Singer placed a “village commission agent,” who also received machinery directly from the factory or at times from the central office in the country. This way Singer laid out local competitors and avoided constant costly transportation expenses as a regional store was in charge of establishing canvassing stations with ready-to-sell stock. Although Singer’s selling organization continued to grow throughout the turn of the twentieth century, certain rural areas continued to be isolated and the local

⁸⁷ Regina Lee Blaszczyk, *Imagining Consumers: Design and Innovation from Wedgwood to Corning* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000)., 16.

canvasser remained fundamental for the company.⁸⁸ As Pamela Laird explains, “the nature of the product –a novel, complex, and expensive device for consumer use” shaped Singer strategies and in this case continued to support the work of local employees, especially in less connected areas.⁸⁹ Given the dispersion of households in rural areas and the still not well-known application of the sewing machine for home sewing, Singer’s canvassers were essential. They were to go door-to-door explaining the possibilities of the new appliance. Though employees of a large multinational corporation, canvassers learned that they were most successful when they were familiar with the local customs and sewing practices of the peoples of a specific region. Generally, manners and the ability to interact with families, and specially women, were the most important qualities for a canvasser. This cultural capital made canvassers successful. Although Singer managers in charge of sales organizations in different countries around the world, such as Spain *gerente* Adcock, were generally foreign, they, and especially their employees, needed to know the language and the local customs. As an article in *The Sewing Machine Advance* put it in 1886, “every customer has

⁸⁸ Luis González, *San Jose de Gracia: Mexican Village in Transition* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1982)., 90-95. Davies, *Peacefully Working to Conquer the World: Singer Sewing Machines in Foreign Markets, 1854-1920.*, 70-72.

⁸⁹ Pamela Walker Laird, *Advertising Progress: American Business and the Rise of Consumer Marketing* (Baltimore, Md: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998)., 36.

to be canvassed differently.” Familiarity with the locals’ lives and traditions helped canvassers to better address and create customer needs.⁹⁰

Singer urged agents to possess all these qualities as these assured consumers a better after-sales service. A way to control that agents followed the company’s goal was to make them part of the company. In each country, regional offices (or stores) were under the supervision of the central offices (Mexico City and Madrid), which coordinated financing accounts established and supervised from New York. The *gerente* in central offices budgeted these accounts to stock stores with sewing machines and accessories and also to pay the salaries and other expenses of staff and retail infrastructure. In 1890, Singer top executives urged centralization and standardization of the business organization to secure the work of regional agents and the already noticeable predominance of Singer family sewing machines in the market. When Bourne began leading the company, Singer headquarters pushed further to make central offices transfer in-store agents and travelling agents into company staff. Making agents salaried employees served to boost and amplify local consumption of sewing machines. In addition, this strategy of centralization boosted the localization of Singer Spain and Mexico—as I further explain in Chapter Two—because it strengthened the role of the local employee in the building of the multinational and more and more bureaucratically managed enterprise.

⁹⁰ *The Sewing Machine Advance*, 1877; TCSM. For more information about salesmanship in the United States see Walter A. Friedman, *Birth of a Salesman: The Transformation of Selling in America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004).

BUILDING A MULTINATIONAL BRAND

Singer's patents expired in 1877 and to keep its market share the company began to rely upon the reputation that local salesmen and saleswomen had built.⁹¹ The success of Singer marketing strategies and the increase of sales had brought another difficulty for the company, imitations. With trademark legislation, the Singer Company had the exclusive right to use Singer's name. Since the early 1880s in the United States, and from the 1890s standardly worldwide, President Frederick Bourne made special effort to ensure the authenticity of Singer machines. In the United States, Singer promoted a song in English that appeared in the *Sewing Machine Advance* in 1888. "Praise Singer's world-renowned machines," the song went, "So splendidly they sew. But buyers must be cautious, as counterfeits are made and offered as the genuine, by tricksters in the trade" the song concluded. Imitations, especially German, were a serious threat and the song continued "steps, therefore, have been taken, to shed the poor from harm, by stamping all the real machines, with "SINGER" on the arm."⁹²

The trademark helped to protect Singer's name worldwide as well.⁹³ Imposters sought to capitalize on the famous Singer reputation with names like

⁹¹ Davies, *Peacefully Working to Conquer the World: Singer Sewing Machines in Foreign Markets, 1854-1920.*, 55-57.

⁹² *The Sewing Machine Advance*, 1888; TCSM. Postcard 'Singer sewing machines and accessories trademark, WCBA, Box 3.

“New York Singer.” In Mexico, Singer’s inspector A.C. Hill, reported imitations with names like “Singer Nueva Vibratoria.” In local ads, Singer retailers in Spain reminded consumers to look for the entire Singer name on the machines’ arm to determine its legitimacy.⁹⁴

Singer executives believed that trademarks would protect from theft of sewing machines. Trademark registration allowed the Singer representative in every country to issue a *factura* (bill), which the company could use to repossess sewing machines if these were pawned or renters had not met the payments. The pawning of sewing machines was an issue that especially in Mexico resulted from customers’ impossibility to meet all the payments for their machines. The payments collecting effort came down on the canvassers, whose job was difficult because lease machines were sometimes resold before the final payment was made. Both consumers and agents, especially before they became Singer salaried employees, often resold or disappeared before paying for the machine in full. Pawning sewing machines was a profitable business. And the only way

⁹³ For more information on patents and trademarks registration in Mexico see Edward Beatty, *Institutions and Investment: The Political Basis of Industrialization in Mexico before 1911* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1996). Edward Beatty, *Institutions and Investment: The Political Basis of Industrialization in Mexico before 1911* (Stanford University Press, 2001); "Patents and Technological Change in Late Industrialization: Nineteenth-Century Mexico in Comparative Context," *History of Technology* 24(2002). Kristine Bruland, "The Management of Intellectual Property at Home and Abroad: Babcock and Wilcox, 1850-1910.," *History of Technology* 24(2002). J. Patricio Sáiz González, "The Spanish Patent System (1770-1907)," *ibid.* Paul Deguid, "French Connections: The International Propagation of Trademarks in the Nineteenth Century," *Enterprise and Society* 10, no. 1 (2008).

⁹⁴ Mexico Correspondence, 1890; SSMC, Box 103; Folder 6.

Singer could control it was to issue and require official stamped sales receipts.⁹⁵

Starting in the late 1880s, the company used its registered brand to repossess sewing machines when payments were not or when service was required.

Singer's trademarking strategy, a legal tactic that also helped avoid imitations, was part of Singer top executives' move toward the centralization of business operations in New York. The trademarking policy required the placement of the letter "S" in stores, canvassers' business cards, letter headings and sewing machines' arms, covers and accessories. Thus by assuring the multinational rights to its name worldwide, Singer also facilitated the wider recognition of the company worldwide. The letter "S" in red, at times and in certain products accompanied by other standard decorations such as a woman using a sewing machine or sphinx drawings, became a fundamental way of communicating with consumers.

Historians and economists have argued that the use of trademark or brand names may imply the separation of the product from its producer. In the second half of the twentieth century, successful brand names would be bought without taking over entire firms.⁹⁶ The case of Singer, however, denotes the company's

⁹⁵ AHDF, 1903-1913. For more information about pawning in Mexico and the pawning of sewing machines see Francois, *A Culture of Everyday Credit: Housekeeping, Pawnbroking, and Governance in Mexico City, 1750-1920*. And Marie Francois, "Housekeeping, Development, and Culture in Porfirian Chihuahua and Sonora," *Mexican Studies/ Estudios Mexicanos* Summer, no. 27.2 (2011).

⁹⁶ John Mercer, "A mark of distinction: Branding and trade mark law in the UK from the 1860s," *Business History* 52, 17 (2010): 16

determination to maintain a connection with the consumer both in the United States and abroad. Singer created a multinational brand. As Mira Wilkins has explained, “the name embodies the company’s reputation and offers information to the customer,” which rather than divorcing brand and firm, “the trade name allowed the firm to persist.”⁹⁷

Singer’s trademark policy’s also demonstrated its intention to remain consumer’s first choice by satisfying consumers’ choice and decision of having bought a Singer. Purchasing a Singer, the customer had access to instructions, a varied range of attachments in their local store or through the local canvasser, and the company’s exclusive after purchase service. For any repair or maintenance service, Singer employees required payment stamps or sales receipt from the customer. Without the proper local registration of trademarks, a policy that the company became fixated with, Singer’s receipt of sales had no legal legitimation abroad. Singer’s stamped sales receipt was the only form a customer could claim the company’s well-diffused customer service. Ultimately, the objective was also to make customers rely on the Singer’s service and relate such sewing appliance and its service with only one company around the world. Singer strove to create a unique and universal service, which was rather expensive, yet guaranteed to the given customer not only the product but also its

⁹⁷ Mira Wilkins, “The Neglected Intangible Asset: The Influence of the Trade Mark on the Rise of the Modern Corporation,” *Business History* 34, no. 1 (1992).

services. Singer wanted to create loyal customers, who would continue to buy the company's services and accessories.⁹⁸

President Bourne knew branding was essential. He instituted a patent department to manage trademarks in regions where the company operated. In Spain and Mexico, the *marca registrada* (trademark), was periodically renewed between 1897 and 1960. In 1897 Adcock renewed the 1888 *marca de comercio* (trademark), "to distinguish the Singer Manufacturing of New York machines" from other similar appliances and to secure the right to use the company's name. The *marca registrada* allowed the American-based company, represented by Adcock in Spain, "to the criminal prosecution and to the court those who will attempt against his rights." In addition, the court would grant "Civil Action compensation for the damage and prejudices that should have occasioned." A clear description and a copy of the brand name, along with any other explanation of the drawing of the various decorative ornaments that could be placed in machines, accessories and diverse advertising items had to be described in the trademark registration. The administration of trademarks, like any other form of advertising, was expensive for Singer. The company, however, achieved its objective and added value to a machine that many other manufacturers were

⁹⁸ Tom Mahoney, "100 Million Sewing Machines: The Story of Singer," Chapter 1, Pages 391, 396. Unpublished manuscript, Box 1, Singer Company Records (Accession 2207), Hagley Museum and Library. Archives, Soda House (hereafter HMLA). Mira Wilkins, "When and Why Brand Names in Food and Drinks?" in *Adding Value. Brands and Marketing in Food and Drink*, Geoffrey Jones and Nicholas J. Morgan, eds. (London: Routledge, 1994), 15 -16, 20.

also putting out in the market.⁹⁹ The letter “S” continues to symbolize a sewing machine, whether in Oaxaca or in Zagreb, even when the company no longer manages selling and manufacturing at the same time.¹⁰⁰

VERTICAL INTEGRATION COMPLETED

Between 1860 and 1890, Singer in New York perceived from its expansion abroad that the strategies that aimed at establishing greater control on the parent company made sales more successful.¹⁰¹ By the 1890s, overseas central offices, such as Madrid, began reporting directly and regularly to the corporate

⁹⁹ Chandler, *The Visible Hand : The Managerial Revolution in American Business*. By the 1900s wholesalers like Sears threatened Singer’s price strategies by offering a sewing machine three times cheaper. There were no retailers like Sears in Mexico or Spain in the early twentieth century. Nor were there large mail order retailers; Elizabeth M. Bacon, "Marketing Sewing Machines in the Post-Civil War Years," *Bulletin of the Business Historical Society* 20, no. 3 (1946)., 94. Singer Company Records: Trademarks; (Accession 2207), Box 6; HMLA. *The Sewing Machine Journal*, September 1876, *The Weekly Sewing Machine Journal*, 1883; HML, Imprints. Edmund Adcock y la Compañía Fabril Singer, Marca 967, 1888. Oficina Española de Patentes y Marcas (hereafter OEPM).

¹⁰⁰ Wilkins, "The Neglected Intangible Asset: The Influence of the Trade Mark on the Rise of the Modern Corporation." Lina Gálvez-Muñoz, "Regulating an Addictive Product: The Spanish Government, Brand Advertising and Tobacco Business (1880s to 1930s)," *ibid.* 47, no. 3 (July 2005); Teresa da Silva Lopes and Mark Casson, "Entrepreneurship and the Development of Global Brands," *Business History Review* 81(Winter 2007)., 652.

¹⁰¹ Jones, *Multinationals and Global Capitalism*, 5, 232-33. Like other American companies investing abroad in the second half of the nineteenth century, Great Britain was the first location abroad where the American-based Singer Company established a foreign office and manufacturing plants (1867, 1871, 1883). Wilkins, *The Emergence of Multinational Enterprise*, 15-23. Davies, *Peacefully Working to Conquer the World: Singer Sewing Machines in Foreign Markets, 1854-1920* (New York: Arno Press, 1977) 17, 20-23. Godley, "Selling the Sewing Machine Around the World," 281.

headquarters in New York. Central offices, generally also stores, controlled the opening and stock of each sub agencies and different stores opening in the country. Each store employed a general manager in charge of local employees in that location – clerks, salesmen, saleswomen, instructors and mechanics. Each store was part of a hierarchically structured marketing system with its head in New York. To efficiently coordinate and control these marketing strategies CEO Bourne created national companies and partnerships, as well as specialized departments for sales and marketing purposes. The company's various departments all had to report to firm's headquarters in New York. In 1891 two departments were created in the United States, the Manufacturing Trade Department and the Family Trade Department. Both manufacturing and distribution worldwide were transferred to New York.

Figure 9. (map 3) Singer Corporate Structure, 1893-1925. Source: Godley (2001) and SSMC.

The Family Trade Department coordinated the 1899 partnerships that were created in Spain and Portugal, Romania and Serbia, and Bulgaria and Greece. From January 1893 Spain was directly under U.S. management and no longer under the Foster Lane's London Office.¹⁰² President Bourne created his own company to coordinate the last four countries in addition to the operations in Africa and in the Middle East. The Family Trade Department became the Singer Sewing Machine Co. in 1904, to coordinate and later completely take over some partnerships such as Spain (1906), Turkey (1915) and the Czech Republic (1926).¹⁰³ Although they became local companies under the name of the Singer's general manager in each location and partners with president Bourne, such as Spanish Singer *gerente* Adcock, they regularly needed to report directly to New York.¹⁰⁴ Even though sewing machines in Europe were shipped from

¹⁰² Summaries outgoing correspondence. SSMC, Micro: 2013 P92 – 9070; Reel 71. The reorganization of Singer brought significant tension to the relations between the London and the New York Singer offices. For more information see Davies, *Peacefully Working to Conquer the World: Singer Sewing Machines in Foreign Markets, 1854-1920.*, 119-123. Godley, "The Global Diffusion of the Sewing Machine, 1850-1914."

¹⁰³ Before 1915 Turkey and Egypt were part of the same structure in partnership with president Bourne (1889-1905) and president Alexander (1905-1949). See World results, 1902-1940; SSMC, UM: AP 93-0444; Reel 1. National sales companies were also created in Russia (1897, 1903), Sweden and Norway (1901), France (1894, 1906), Belgium (1908), Switzerland (1920) and Holland (1935).

¹⁰⁴ See map three Singer Corporate Structure. The map shows the Singer corporate structure based on SSMC, Box 1 and SSMC UM AP 93-0444; Reel 1. Locations such as Holland are represented as national companies but these subsidiaries were created later and Singer had a central office instead in 1905. Also, locations such as Sudan appeared as a central office under NY since the 1920s. Locations with no particular color assigned consumed sewing machines

Great Britain or Germany (1895), manufacturing also became coordinated through New York. Bourne's administration decision to create national sales companies and manufacturing plants was to avoid nationalist sentiments and to relieve New York of transportation and tariff's costs but hierarchies remained clear.¹⁰⁵

After Bourne left the administration of the company some restructuring of territories took place from 1905 to 1951, yet the basic integrated and hierarchical organization result of his administration remained in place.¹⁰⁶ This chapter has demonstrated the significant role of regional contexts and how the experiences of Singer agents in unfamiliar markets contributed to building Singer's managerial hierarchies and corporate structure. The strategies used to open markets (or to end with malpractices) in Spain and Mexico, which were discussed regularly with

but possibly reported to central offices or national companies before sending the information to NY. There are locations such as Japan, which was under the NY Export Agency Department, that are not very visible in the map but that were important markets for Singer. Davies, *Peacefully Working to Conquer the World: Singer Sewing Machines in Foreign Markets, 1854-1920.*, 132.

¹⁰⁵ In 1895 Singer Germany became Singer Nahmaschinen, which made Singer in Germany a subsidiary to avoid tariffs and nationalist sentiments at the turn of the twentieth century. Ibid., 224-227. The Russian Singer Co. got nationalized in 1917. See Irinia V. Potkina, "The Singer Company in Russia: 1897-1917," in *American Firms in Europe: Strategy, Identity, Perception and Performance (1880-1980)* ed. Hubert Bonin and Ferry De Goey (Genève: Librairie Droz, 2009), 285.

¹⁰⁶ Douglas Alexander became president of the Singer Co. in 1905 until 1949. In the 1960s Singer diversified to manufacture and supply household and industrial sewing machines, office equipment, furniture, household electrical appliances, air conditioners, fabrics and home entertainment appliances among other consumer goods. Background Information on the Singer Co. Leaflet, 1965. SSMC, Box 1.

the Singer top executives, showed the importance of focusing on the consumer and on the local market. At the same time, as Chapter Two shows, the implementation of managing structures and rules that came along Singer's internalization strategies, assured the company's permanency and success in both Spain and Mexico.

Chapter 2

Localizing Markets: *Casa Singer* in Spain and Mexico, 1890-1910

Concerns about the viability of Singer's business in the Hispanic world increased as the United States entered into war with Spain in 1898. The increasing support that the United States government provided to the claims for independence in Puerto Rico, Cuba and the Philippines triggered anti-American protests and discontent in Spain. In February 1898, an article in the local newspaper *El País* called for consumers of sewing machines to know that "the only sewing machines that [were] not American [were] being sold in Palma Street," in Madrid's downtown. In April 1898, when the Spanish-American war began, the newspaper *La correspondencia militar* reported that there had been demonstrations in front of Singer stores in the northern city of Zaragoza and in the southern city of Cádiz. In the city of Segovia, north of Madrid, an *aviso* (bulletin/news) in *El País* warned that some customers were returning their machines to Singer's "cadre of thieves."

The news alarmed Singer's Spanish agents and managers, as well as the *gerente* Edmund Adcock. In response to mounting protests, Adcock planned to contribute to the Spain's war effort with company funds. And to further appease consumers' nationalist sentiments, Singer agent in Segovia, Angel Sopeña, countered to the press that Singer sewing machines were not American because they were manufactured in England. Sopeña added that Singer "belong[ed] to a British citizen who had been established in Spain for thirty years." Adcock, the agent from Segovia added, "ha[d] nothing to do with the Singer Company from

the United States.” His message concluded assuring that Singer sewing machines were “more Spanish than those that boast of being so.”¹⁰⁷

Sopeña’s response to the press in 1898 was not a wholly devious attempt to maintain Spaniards’ loyalty to the sewing machines’ company and to distance itself from the US-Spain conflict. Singer sewing machines sold in Spain were most likely manufactured in England, at the Singer factory in Kilbowie, Scotland, which opened in 1885. Despite Singer’s attempt to soothe hostilities through the press, however, the attacks increased through June 1898. Some focused on the company’s fast expansion, claiming that Singer “had invaded everything, from the capital to the remotest rural towns.” Others complained that Singer “had penetrated everything.” *Avisos* denounced that this “fabulous” business was also built on offering credit directly to poor working women who were forced to sign long-lasting contracts with the company.¹⁰⁸

The Spanish-American War ended in December 1898 (armed conflict ended in August) with the Treaty of Paris by which Spain lost Cuba, Puerto Rico and the Philippines. After a few months of tension, Singer’s business went back to normal. Sales decreased from 24,000 machines in 1896 to 20,500 in 1897 and 22,734 in 1898. Yet Singer sales exceeded 31,000 in 1899 and from then

¹⁰⁷ *El País*, February - May, 1898. *La Correspondencia militar*, April 23, 24, 1898 HNE. Spanish correspondence and press clippings, 1898. SSMC, Box 106; Folder 4. Manuel Suárez Cortina, “La regencia de María Cristina,” in *Historia contemporánea de España*, ed. Javier Paredes (Barcelona: Sello Editorial, 2009), 404-406.

¹⁰⁸ Spain correspondence, 1890-1900; SSMC, Box 106; Folder 4 and Folder 7.

on a steady growth—with a peak of 80,745 sewing machines sold in 1912—followed until 1917.¹⁰⁹

Nationalist sentiments against Singer dissipated fast because for employees and consumers in Spain, at the end of the nineteenth century, Singer appeared to be a local company. Although weaved within a strict hierarchical organization with center in New York, after more than three decades of business in the country, like in Mexico, almost all Singer employees were local. And as the press resentfully denounced in 1898, Singer's selling organization had exceptionally spread throughout rural and urban areas and had become part of Spaniards and Mexicans sewing cultures and markets. Singer's structure had resulted exceptionally flexible and open to local agents who embedded in local communities and sewing practices developed and enlarged Singer's selling organization in different markets.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁹ Andrew Godley, "Selling the Sewing Machine Around the World," Table A2.

¹¹⁰ List of agents, Spain 1885 – 1891; SSMC, Box 106; Folder 6. Incoming correspondence, 1903-4; SSMC, Micro 2013 P92 9081. Mexico correspondence, 1890s; SSMC, Box 104, Folder 1. Correspondence from Mexico to Sewing Machine Times, *The Sewing Machine Times*, 1890-1908; HML, Imprints. Manuel Suárez Cortina, "La regencia de María Cristina."

Figure 10. (chat 3) Singer sales of family sewing machines in Spain, 1892-1916. Source: Godley (2006) and SSMC UM.¹¹¹

Chapter Two examines how Singer's multinational policies, globally standardized beginning in 1889, served to integrate the company within local contexts while foreign managerial hierarchies were established. This chapter studies how Singer agents in Spain and Mexico implemented the company rules, from trademarks to ways of doing customer service, and management hierarchies. The figure of the agent, from the top *gerente* to the village traveling agent, was essential to the building of the firm within the host economy. In both countries, Singer's strategies and rules made the company more permanent. Singer employees welcomed the business structure implemented as they

¹¹¹ The data for Spain between 1892 and 1907 refers to net sales and is taken from Andrew Godley, "Selling the Sewing Machine around the World: Singer's International Marketing Strategies, 1850-1920," *Enterprise and Society* 7, no. 2 (2006), table A2. Until 1907 Singer Spain also reported the sales of Italy and Lisbon as both offices worked through Madrid's central office. For the rest of the years the data refers to gross sales as I consider that some of the reposed machines might have been used. This data and tables 1.2-1.5 in appendices also use the World Results, SSMC UM, Ap 93-0444, Source 2; Project 56; Reel 1.

generally depended on Singer's financial, organizational and manufacturing globalized operations by the end of the nineteenth. The notion of success implicit in the escalating from traveler to chief of travelers to *encargado* (manager) also endured the hierarchy of the enterprise, both at a local as well as a global level, at the end also benefiting the company's agenda.

Singer business practices made the company part of regional contexts because they served local interests. At times, however, local interests and business results diverged from Singer's headquarters expectations. In Mexico, as this chapter will demonstrate, local Singer agents at times spread Singer's selling system to points that were not profitable for the company. Local agents opened stores and branches in locations where business never reached expected sales. Because Singer depended on locals to explore and survey new business venues in host economies, headquarters generally went along with expansion. Customers came to identify the company through their district agent, not with the top executives in New York. This relation reinforced Singer's dependence on local agents and provided the canvasser with leverage and certain level of autonomy within the company.

Figure 11. Singer's World and Regional Managerial Structure and Commodity Chain by 1890.

Scholars of multinationals in Mexico and Spain have largely focused on how foreign companies imposed their business practices on locals and also on the incompatibilities that the economies of each nation had to really support the success of foreign companies in the nineteenth century. My examination of Singer's growth in both nations focuses on how individuals, employees and also consumers, contributed to build the multinational while participating in new and modern forms of economic activity. Locals became agents of Singer's capitalist-driven modes of selling and manufacturing. The present chapter emphasizes the role of all employees within the managerial structure instead of concentrating in the decisions of few individuals. Edward Clark's plan to open top-down managed

branch offices to avoid costs of dealing and litigating against independent dealers led to great profits for Singer in the United States by the 1860s. The role of George Woodruff in expanding Singer's selling system abroad was also remarkable. "Following the U.S. pattern," Woodruff opened branch offices in England as demand of sewing machines rapidly increased in the early 1860s.¹¹² Other veteran agents and loyal representatives of Singer abroad like Frederick Neidlinger in Germany or Nasarvanji Mervanji Patell in India, contributed greatly to the building of the multinational.¹¹³ While I focus on Edmund Adcock and Louis Harnecker, Singer's principal agents in Spain and Mexico, their efforts to implement Singer's selling organization depended upon locals' willingness to expand the multinational's structure. Singer *gerentes'* relationship and experience with the rest of the agents in host economies are key to understand the development of the multinational in both Spain and Mexico.

¹¹² Edward Clark was Isaac M. Singer's lawyer in the early 1850s. In 1852 Singer and Clark became partners and formed the Singer Company. Clark was president of the Singer Manufacturing Company between 1875 and 1882. George Woodruff was Singer veteran in Boston before he was appointed to London in 1864. Mira Wilkins, *The Emergence of Multinational Enterprise: American Business Abroad from the Colonial Era to 1914* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1970), 40.

¹¹³ Ibid., 38-45. Mark Casson and Andrew Godley, "Revisiting the Emergence of the Modern Business Enterprise: Entrepreneurship and the Singer Global Distribution System," *Journal of Management Studies* 44, no. 7 (2007). David Arnold, "Global Goods and Local Usages: The Small World of the Indian Sewing Machine, 1875-1952," *Journal of Global History* 6, no. 3 (2011), 420.

SINGER GERENTES, ENCARGADOS AND AGENTES

Singer's office in New York provided general agents or *gerentes* with a power of attorney to operate the business in each region during the 1880s. This way Singer avoided selling patent rights to local merchants while the *gerente* acted as representative of the American-owned company.¹¹⁴ At the local patent and brands registry, a local/national agent or representative was required to proceed with the registration of the company and the Singer trade name. In Spain and Mexico, *gerentes* and locals, and not top executives, became the figures to which local authorities would turn to in case legal of disagreement.¹¹⁵ Adcock and Harnecker were, for local authorities, the heads of Spain and Mexico's Singer operations.

¹¹⁴ In 1855 Singer sold patents rights to Charles Callebaut, a French independent dealer. Callebaut assembled and sold Singer sewing machines and never paid back the fees that were agreed upon between the French merchant and Singer. As Mira Wilkins explains, this was the last time that Singer sold patents abroad. Wilkins, *The Emergence of Multinational Enterprise: American Business Abroad from the Colonial Era to 1914.*, 38-39.

¹¹⁵ Outgoing correspondence, McKenzie to Adcock, 1880; SSMC, Micro 2013 P92-9013, Reel 4. Correspondence from Oscar Graham, Mexico, 1887, 1888. SSMC, Box 103; Folder 5. Trademarks, Singer Company Records; HMLA, Box 7; Folder 9; and Box 6. Power of Attorney from Edmund Adcock conferred to Pedro Velasco Rojo, 1894. Poder otorgado a Edmund Adcock, Compañía Fabril "Singer," Archivo Histórico del Banco de España (hereafter AHBE). Frederick Bourne decided to give Adcock the 1894 power of attorney as Spanish authorities kept their tariffs on Singer sewing machines, which they continued to tax as produced in the United States even though by the mid 1880s almost all Singer sewing machines were imported from the factory at Kilbowie. Robert Bruce Davies, *Peacefully Working to Conquer the World: Singer Sewing Machines in Foreign Markets, 1854-1920* (New York: Arno Press, 1976)., 130-132.

Under New York oversight, Adcock and Harnecker organized Singer's selling system in Spain and Mexico. The *gerentes* divided business into regional districts or divisions to better coordinate distribution of sewing machines and other services. Branch offices in different states and provinces, called *encargadurías* in Mexico and *sucursales* in Spain, were directly under the nation's central office. *Gerentes* oversaw the central office, which in Spain and Mexico was in Madrid and Mexico City. They were also required to travel and control the region's branch offices.

Gerentes followed and embraced Singer's rules as they were under New York's supervision and because they discovered in Singer's hierarchy a way to help them coordinate and employ greater control over employees. For example, when opening a new branch office, Harnecker wrote in March 1896 to all the branch offices in Mexico, "we do want [them] to send their orders in time." The distance between different branch offices was also a problem in the country and Harnecker did not want "to run short of stock". Later in December 1896, he insisted on the importance of keeping the books and inventory up-to-date. "As usual," he ordered them, "you will send an inventory to this office with all the necessary details." He wanted to know the exact "state in which they are found, complete or incomplete, good or bad, salable or unsalable." Every piece of property – "Horses, wagons, etc." – and their value had to be in the books.¹¹⁶ As figure eleven shows, to express complaints or to request recommendations or to

¹¹⁶ Correspondence from Mexico, 1896; SSMC, Box 104; Folder 1.

send reports, local agents referred to the *gerentes* and not Singer's top executives in New York.

Meanwhile, employees accepted Singer's hierarchies and policies as they prized the higher social status that was sure to come with promotions. Whenever the *gerente* opened a new branch, he had to hire new workers, canvassers, cashiers, and salesmen. High-ranking positions in the company were rigorously assigned and thus competitive, but when given, employees knew the opportunities for permanency within the company were high, as Singer would not risk their local leverage.¹¹⁷ No new territory could be added to Singer's selling organization unless the general manager visited the region in question. The *gerente* used his responsibility of appointing positions in new branches to demonstrate his authority as head of Singer in each country. To become an *encargado* without positive reputation was almost impossible. Positions were intended to be long-term as time and company resources were invested in training.

A new *encargaduría* opened in response to demand. In Spain and Mexico, where travel and distribution was slow, a new branch enabled the company to reach more customers. *Encargadurías* and *sucursales* sent reports periodically—monthly reports were recommended—back to the *gerentes*, and even recommended potential opportunities for expansion. Between 1890 and 1905, Adcock and Harnecker plans to expand Singer's selling system was working

¹¹⁷ Correspondence from Mexico, 1890; SSMC, Box 103; Folder 6.

successfully. As maps below show, Singer's selling system reached each state in Mexico and province in Spain.

Figure 12. (map 4) Map of the distribution of Singer *sucursales* in Spain, 1905.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁸ Directory of Shops for the sale of Singer Sewing Machines. SSMC, Box 109.

Figure 13. (map 5) Map of Mexico, States and capitals, ca., 1900. Singer corporate structure in Mexico organized by divisions and branches (*encargadurías*) by 1905.¹¹⁹

The route to become a manager was similar in both Spain and Mexico, especially after president Bourne commanded the systematic centralization of the business. Singer employees generally began as salesman. In the offices, employees got to know the company as clerks or as instructors. Each of these positions required certain training, especially of the sewing machine workings. To learn all the intricacies of the job, apprentices assisted veterans in the job during six months to one year. In Spain, an assistant clerk could become a province or a capital district branch *encargado* in a matter of a decade. The ascendance within the company most likely required the agent to move from city to city. Agents were generally willing to move, which demonstrates the level of

¹¹⁹ Expendios en la República Mexicana, Arreglado por Divisiones y encargadurías. SSMC, Box 109.

compromise among employees, as expectations of job permanency and even improvement were tangible. The company generally paid for the expenses, which even more encouraged employees to accept the change. By 1900s, more than three hundred local agents worked as clerks, salesmen, warehousemen, bookkeepers, cashier, canvasser and collectors. For the most part they were salaried and could become managers of the different offices.¹²⁰

The rules were different for women. The opportunities for women within the company were fewer than for men. As business historian Angel Kwolek-Folland pointed out, “salesmen and managers were united as the central male figures of the new gender relations of the business world.” However, Singer’s focus on domestic sewing granted women’s influence and inclusion. Because of women’s given knowledge on domestic sewing they were mostly hired as Singer instructors. Also, and increasingly, the job of clerk or store saleswomen became more available for women.¹²¹ Yet Singer’s rules about employing women were never set, which allowed local customs to draw the limits. This approach benefited the company in Spain and Mexico, as their skills on domestic sewing were most useful and the company’s expenses on women employees were lower or even inexistent.

¹²⁰ List of agents, Spain (1885 – 1891); SSMC, Box 106; Folder 6.

¹²¹ Angel Kwolek-Folland, *Engendering Business: Men and Women in the Corporate Office, 1870-1930* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994). Lina Galvez Muñoz and Paloma Fernández Perez, "Female Entrepreneurship in Spain During the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries," *Business History* 81, no. 3 (2007)., 22.

A Singer's canvassing spot, and even a store, could be run as a family business. In Spain, a report described that general agent Adcock had opened "many small shops at a very low rental [cost] with a man and his wife in each." In terms of costs for the company, this practice was beneficial as the "wife receives nothing and the man is under the canvassing collector conditions."¹²² In both nations, small business and *tiendas* (shops) generally used the whole family as employers. Although the husband was the owner of the family-owned business, the wife could either do the accounting and/or sell the goods. Children or other members part of the extended family could also become part of the *negocio* (business). These were not Singer's standards, yet they helped the company to save on expenses and also to become even more entrenched in the local context.

Domestic sewing and thus the adaptation to local sewing practices and commercial practices guaranteed success in Spain and Mexico. Women's skills in domestic sewing constituted part of salesmen training. In addition, canvassers as well as store salesmen learned the customs around different goods to be able to market the sewing machine accordingly. And this "world of goods" was a female-centered world, especially of garments and sewed goods.¹²³ Singer

¹²² London Central Office Reports, 1884. SSMC, Box 95, Folder 3. Edward Clark also organized this system in the United States. Here, however, the agent's wife received a small commission. Davies, *Peacefully Working to Conquer the World: Singer Sewing Machines in Foreign Markets, 1854-1920.*, 58-60.

¹²³ John Brewer, *Consumption and the World of Goods in the 17th and the 18th Centuries* (New York: Routledge, 1993). Barbara Burman, ed. *The Culture of*

employees around the world were aware of this. In 1898, Adcock contacted the New York headquarters reporting on the development of a permanent sewing work exhibition in the newly opened central store in Madrid's Alcalá Street. The *encargado* of the new office in Madrid assured that the entrance to the exposition was going to be in "the very best street in Madrid." Alcalá Street was a popular haunt of middle-class sectors of the capital.¹²⁴ In his detailed description of the event, Adcock explained that the main purpose of the exhibit was to show women how the sewing machine will help them make household decorative goods. Also, instructors, salesmen and saleswomen, needed to show how useful the machine was for garment purposes. Another agent at the Madrid office explained that the "vestibule will be utilized for fancy machines" and inside the building, "the right hand section will be filled with Jacquard, carpet, sail-making and other machines which require great space, and the left hand section will be an artistic exhibition." The artistic exhibition, he added, will display both local embroidery samples as well as embroidered pictures directly sent from New York. "Fancy furniture," the agent continued, served well in the room where the artistic exhibition was placed.¹²⁵

Sewing: Gender, Consumption and Home Dressmaking (Oxford, UK: Berg, 1999).

¹²⁴ Incoming correspondence, summaries, 1898; SSMC, UM: AP 01-0041, Source 1; Project 2; Reel 1.

¹²⁵ European Trip, 1902; SSMC UM: AP 01-0041; Source 1; Project 1; Reel 1. *The Sewing Machine Times*, 1909-1910. HML, Imprints.

Adcock invited a delegation of press members to the inauguration of the exhibit. As oppose to previous denunciations that Singer was foreign and therefore not interested in Spain's peoples, an article in the *Nuevo Mundo* defined Singer as a company "that had been registered in Spain for many years." The description in the *Nuevo Mundo* of Singer's "extraordinary artistic exhibition" in Alcala Street was detailed and reminded readers that "all sectors of society" were welcome to visit and admire all kinds of embroidered goods and garments, "all done with the sewing machine Singer."¹²⁶ The exhibition was organized and designed by local salesmen and saleswomen, helping Singer demonstrate the company's accountability to local markets.

Local agents were key in branding as well, one of Singer's most important selling strategies since the 1880s. As we have seen, Singer used trademarks beginning the late 1880s.¹²⁷ In 1897, as part of Singer's agenda for vertical integration, both Adcock and Harnecker, Singer's *gerentes* in Spain and Mexico, renewed the Singer trademark in their respective territories. Singer representatives needed to submit "a copy of the duplicate of the brand," as well as a "cliché of the brand" and "four examples of the brand image," like any other Spanish firm. In addition, as a foreign company, a "quality certificate" from the

¹²⁶ *Nuevo Mundo*, April 1900; HNE.

¹²⁷ Davies, *Peacefully Working to Conquer the World*, 55-120. Wilkins, "The Neglected Intangible Asset."

country of origin was required.¹²⁸ Trademarks, a company legal strategy, affected local contexts directly and became one of Singer's best localization marketing strategies. Singer required that stores and branch offices in medium-to-large towns in Spain and Mexico display the brand's logo everywhere in order to catch consumers' attention. Singer agents in Mexico and Spain emphasized the importance of the location of the central office, hence Singer's main store in the cities' downtowns, often placing the letter 'S' or the trademark symbol in the middle of the shop window. And they did this in a context that increasingly favored the city as an emblem of modern life. Since the 1850s, city street improvements in both regions emerged as a result of elite's plans for modernization. City life was, for the Spanish emerging middle classes, "essential for Spain's incorporation to modernity."¹²⁹ For Mexican elites too, as manifested mostly in the different states' capitals, the city was part of the ideal "modern lifestyle."¹³⁰

¹²⁸ The Real Orden de 7 de Abril de 1892 compiled previous patent registration legislation. From this year the level of protectionism through higher tariffs increased in Spain. On the contrary, sewing machines were free of tariffs in Mexico at the end of the nineteenth century. Davies, *Peacefully Working to Conquer the World*, 130-32. Edward Beatty, *Institutions and Investment*, 120. Wilkins, "The Neglected Intangible Asset," 66. Jones, *Multinationals and Global Capitalism*, 89, 202.

¹²⁹ Antonio Flores, *La sociedad de 1850* (Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 1968), 197-9. Noël Maureen Valis, *The Culture of Cursilería: Bad Taste, Kitsch, and Class in Modern Spain* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), 145-7. Deborah L. Parsons, *A Cultural History of Madrid: Modernism and the Urban Spectacle* (New York: Berg Publishers, 2003). Cruz, *The Rise of Middle-Class Culture in Nineteenth-Century Spain*, 2, 67-70.

¹³⁰ Overmyer-Velázquez, *Visions of the Emerald City*, 3, 40-50.

In Madrid, Singer opened its first offices in the downtown area in Montera Street in the early 1890s. After two decades of business and with more than 50 offices opened by the end of the 1880s, *gerente* Adcock suggested to the headquarters in New York to buy the whole building and to make this location the country's central office. Adcock intended to take advantage of the city's "restructuring of the streets" in this very heavily transited area of the capital. He argued that this location, like Alcalá Street years later, would highlight the company within such a busy street.¹³¹ Meanwhile, Singer agents installed a central office on Independencia Street in downtown Mexico City in 1902. In this location, as well as a location on the neighboring San Francisco street, agents organized showrooms to instruct potential consumers in the applicability of the appliance to home sewing goods and also as a way to promote the suitability of the machine in home decor.¹³²

¹³¹ Incoming correspondence, Spain, April 1902; SSMC Archives, UM AP 95-0023, Source 1; Project 2; Reel 2. Letter from Edmund Adcock, November 1882, SSMC Archives, Box 106; Folder 4.

¹³² *Mexico*, January 1902, in *The Sewing Machine Times*. HML, Imprints.

foreign company. For example, in the village of San José de Gracia in the state of Aguascalientes in Mexico, a perceived opportunity existed as there was only one tailor in the town while no garment stores had opened. The canvasser paid a first visit to gauge the existence of potential consumers in an area. In San José de Gracia he observed that "women not only cooked, but also spun, wove, and sewed the family's everyday clothing" and were taught a variety of home sewing skills in the Catholic school and at home. In his second and third visits, villagers already recognized the salesman as part of the Singer Organization because he only sold Singer products. Likewise, villagers identified Singer with the agent that travelled—and not the district's *encargado*—as he was the one who came back to the town to sell machines but also to procure repairs and collect monthly payments.

WORKING FOR THE MULTINATIONAL'S BENEFIT?

While expanding Singer's system and following the multinational standards, not all results were positive. In the early 1890s, reports of increasing demand in the Yucatán Peninsula reached Harnecker's central office in Mexico City. Carlos and Hugo Patterson in the Puebla branch and an *encargado* in Mexico City agreed that Yucatán had great potential because it was seemingly the "wealthiest part of the country." Patterson noted how salesmen in Yucatán wanted more machines to sell, but his branch could not maintain the supply because they were too far away. Harnecker took to Patterson's recommendations, visited Yucatán and decided to open a new branch in Merida

to supply the Peninsula.¹³⁴ Harnecker trusted Patterson's advice because of his experience. Singer top executives demanded from *gerentes* that employment within the company was given to people familiar to the business, as well as to agents that had already built relationships among the community and with consumers.

Indeed, Carlos Patterson and his brother, Victor, had opened multiple Singer branches in Mexico, including one in Chiapas in the 1870s. In 1894, Harnecker reported to New York that he had "little doubt in his mind that ... [Yucatán] will be a profitable one." Mexico's *gerente* assured his superiors that his selection of employees would be rigorous as well. He insisted, the *encargado* will not "grow ... careless in employing men." Various company agents had advocated expansion. They promoted the sewing machine in schools and other venues, and had been selling machines to workingwomen as well as to upper class Catholic schools.¹³⁵ They were also in contact with government officials, who were very interested in mechanization as a means to improve productivity and the national economy.¹³⁶ Although Harnecker had the last word in the matter, agents already familiar with the business and those who had been in contact with locals for years had the power and opportunity to make Singer grow

¹³⁴ Correspondence from Mexico, 1894; SSMC, Box 103; Folder 6 and folder 8.

¹³⁵ Headquarters incoming correspondence, 1898; SSMC, UM AP 01-0041.

¹³⁶ Overmyer-Velázquez, *Visions of the Emerald City*.

in size in Mexico and achieve better positions within the company as a result of the growth.

Employees used both Singer's and their local contacts to enlarge the business in the case of Yucatán. Yet soon this branch and others were not functioning as expected. The opening of shops in Mexico reflects that local agents' motivation to grow Singer's system at times exceeded the company's sales expectations. The size of the selling system in Mexico in 1905 in relation to the sales in the country is evidence of the key role of employees in building the Singer selling system in the region. By 1905, Mexico had 305 shops or branches throughout the country (see map 5). As shown in table 1.1 (see appendices), however, the sales of Singer sewing machines in Mexico were half of those in Spain in 1905, where Singer had opened around 150 branches. Although Mexico's territory to cover was larger than Spain's, the proportion of sales and shops reflects an over-development of the selling organization in Mexico.

Map seven further proves this pattern as it compares Mexico with the rest of Singer's international operations. The map represents the average number of sales in Singer's central subsidiaries and partnerships between 1900 and 1905. The number of offices opened by 1905 in each of these locations is also representative of the diffusion of Singer in different territories. When comparing opened offices with average sales, there is a clear unevenness. In France, for example, Singer had 220 offices. The main office in Paris reported in 1906 the sale of 107,667 sewing machines. Mexico had almost two hundred offices fewer and although 1906 was a profitable year, their sale of 35,472 sewing machines

was almost four times lower.¹³⁷ Again, Mexico's territory to cover was larger than France's. And there were less communication networks between urban centers. This made Singer Mexico open even more offices. Salaries in Mexico were lower than in Europe, which also encouraged Singer to continue enlarging its selling system in the country. But the population of Mexico was lower than most countries of Western Europe at the turn of the twentieth century.¹³⁸

¹³⁷ Directory of Shops for the Sale of Singer Sewing Machines, 1905 and Compañía Singer de Máquinas de Coser, Expendios en la República Mexicana, Arreglados por Divisiones y Encaragadurías, 1905. France repossessed 8,895 machines and Mexico 3,405. SSMC, Box 109. World Results, SSMC UM, AP 93-0444 Source 2 Project 56 Reel 1.

¹³⁸ Correspondence from L. Harnecker, Mexico, 1891-1892; SSMC, Box 103; Folder 6. Angus Madison, *The World Economy: A Millennial Perspective* (Paris: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2001) 38, 198-228.

Figure 15. (map 7) Map of Singer world sales distribution and stores between 1902-1907.

Countries are assorted based on the average sales of sewing machines from 1902-1906 to provide an estimate of which regions were the top level consumers of sewing machines in the beginning of the twentieth century. The analysis can be done comparing the number of stores for each region, which sometimes encompassed two countries like regions of the Ottoman Empire and Egypt. I have not included Africa in both maps. In my estimates, South Africa with Central Office in Capetown would be part of the first group and in 1905 twelve shops. SSMC Archives, Box 109. World Results. SSMC UM, AP 93-0444, Source 2; Project 56; Reel 1.

Singer sought to limit the opening of inefficient or not prosperous branches by appointing Singer examiners, as Singer referred to inspectors, who oversaw the work of *encargados* and *gerentes*. To ensure impartiality, inspectors came from abroad. This measure reassured Singer headquarters in New York that the company's policies were followed in the different regions where partnerships and subsidiaries had been created after 1889. Both at a global and a local scale, examiners constituted Singer's embodiment of the company's managerial structure. The authority given to inspectors to review any part of the business was a way to control far-flung operations as well as a symbol of Singer's power structure and the perpetuation of the firm's hierarchies at every level.

Within Spain and Mexico, local examiners were also appointed to ensure the business in rural areas was running efficiently and according to New York's streamlined guidelines. Generally, the examiner came from the city where Singer had established a branch to supply less urbanized areas such as Segovia or Badajoz in Spain or Mérida or Oaxaca City in Mexico. Local employees could also become regional examiners depending on their reputation.¹³⁹ The *gerente* was ultimately in charge of appointing examiners in each nation.

The relation between examiners, *empleados* (employees) and *gerentes* was evidence of the independence that regional Singer partnerships and companies had acquired from the US headquarters.¹⁴⁰ These relations,

¹³⁹ List of agents, Spain (1885 – 1891); SSMC, Box 106; Folder 6.

¹⁴⁰ On subsidiaries and hybrids see Jones, *Multinationals and Global Capitalism*, 162-165.

however, also reflected the tensions that aroused between the parent company and the host economies when outsiders questioned *gerentes'* decisions. Having an inspector coming from abroad generally frustrated the *gerente* or the *encargado*, especially when the final report was negative. At Singer headquarters in Spain, Adcock voiced concerns about French examiner Riverend. Adcock complained that Riverend was "a Frenchman who does not have experience with the business [in this country]." In his report to his superiors in London, Riverend complained that Adcock did not accompany him when he toured Singer's branches in Spain; and so he was not told about the work of some *encargados* who he believed they were not the best of managers. Adcock defended *encargados* around Spain and especially in leading Madrid's central office district. Here, Adcock assured that the *encargado* was his best and oldest agent in the company and even when Riverend reported to London and New York about his wrongdoings, Madrid's district *encargado* was not terminated.¹⁴¹

Another measure that sought to assure canvassers' loyalty to the company were commissions as part of salaries. By the mid 1890s all canvassers received a small salary and a commission. As historian Robert Davies explained "uniform employee contracts established a first sale commission on installment sales of 25 percent to 35 percent," depending on distance and the number of sewing machines that an agent was expected to sell in a certain location. If the canvasser paid for the machine within 30 days it was considered a cash sale, for

¹⁴¹ Correspondence from Spain, 1889; SSMC, Box 106; Folder 6.

which the canvasser received three times the commission he would receive for each payment on a rental agreement.¹⁴²

Based on the Singer's manual, titled *General Rules and Regulations for Salesmen – Canvassing and Collecting*, "salesmen will be assigned districts in which to canvass, and must not leave them without permission of their managers." A salesman's primary responsibilities were to show and promote the sewing machine, "place three machines on trial" a week, as well as "collecting the district average" in customer payments. The canvasser coordinated his own business in his designated territory. Each agent was responsible for their districts and their accounts. Only if the canvasser "fail[ed] to collect the district average," the canvasser's superiors intervened and required the canvasser to abandon his position and return his shortage. And so long as their prices were not too low or too high, Singer let them exercise considerable autonomy to interact with the local communities and culture as they saw fit.

After 1889, as more agents were under Singer's payroll, they were also under a greater accountability for adherence to the firm's procedures. Despite the tensions and the inefficiencies, in the long run, Singer achieved great integration within local contexts. Generally, agents stayed in the company until they retired, for example. Singer salesmen became widely known in local communities and they are even remembered today as such. Although sales

¹⁴² General Rules and Regulations for Salesmen – Canvassing and Collecting, 1894; SSMC, Box 1. Davies, *Peacefully Conquering the World*, 110-111. Harnecker in-Mexico correspondence, translated December 1896; SSMC, Box 104; Folder 1.

reports were not always as expected, canvassers had accomplished something more important, the presence and generally the monopoly of Singer in both rural and urban regions in both Spain and Mexico.

FOLLOWING SPANISH TIMES

Although intended to guarantee the canvasser's fidelity and reliability to the company, Singer contracts also reassured canvassers' independence. The system of uniform contracts perpetuated the hierarchical model implemented from New York but it allowed local agents to act independently according to local markets. In 1898, when Singer received the first nationalist attacks as a result of the war between the United States and Spain, *Casa Singer* designed new advertising trade cards that contributed to Spain's official efforts to commemorate Miguel de Cervantes *Quixote*'s tri-centenary. These illustrated the triumph of Spain and modern technology, and also the benefits that the sewing machine had brought to Spanish society, especially to women.

The trade cards were distributed in Singer stores in Spain at the beginning of the twentieth century. Three were particularly representative of the hybrid and diverse "gazes or points of view" about Singer and the introduction of sewing machines. The illustrations embodied contradicting cultural perceptions of modernity among Spaniards.¹⁴³ One trade card represented people's admiration of the treadle Singer sewing machine. Quixote is shown kneeling, gazing in awe and astonishment the ascendance of the sewing machine, which rises on wings

¹⁴³ Peter Burke, *Eyewitnessing: The Uses of Images as Historical Evidence* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), 125.

as a way of symbolizing its great expansion and acceptance since its invention in the 1850s. In the text, Don Quixote recites, “this is my lady Dulcinea, the marvelous Singer sewing machine.” In a chivalry system, women constitute part of the required hidalgo paraphernalia. In *Don Quixote*, the main protagonist struggles to attract and seduce Dulcinea, he is a decent nobleman, who represents the difficulties and trifles of the cultural obstacles in becoming a *caballero* or knight (figure sixteen).

Figure 16. Singer Trade Cards, Don Quijote de la Mancha. Ca. 1905. Biblioteca Histórica, Madrid.

In another trade card, Don Quixote is dominating the sewing machine by riding over a Singer sewing machine. The text describes, “on a Singer sewing machine, Don Quixote feels even more powerful than on his Clavileño.”

Clavileño is a wooden horse in the book *Don Quixote*, a tool that would “put end

to our misery,” Sancho reminded, in regards to his and Quixote’s social existence as quasi-knights. The illustration of Don Quixote riding the sewing machine is representative of the gendered connotations of technology, as it is men that control the machine through a masculinized sexual imagery, which dignifies man as the master and provider and woman as both the assistant and receiver of man’s largesse.¹⁴⁴

Finally, figure seventeen represents the confusion of “a priest and a barber,” who think that a male apprentice or “*mancebo*” is using a sewing machine, but sure enough, they realized the person is “a lady of good taste, who sews with the Singer sewing machine.”¹⁴⁵ In a way, this image conveyed to the consumer the benefits of the sewing machine, a tool that dignified women’s labor while also maintaining the gendering of sewing. Yet the surprise and confusion in the priest and the barber also denotes skepticism about introducing new technologies that may prompt more women to seek work outside the home. These images contributed to mold the perception of the sewing machine as a domestic technology, a tool for women to represent their femininity as consumers

¹⁴⁴ Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra and Thomas A. Lathrop (transl). *Don Quixote: fourth centenary translation* (Newark: Cervantes and Co., 2005), 677.

¹⁴⁵ Tarjetas postales hechas para anuncio de la Casa Singer. Singer advertising cards, Madrid, Montera 18. (Madrid: Lit: Bernardo Rodríguez, 1905). Biblioteca Histórica, Archivo de la Villa, Madrid (hereafter BH).

but also as homemakers, and for men to show their involvement as breadwinners.¹⁴⁶

Figure 17. Singer Trade Cards, Don Quijote de la Mancha. Ca. 1905.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁶ Leora Auslander, "The Gendering of Consumer Practices in Nineteenth-Century France," in Victoria De Grazia and Ellen Furlough, eds., *The Sex of Things. Gender and Consumption in Historical Perspective* (University of California Press, 1996).

Don Quixote is a Spanish literary classic that Cervantes created to mock satirically the feudal and socially limited system of chivalry. Quixote's chivalry stories are only in his imagination, which serves to both criticize the restrictions of the system but also to show the recurrent aspirations of a sector of the population eager to ascend the social ladder through honor and bravery. Without losing the satire of Cervantes book that these images represent, in the nineteenth century, they portray regional anxieties towards modernity. The colorful images show Spaniards appreciation of and skillfulness for the sewing machine as a tool that could improve both men and women's ambitions and aspirations to be a part of the middle class or simply to maintain an honorable profession. However, these images also represent the difficulties and the understanding of the limiting factors that tradition may impose on the near-to-obsession desire for progress. When Don Quixote rides the sewing machine, he does it in an almost forceful way, demonstrating expertise but also the uneasiness of the situation.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁷ Tarjetas postales hechas para anuncio de la Casa Singer (Singer advertising cards), Madrid, Montera 18. (Madrid: Lit: Bernardo Rodríguez, 1905). HAV-BH.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., Pamela Walker Laird, *Advertising Progress: American Business and the Rise of Consumer Marketing* (Baltimore and London: The John Hopkins University Press, 2001), Cruz, *The Rise of Middle-Class Culture in Nineteenth-Century Spain*, Dorota Heneghan, "Shopping Angel: Fashion, Gender, and Modernity in Galdós' *La De Bringas*," *Dissidences. Hispanic Journal of Theory and Criticism* 2.1, no. 1 (2006), Valis, *The Culture of Cursilería*, 139-141 and 145-150.

NEGOTIATING MODERNITY

The increasing number of delinquent accounts (non-paying customers) that Singer had to face in Spain, and especially in Mexico, highlights even more the at times fragile relationship between tradition and modernity. On one hand it meant that the demand for sewing machines on credit was high. In Spain, for example, Singer offered a family sewing machine for 2.50 *pesetas* a week over twenty weeks. Such plan permitted more individual consumers to access the technology, especially women. On the other hand, higher number of delinquent accounts reflected the recurrent income limitations of consumers and agents in both nations.

Singer installment payments plans (*contratos de alquiler*) were especially attractive to women as late nineteenth-century civil codes posed important legal restrictions on women's right to individual property. Although the Mexican Civil Code of 1884 and the Spanish Civil Code of 1889 intended to propel economic activity by guaranteeing the right to private property, marriage posed restrictions on women's usage of it. The father and the husband maintained greater authority than the mother or the wife in regards to usage and management of property. This was particularly true in Spain, where the *patria potestas* remained in place, which made the father's permission necessary for "legal transactions" of family members and their property. In 1884 and 1889 the conditions of marriage changed and greater emphasis was placed on the consent of the bride and groom rather than on their parents. This situation did not always benefit women, however, who before the Civil Code of 1884 and 1889 could count on their

families' *dote* or dowry as her own property even during marriage. In the late nineteenth century in Mexico, "the dowry [was] anything or amount that a woman or other in her name provides with the goal of supporting the household expenses."¹⁴⁹ Like in Spain, however, this became to be managed by both the husband and wife, removing this security to access property from the woman.¹⁵⁰

As the press denounced in 1898 in Spain, women constituted an important sector of the population that demanded sewing machines on credit. Singer contracts, once the machine was paid in full, granted the ownership of the sewing machine to one person. For married women and women in female-headed households, a condition in which women, especially in Mexico, more often found themselves in the nineteenth century, Singer *títulos de propiedad* (ownership titles) stimulated the possibility of their individual ownership.¹⁵¹ In both Spain and Mexico, the number of sales to households and open accounts never ceased to increase between 1890 and 1910. In the northern city of Burgos, for example, for every one hundred people, over fifteen bought a Singer sewing machine in 1892. In the southern cities of Cadiz and Granada, thirty-two people and twenty-five people out of a hundred, respectively, owned a Singer family machine. In

¹⁴⁹ Código Civil, Mexico, 1884, Capítulo X; Art 2119. Código Civil, Spain, 1889. Cruz, *The Rise of Middle-Class Culture in Nineteenth-Century Spain*, 96-99.

¹⁵⁰ Silvia Arrom, *The Women of Mexico City, 1790-1857*, 59-61. Silvia Arrom, "Changes in Mexican Family Law in the Nineteenth Century: the Civil Codes of 1870 and 1884." *Journal of Family History*, 10 (1985). Marta Santos Sacristán, "Los malos tratos a la infancia."

¹⁵¹ Silvia Arrom, "Changes in Mexican Family Law in the Nineteenth Century: the Civil Codes of 1870 and 1884."

Mexico, between 1907 and 1913, the *encargadurías* managed an average of sixty thousand open accounts. In Spain, the minimum open accounts registered 60,000, reaching over 150,000 in 1913.¹⁵²

Meanwhile, the sewing machine boosted women's participation as well as their autonomy in the garment sector—when possible to own your own shop. The number of *cajones de modistería* (seamstress fixed shop) or *modistas con tienda* (dressmakers' shops) grew rapidly beginning in the 1850s. Furthermore, the number of *modistas sin tienda* (without fixed shop) increased and surpassed the number of *sastres con tienda* or *sastrerías* (tailors with store) by the 1900s.¹⁵³

Among women, the sewing machine also fostered other forms of consumption related to marriage. The trousseau, for example, substituted the dowry in the nineteenth century. Since the eighteenth century, bridal trousseaus were popular and these increasingly were made out of fabrics and/or dresses as well as house linens. By the mid nineteenth century, in rural households, “women's dresses and undergarments formed more than 83 percent of countryside trousseaus, while in the city the portion was about 67 percent.” In the Mexican Code of 1884, when marriage was consented between a man and a

¹⁵² Estado Comparativo del negocio (business report), 1891-1892; SSMC, Box 106; Folder 5. World Results – Lease accounts, 1907-1913; SSMC UM: AP 93-0444, Source 2; Project 56; Reel 1.

¹⁵³ Estadística Administrativa de la Contribución Industrial y de Comercio, 1856, 1879, 1889, 1909. See appendices. Silvia Marina Arrom, *The Women of Mexico City, 1790-1857* (Stanford University Press, 1985), 169. For information about the retailing revolution in Spain see Cruz, *The Rise of Middle-Class Culture in Nineteenth-Century Spain*, 121-24.

woman, the married couple joined their “*donaciones ante nupciales*” (engagement donations). Women largely received clothing, fabrics, and house linens as symbols of marriage unison. The sewing machine boosted these practices in Spain and Mexico, creating a stable and a durable demand over time.¹⁵⁴

As a result of the popularity of *contratos de alquiler*, the number of salaried agents rapidly increased at the turn of the twentieth century to collect payments and to control consumers’ uses of the sewing machine. The percentage of delinquent accounts was higher in Mexico, around 2.2% between 1907 and 1910. In 1911, Singer numbers began feeling the effects of the revolutionary uprising and the percentage rose to 3.4% in 1913. On the contrary, Madrid continued lowering its delinquent accounts rate, having its minimum in 1913 at 0.88%.

Figure 18. (chart 4) Overview of open and delinquent accounts in Spain and Mexico, 1907-1913.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵⁴ Cruz, *The Rise of Middle-Class Culture in Nineteenth-Century Spain*, 98. Código Civil, Mexico, 1884.

¹⁵⁵ World Results; SSMC UM, AP 93-0444, Source 2; Project 56; Reel 1.

Although more agents were hired to cope with the irregularities that often aroused as a result of customers' inability to pay, agents also run into debt with the company. In reports, not-well-followed books or excessive agents' shortage were often brought up.¹⁵⁶ To ameliorate this situation, Harnecker hardened local regulations by requiring employees to sign a bond when first hired. The "Employees Guarantee Fund" acted as an insurance policy, which employees paid regularly. Guarantee funds were first implemented in the late 1870s in England. A clause in their contract stipulated that part of the canvassers' commission would go toward such fund, which would only be returned (and with interests) as the agent paid for the machine. Local *encargados* often claimed their efforts within the job and blamed the customers lack of compromise in making their payments.¹⁵⁷

General managers were aware of such issues within certain branch offices and as long as accounts were stable, top executives continued allowing inefficiencies. In 1890, in Spain, a local Singer employee owed the company 1600

¹⁵⁶ Letter to Madrid, Outgoing correspondence, 1915; Executive, Management Letterbooks; SSMC Micro 2013 P92 9063. Jon Stobart and Ilja Van Damme (eds.), *Modernity and the Second-Hand Trade. European Consumption Cultures and Practices, 1700-1900* (New York: Palgrave, 2010).

¹⁵⁷ Mexico Correspondence, 1893; SSMC, Box 103; Folder 7. Summaries incoming correspondence, 1898; SSMC Archives, Unprocessed Microfilm Source 1 Project 2, reel 1. Guarantee funds came along fidelity funds in the 1870s in Great Britain. These were payments that employees were obliged to make by contract to assure "against dishonesty and embezzlement." George Woodruff's intention was to ensure the continuous check and control of salesmen payments. When embezzlements dropped, Davies explained, the company returned the funds, rewarding salesmen and assuring the company's business. See more in Davies, *Peacefully Working to Conquer the World*, 65.66

pesetas (roughly \$5,500 of today) and yet walked out the local court without charge as such dispute was not locally considered a misdemeanor. In Mexico, Guadalajara's branch office continued to report losses based on agents' shortages. Inadequacies were also somewhat tolerated as the prosecution costs against a canvasser were high. The *gerente* or the branch office *encargado* needed to hire a local lawyer to proceed against the employee. This, which was the only option to claim theft of company funds as well as machines that customers had not fully paid, generally did not work. As a result, *gerentes* often overlooked issues dealing with agents' shortages.¹⁵⁸

The data on delinquent accounts reflects the variety of ways in which consumers used Singer's machines. Individuals at the turn of the nineteenth were aware of the high value of the sewing machine. Many drew upon newly rented machines for collateral credit, for example. A customer that paid only some of the installments would pawn the machine in exchange of its whole valued. The pawnbroker, without knowledge of the missing payments, easily agreed to provide the loan. Once the pawnbroker had accepted a machine without title, the customer may go missing. Singer, aware of the increase of pawned machines, especially in Mexico, implemented a system of stamps for each payment done on a machine. By the 1900s, the company required pawnbrokers to not accept any machine without the final sales receipt. Between

¹⁵⁸ Case between Singer and Nicolas de Górgolas, January-February 1890, *La Correspondencia de España, El Día*. Incoming correspondence, 1899; SSMC UM, Source 1 Project 2 reel 1.

1904 and 1911 Singer's *gerente* (general manager) overviewed the city's pawnbroker shops in search of machines under rental agreements.

Singer also adapted *contratos de alquiler* to these circumstances and to the limitations to pay that women had demonstrate based on their employment conditions in the sector and the ways individuals used the machine.¹⁵⁹ In 1907, a sewing machine rental agreement, which included a complete sewing machine and “a *estuche* with all the accessories,” required customers to maintain the machine in “my current *habitación* (room/house).” Twenty monthly payment in cash, instead of weekly as it was custom in Spain, granted the title of the sewing machine in Mexico. However, after three months, if payments were not done, the customer should have returned the machine and the *estuche* in “*buen estado* (good conditions).”¹⁶⁰

CONCLUSIONS

Historians have often portrayed Singer's world marketing as aggressive. Indeed, Singer sales force grew rapidly around the world at the turn of the twentieth century and thousands of Singer branches opened to back salesmen door-to-door selling efforts. Singer policies, the labor relations and the rules about expanding business in each region, were practically universal by the end of the nineteenth century. This chapter has demonstrated, however, that Singer

¹⁵⁹ For more information about the establishment of the installment system and the initial doubts about consumers see Gordon, *Fabricating Consumers*, 70-72.

¹⁶⁰ Gobierno del Distrito Federal; Sección Empeños, Indiferentes, 1906-1908; AHDF Tomo 3; EXP 103 1.1.155.

marketing developed along with regional modernization agendas and adapted to local markets. The selling structure enforced from New York provided enough independence for the development of Singer in Spain and Mexico and for the company to become local in each nation. Singer's policies toward centralization allowed the multinational to control business operations at the same time it permitted employees in each region to voice their discontent and personal opinions about how to proceed in certain territories. And consumers, especially women who sew at home either for private purposes or as a money making activity, found in Singer a commercial structure—credit, rural and urban availability and after-purchase service—that was suitable to their social, cultural and economic contexts.

Meanwhile, the development of Singer in Spain and Mexico also demonstrates the limitations of standardization. Singer adapted to local business practices even when these were not optimal for its business. As long as sales were stable and the company functioned according to Singer established structure, local particularities were not rigorously taken in consideration. Singer top executives valued familiarity and loyal men in local markets. When following Singer standards, top executives placed small limits to enlarge the at-times-unprofitable selling system in the region.

Chapter 3

Global Patterns: Singer Advertising and the Globalization of Sewing

Practices, 1876-1920

In May 1876, Singer inaugurated a seven-month advertising campaign at the Centennial Fair in Philadelphia. The fair's coordinators invited manufacturing companies to demonstrate America's industrial achievements to both local and international audiences.¹⁶¹ Singer had its very own building. New and "improved" sewing machines were on display for potential consumers and investors. Back in the early 1860s, Singer had started to adopt mass-production and its achievements toward this endeavor were displayed proudly in Philadelphia.¹⁶² Emphasizing the company's participation in the nation's industrialization and technological advancement, part of Singer's exhibit was its recently inaugurated factory complex in Elizabethport, New Jersey.

To promote the new sewing technology, however, the bulk of the company's exhibit took a culturally and gender specific approach. Most of

¹⁶¹ Robert W. Rydell, John E. Findling, and Kimberly D. Pelle, *Fair America: World's Fairs in the United States* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian, 2000), 20-25.

¹⁶² Editorials: "The Singer Manufacturing Company Building, Centennial Grounds, Philadelphia," "Singer at the Centennial," *The Sewing Machine Journal*, 1876 and 1877. Catalogue: *Machines for every stitching process* (The Singer Manufacturing Company: New York, 1896). *Singer Manufacturing Co's Catalogue of Exhibits Shown in their Centennial Exhibition Building* (The Singer Manufacturing Company: New York, 1876). HML Imprints Collection. David A. Hounshell, *From the American System to Mass Production, 1800-1932: The Development of Manufacturing Technology in the United States* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984), 84-91. Roland Marchand, *Creating the Corporate Soul: The Rise of Public Relations and Corporate Imagery in American Big Business* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 251.

Singer's exhibits were on home sewing. They showed how the machine facilitated ornamental work or embroidery. While Singer's exhibit displayed industrial prowess, the corporation's advertising focus maintained that the home was the ideal space for the sewing machine.¹⁶³ This idea guided the company's marketing strategy throughout the nineteenth century, as it was extraordinarily successful in selling machines to households well into the twentieth century.

Chapter Three shows how Singer's gendered views toward sewing and women's labor molded the multinational's global business strategy. The private sphere, materialized in the image of the home, served Singer to validate the appropriateness of women's labor in the home and thus the purchase of sewing machines. In Singer's public exhibits, advertisements, stores and instruction manuals, the private sphere, i.e., the home, was repeatedly presented as the physical and moral appropriate place to sew.

Singer's focus on the home was key to its development as a multinational in Spain and Mexico. Its expansion was both locally and globally gendered. As Partha Chatterjee argues, the home was not "unimportant" vis-à-vis the "outside world."¹⁶⁴ While many middle-class women embraced domesticity as associated with the private sphere, historians have since shown that the public and the private were not entirely separate. For one, Singer's ads helped to shape the

¹⁶³ *Singer Manufacturing Co's Catalogue of Exhibits Shown in their Centennial Exhibition Building*. HML Imprints.

¹⁶⁴ Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1993)., 116-120.

culture of domesticity, which determined women's work in the home, a supposedly private space. Meanwhile, women's labor in the home on machines enabled Singer to expand into new public spaces such as exhibits and stores.¹⁶⁵

Singer home sewing exhibits and manuals between 1876 and 1920 are the main sources examined in this chapter. These documents demonstrate how the company's strategic planning worked particularly well in Spain and Mexico, especially from the late nineteenth century. In both nations, Singer marketed home sewing, and embroidery particularly, the latter an activity that women performed widely and generally in the home. This marketing strategy met local trends toward the rationalization of household chores, which redefined home sewing as a modern but feminine activity.

As a result of Singer's marketing and advertising strategies, which merged multinational and regional sewing practices beginning in the 1890s, home sewing cultures were transnationally standardized. Since using local embroidery to sell machines was successful in Spain, Mexico and also in the United States, local embroidery patterns made it to Singer international advertising campaigns. And to make it internationally accessible to consumers, Singer rationalized the

¹⁶⁵ Angel Kwolek-Folland, *Engendering Business: Men and Women in the Corporate Office, 1870-1930* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994). Judith G. Coffin, *The Politics of Women's Work : The Paris Garment Trades, 1750-1915* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1996)., 130-140. John D. French and Daniel James, *The Gendered Worlds of Latin American Women Workers: From Household and Factory to the Union Hall and Ballot Box* (Durham, N.C: Duke University Press, 1997). Joan Wallach Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999). Elizabeth Dore and Maxine Molyneux, eds., *Hidden Histories of Gender and the State in Latin America* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000)., 3.

embroidery technique by publishing standard instructions for all the steps necessary to produce any kind of embellishing stitching.

In previous chapters I have emphasized the high level of integration of Singer multinational policies within Spain and Mexico's social, cultural and economic contexts. In Spain and Mexico, women were not only consumers to whom machines were marketed. They were active participants too. Women were Singer instructors for the company in Spain and Mexico. *Profesoras* were in charge of sampling all possible applications of the sewing machine as well as showing other women how to perform their usual house sewing tasks with the sewing machine. Consequently, Spanish and Mexican women contributed to the mechanization of embroidery, which was now a new standard across the world.

Although the standardization of embroidery techniques could be seen as a form of colonization, the participation of women in the mechanization of local embroidery complicates and gestures toward a debate about the workings of globalization. Women redeployed Singer's civilizing rhetoric even as they upheld traditional patterns. They presented machine sewing as modern at the same it could help preserve values that defined the ideal woman as an honorable Catholic woman and household manager.

In the United States and abroad, Singer welcomed the idea that its machines were at the nexus of modernity and tradition. The company "styled

itself” as protector of domesticity as an ideology that uplifted women’s status.¹⁶⁶

Singer often praised that the company’s international success was the result of “the common sense of the whole civilized world.” Singer’s advertising strategies in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century often represented the sewing machine as a tool that would bring modernity to women who could perform sewing while participating in nineteenth-century bourgeois culture and values. Singer promoted its commercial expansion as a race to improve women’s place in society by assuring their role in the home. The company displayed its sewing machine, and thus American technology, as a civilizing tool for other cultures less industrialized and thus seemingly backwards.¹⁶⁷ Scholars that have concentrated on these discourses, however, have placed an emphasis on the United States versus the rest of the world. My study shows that Singer’s civilizing mission rhetoric coincided rather than clashed with or imposed modernity on foreign countries; it harmonized with how regional and gendered social and cultural aspirations to modernize were constructed within Spain and Mexico at the turn of the twentieth century.

¹⁶⁶ Coffin, *The Politics of Women's Work : The Paris Garment Trades, 1750-1915*. Coffin, 90-114. Marchand, *Creating the Corporate Soul: The Rise of Public Relations and Corporate Imagery in American Big Business.*, 3, 165.

¹⁶⁷ Michael Adas, *Dominance by Design: Technological Imperatives and America's Civilizing Mission* (Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006). Mona Domosh, *American Commodities in an Age of Empire* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2006).

PROTECTING WOMEN, MARKETING THE HEARTH

The gradual disappearance of guild regulations in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries allowed more women to enter the garment sector. The poor working conditions in the sector aroused social reformers' concerns, however. Like Thomas Hood's *The Song of the Shirt* (1843) went, reformers denounced that women performed many sewing tasks – they “Seam, and gusset, and band, ...Till over the buttons I fall asleep.” Seamstresses in factories and in their homes “Work - work - work,” without proper rest, “Till the eyes are heavy and dim!.”¹⁶⁸

Reformers' critics resonated across the Atlantic throughout the second half of the nineteenth century. In response, Singer and other manufacturers in the United States soon switched to making the Victorian ideal of the home their major advertising focus. Choosing the household as the location where women could both perform family sewing and sewing for the marketplace, rather than only promoting the machine as a labor saving technology, allowed manufacturers, as marketers, to avoid social reformers complaints about women's degenerative working conditions. Beginning in the late 1860s,

¹⁶⁸ Adrian Shubert, *A Social History of Modern Spain* (London & Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1990). Coffin, *The Politics of Women's Work : The Paris Garment Trades, 1750-1915*. Nancy L. Green, *Ready-to-Wear and Ready-to-Work : A Century of Industry and Immigrants in Paris and New York* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997). Susie S. Porter, *Working Women in Mexico City: Public Discourses and material Conditions, 1879-1931* (University of Arizona Press, 2003). Pilar Díaz Sánchez, *El trabajo de las mujeres en el textil Madrileño: Racionalización Industrial y Experiencias de Género, 1959-1986* (Malaga: Servicio de Publicaciones de la Universidad de Málaga, 2001)., 39-41.

manufacturers emphasized the sewing machine's role in uplifting women's labor conditions and social status in industrializing societies.¹⁶⁹

With industrialization came new work and life routines, which also affected the roles of women within emerging capitalist western economies and societies. In contrast to the liberal and modern public sphere of cafes, factories and commerce, throughout the nineteenth century, the ideal middle-class home was defined as women's own's private and ideal space to comply with their gendered social roles such as housework.¹⁷⁰ Middle-class women joined marketers in promoting the sewing machine as a household appliance by aligning the appliance with questions of women's morality and respectability. During the second half of the nineteenth century, women's consumption of garments and fashion increased. With the sewing machine, they could produce their dresses in the home and comply with bourgeoisie cultural standards of appearance and respectability. In 1875, American reformer and feminist Elizabeth Oakes noted

¹⁶⁹ *Genius Rewarded or The Story of the Sewing Machine* (New York: John J. Caulon, Book and Job Printer, 1875), 3-10. "Song of the Shirt." *The Sewing Machine Journal*, 1875; "A Household Necessity." *The Sewing Machine Journal*, 1877.; HML, Imprints. Mary Alice Wynman, "Two American Pioneers: Seba Smith and Elizabeth Oakes Smith" (PhD diss., Columbia University, 1927), 193-194. Glenn Porter and Harold C. Livesay, *Merchants and Manufacturers: Studies in the Changing Structure of Nineteenth-Century Marketing* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1971). Pamela Walker Laird, *Advertising Progress: American Business and the Rise of Consumer Marketing* (Baltimore, Md: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998)., 78-79, 97. Coffin, *The Politics of Women's Work : The Paris Garment Trades, 1750-1915.*, 7, 57, 173-187.

¹⁷⁰ Laird, *Advertising Progress: American Business and the Rise of Consumer Marketing*. Megan J. Elias, *Stir It Up: Home Economics in American Culture* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008).

that “the squalid class of sewing machine workers formerly seen in New York and other cities has totally disappeared.” With a sewing machine, Oakes argued, widows and “unhappy wives, with drunken husbands,” women “in all classes... could live in comparative comfort.”¹⁷¹

Singer’s advertising emphasis on ornamental sewing and home sewing dates back to the 1870s. In 1876, the company headquartered in New York asked the branch offices elsewhere in the United States to supply samples of “ornamental sewing machine work” to exhibit at the Centennial Fair in Philadelphia.¹⁷² Branches from every state sent-in diverse items, everything from quilts to tablecloths, to pillowcases and framed embroidered American monuments such as the statue of George Washington recently erected in Cincinnati. Goods were also sent-in from abroad, from recently opened foreign branches such as Hamburg. Women most likely were the ones who made these. Singer used these embroidered items to prepare a “cozy and home [–like space],” where the company invited “the ladies” at the fair to enjoy the wonders of modern industry.¹⁷³

¹⁷¹ *The Sewing Machine Journal*, October 1875. HML, Imprints.

¹⁷² Between 1865 and 1875 Singer’s annual sales grew from 26,340 machines to 249,852. Hounshell, *From the American System to Mass Production, 1800-1932 : The Development of Manufacturing Technology in the United States*. Rydell, Findling, and Pelle, *Fair America: World’s Fairs in the United States.*, 20-25. *Singer Manufacturing Co’s Catalogue of Exhibits Shown in their Centennial Exhibition Building*. “Singer at the Centennial.” Special issue, supplement; *The Sewing Machine Journal*, 1877; HML, Imprints.

¹⁷³ “Singer at the Centennial.” Special issue, supplement; *The Sewing Machine Journal*, 1877.

At the Philadelphia 1876 Singer exhibit, the home and women's labor traditionally performed in the home represented the prosperity of America's industry. The home maintained its production face, along with its incipient consumption role.¹⁷⁴ While the home reacquired a fundamental social and cultural role as middle class morality considered it the proper space for women, it was key in fostering economic prosperity. It dignified women's work, rather than diminished it. To meet the economic pressures of market economies and societies, more and more women in the second half of the nineteenth century entered the workforce without ever leaving the naturalized domestic space.

During Philadelphia's Centennial, sewing machine trade specialists in the United States emphasized Singer's special appeal to working women. In its building, Singer portrayed the family sewing machine as an investment for women who already made sewing their more important moneymaking activity. The company displayed a beautifully decorated home, which could also serve as working space for the industrious woman. In the different rooms, Singer agents demonstrated the variety of jobs that could be done with a sewing machine. Ornamental works as well as dressmaking were the focus of the representatives making samples at the exhibit. The agents' goal was to demonstrate how the sewing machine was, overall, "a domestic helpmate." And to make it truly accessible to all, Singer took the opportunity to promote women's

¹⁷⁴ Jan De Vries, "The Industrial Revolution and the Industrious Revolution," *The Journal of Economic History* 54, no. 2 (1994).

entrepreneurship and improvement of working conditions by offering installment payments options.

Further connecting the sewing machine with the betterment of women's working and social conditions, Singer representatives at the fair also showed appropriate sitting postures to work with the sewing machine. The Singer cabinet was also promoted as an attachment that made the sewing machine more comfortable—it provided a table where the fabric and various accessories could easily be accessed and stored. Singer merged entertainment and industry and thus contributed to the remaking of the home as the ideal and modern place for women.¹⁷⁵ With the table, the machine was not only a production tool but also a home-y form of entertainment and adornment—while the machine cabinet was closed women could enjoy reading on it at the same time it served as decorative furniture ideal of the bourgeois home.

Singer proposed complementary changes in household production rather than a radical alteration of pre-existing gendered labor divisions. “What is a household without a Singer?,” were the first lines of the company's Philadelphia's catalogue. The majority of the machines on display were the new Family model and the samples of work included all kind of home-for goods such as tablecloths, cushions and women and children's clothes.¹⁷⁶ Singer represented home sewing as modern when introducing the machine in the home. When done inside the

¹⁷⁵ *The Sewing Machine Journal*, 1875 and 1876. HML, Imprints. Ibid.

¹⁷⁶ *Singer Manufacturing Co's Catalogue of Exhibits Shown in their Centennial Exhibition Building*, 2-8. HML, Imprints.

home, mechanization not only made a household prosperous but also it complemented women's expected roles in society. And women were not secondary actors in Singer's modernizing perspective of the home. On the contrary, by targeting women in particular the company placed women as main actors in the transformation of the home in modern times. In the company's advertising it was women's responsibility to transform the household to make it prosperous. By introducing a sewing machine, women improved the household while guaranteeing its continuity as a vessel for women's identity and social signification.

The success of women- and home-centered advertising, led Singer to make sewing exhibits a permanent strategy. Shop window decorations represented Singer's continuous attempt to separate machine sewing from factory work. Ornamental sewing exhibits, and at times dressmaking, were installed in some stores in the 1880s. The first highly decorated store was the New York's "Singer family establishment, just below Madison square, at 929 Broadway." An article in the *Sewing Machine Journal* in 1882 praised it as "one of the most attractive shops in the city, and by all odds the most artistic." Instead of referring to embroidery and home sewing as work, the commentator referred to embroidery as artistic following Singer's rhetoric. The article described how pedestrians commented on "the beautifully-arranged stock of tapestries, curtains,

embroideries, fancy linen, dolls' trousseaus, and the like.”¹⁷⁷ This strategy was implemented globally by the late nineteenth century.

HOMESEWING PRACTICES IN SPAIN AND MEXICO AT THE TURN OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

As explained in Chapter One, the number of sales for the cases of Mexico and Spain before 1875 is unclear, yet by 1889 both regions were part of Singer's main selling structure and counted on hundreds of employees distributing family machines throughout both nations. When sewing machines were introduced in Spain and Mexico in the 1860s, they met regional social reformers' plans to modernize the home and women's place in society. In nineteenth-century *economía doméstica* (home economics) manuals and in women's magazines, girls were encouraged to sew small goods to become familiar with an activity that they often had to perform as wives or as heads of households. These practices served manufacturers of sewing machines well, as they emphasized the importance of sewing as a virtuous practice for women to perform in the home.

Beginning in the 1860s more and more *economía doméstica* manuals were published to foster the development of a new culture of household work. Historian Verena Radkau has pointed out that nineteenth-century societies believed that “progress must be done orderly” and thus household chores and women's duties within the home needed to be systematically arranged, well-

¹⁷⁷ *The Sewing Machine Journal*, 1882, and Singer International Shops Ads, *The Sewing Machine Times*, 1910. HML, Imprints.

ordered and –instructed.¹⁷⁸ Nineteenth-century modernity projects in Spain and Mexico included the household as a space in which progress could be experienced and represented. In the manual *La casa por dentro*, [Inside the household] translated in 1830, women were encouraged to organize their days according to strict schedules that would not allow them to neglect housework. In this manual for newlywed women, like in the 1827 *Manual para señoritas* [Manual for the ladies], the emphasis had shifted to women doing household chores themselves rather than simply teaching them to servants.¹⁷⁹ As part of instructions to clean and cook, for example, manuals considered home sewing a modern and morally appropriate women's chore.

With a more materialistic approach to the household, mid nineteenth-century *economía doméstica* manuals included detailed household chore instructions as well as embroidery and self-made household linens that girls and women were recommended to make inside the home. Increasingly, the house became an important space that needed to be adorned. In the case of Great Britain, Deborah Cohen explains, a fascination for household goods rose at the turn of the nineteenth century as a rejection to former notions of material possessions seen as sinful. Desire for interior ornamentation also boomed in France in the nineteenth century. French patterns rapidly made it to Spanish and

¹⁷⁸ Verena Radkau, "*Por la debilidad de nuestro ser," mujeres del pueblo en la paz porfiriana* (México: Centro de Investigaciones y Estudios Superiores de Antropología Social, 1989)., 20.

¹⁷⁹ Madame Pariset, *La casa por dentro ó el manual de las casadas* (Valencia: Imprenta de J. Gimeno, 1830).

Mexican manuals. These included basic garments patterns as well as descriptions of decorative tablecloths, curtains and embroidery drawings for garments and different household linens.¹⁸⁰

In Hispanic culture, household goods represented more than skillful production and social status. These products communicated women's fulfillment of societal gendered roles at the same time women participated and performed modernity through consumption and as household managers.¹⁸¹ The bourgeoisie attitude towards material goods and the mid nineteenth obsession with housework rationalization complemented each other. In manuals and normative literature, "woman's perfection," was to be a mother and a housewife. To achieve this, girls needed to learn all the household chores, and especially sewing. In the 1858 *Tratado de economía doméstica para uso de las niñas* [Home Economics Manual for Girls], "sewing for the family ... was the first thing a girl learned at school and/or the home." This manual taught various sewing stitches as well as how to make handkerchiefs, tablecloths, bed sheets, underwear and shirts. Mexican *calados* (embroidery) were part of the ornamental sewing examples that girls could add to the linens and garments. Spanish and Mexican artistic sewing practices such as the embroidery of initials

¹⁸⁰ Ibid. Deborah Cohen, *Household Gods: The British and Their Possessions* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006). Jesus Cruz, *The Rise of Middle-Class Culture in Nineteenth-Century Spain* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2011).

¹⁸¹ Dorota Heneghan, "Shopping Angel: Fashion, Gender, and Modernity in Galdós' *La De Bringas*," *Dissidences. Hispanic Journal of Theory and Criticism* 2.1, no. 1 (2006), 1.

or the making of *costureros* (sewing baskets and accessories) were in manuals along with a variety of British and French goods, like the so-called Richelieu embroideries. Girls and young women learned to make garments and embroidery in different styles, *a la inglesa* and *a la francesa* (the English and the French way) as well as *a la española* and *la mexicana*.¹⁸²

Economía doméstica manuals were dedicated to both poor and well-off classes as the latter sought to control and define women's place in modern societies as household managers. For poor women, furthermore, sewing lessons included in manuals as well as the explanations of the cultural significance of its products, contributed to create new forms of money-making ventures rather while modernizing their home. Girls first learned how to make simple stitches—to know how to properly baste, for example, was the basis for becoming good at making family clothing but it also provided the initial training to possibly become a seamstress for lower class girls. Women needed to know about different types of fabrics to make elegant dresses without overspending or being duped by the seller. Beginning the 1870s, manuals increasingly included fashion patterns and explanations of textile production tools and materials began too. Manuals included “all the theory about that practice [needlework and sewing] proper of your sex,” all the while continuing moral and etiquette

¹⁸² *Tratado de economía y labores para uso de las niñas*, (Madrid: C. González, Museo de la Educación, 1861)., 29, 44.

teachings and thus contributed to keep sewing an extensively pursued home-based practice.¹⁸³

The significance that sewing activities acquired among household work and practices in the second half of the nineteenth century in Hispanic culture was expressed particularly in specialized *costurera* and *bordadora* manuals. The *La costurera; manual de la costurera de familia* [The seamstress; a manual for the family seamstress, 1877] by Spanish reformer Cesaréo Hernando de Pereda began their lessons addressing the respectability of sewing for women in modern societies. Pereda's garment-making manuals for women, just like other prescriptive and general home economics manuals, insisted on "women's natural gift for domestic chores," detailing how crucial this was for the family and the household's well-being. In another manual distributed in Mexico, the *Manual de corte y confección de vestidos de señora y ropa blanca* [Manual of Dressmaking for Women's and Casual Clothing, 1884], Pereda praised home sewing as the most appropriate activity to "satisfy social needs, the preservation of the home and family life." The author suggested that sewing was the most basic of household-related activities that women must learn to also support the working

¹⁸³ Liberato Guerra, *Lecciones de economía y de higiene doméstica: para las madres de familia y cuantas personas se hallen al frente del gobierno de una casa* (Barcelona: Impr. de Miguel Blanxart, 1866). The secondary literature on the culture of sewing is booming now. Barbara Burman's edited work on the North-Atlantic culture of sewing, which included works on machine sewing, home dressmaking and cultural representations of women and sewing, opened the theoretical ground for a further development. See Barbara Burman, ed. *The Culture of Sewing: Gender, Consumption and Home Dressmaking* (Oxford, UK: Berg, 1999).

class family. For him, a technical education in dressmaking would allow women to create their own family's wardrobes, and not pay for the services of professional and artistic dressmakers, something reserved for well-to-do classes.¹⁸⁴

Through the lessons in *La costurera*, women learned to make casual clothing but also more complex outfits. First, they learned both men and women's physique so that they could take exact measurements. Although dress patterns were increasingly available in women magazines and other general publications like city guides, the dressmaker also needed to know how to adjust these to different body sizes and shapes. Once measurements were taken, they needed to be transferred to paper and finally onto the fabric. Eventually, the pieces were sewn together, tried on the woman's, man's or child's body, and final adjustments made. Hemming and basting were a priority during the first lessons. It was important to delineate the lines with lighter stitches so the final sewing would only need small adjustments. This became crucial once machine sewing was introduced, as Pereda explained, because the machine's stitches were harder

¹⁸⁴ Cesáreo Hernando de Pereda, *La costurera: manual de la costurera en familia ó libro para la Enseñanza de la costura, del corte, armado y confección de las prendas de vestir y de las reglas para aumentar ó reducir toda clase de patrones* (Madrid: José María Perez, 1877), 1-20; and, *Manual de corte y confección de vestidos de señora y ropa blanca* (Biblioteca Enciclopédica Popular Ilustrada, 1884), 140-142. Hernando de Pereda also published in Mexico. See also *Manual del sastre: método teórico-práctico para el corte y confección de toda clase de vestidos civiles, militares y eclesiásticos* (Est. Tip. Editorial de G. Estrada, 1883). [The Tailor's Manual: A Theoretical and Practical method for Making Civil, Military and Clerical Clothes].

to undo. Mending and patching, finally, were also instrumental in the instruction, as one dress was not only made for one occasion and because clothing might be transferred from generations or the fabric reused to make another dress.¹⁸⁵

Dressmaking manuals and teaching methods proliferated as a genre and also were included in a wide range of publications such as normative literature, magazines, press, city guides and in schools. The increase in publication of magazines is particularly noticeable from the 1860s as the home was connected with new consumption patterns.¹⁸⁶ And the connection with the debates on the “woman question” remained. In magazines, women were to retrieve the “irreplaceable value” of the needle to fight the “social decay” that industrialization was bringing, especially to the workingwoman. Social reformers claimed that to work was necessary, but that to do it in a decent way was more important.¹⁸⁷ For them, the home dignified women’s labor.

The evolution in the content offered in women’s magazines represents a move toward a positivist and market-driven perception of home and women’s roles in the home as producers and consumers. This benefited the promoters of new sewing technology in Spain and Mexico to sell more and more machines.

¹⁸⁵ *La costurera: manual de la costurera en familia ó libro para la Enseñanza de la costura, del corte, armado y confección de las prendas de vestir y de las reglas para aumentar ó reducir toda clase de patronos.*

¹⁸⁶ For more information about how this process developed in the United States see Elias, *Stir It Up: Home Economics in American Culture*.

¹⁸⁷ Susan K. Besse, *Restructuring Patriarchy : The Modernization of Gender Inequality in Brazil, 1914-1940* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 18-19.

The Spanish women's magazine *La Guirnalda* embodied the negotiation between reformers' focused on the morality of women working outside the home in emerging market economies and the incipient consumption culture around the home and women's fashion characteristics of the second half of the nineteenth century. *La Guirnalda* was a conservative Catholic magazine first published in 1867. The contributors to the magazine included middle-class women who defended the importance of work in the home. Household work was described as a conglomeration of "useful tasks," which will improve the well being of the household. Household chores were the responsibility of the women of the house, which they described as moral, as these granted the permanency of Catholic family values.¹⁸⁸

In the early years of publication, *La Guirnalda* offered moral readings and a section of embroidery instructions with drawings for girls and women to follow. Although the magazine increased its publication of figurines or dress patterns in the late 1870s, *La Guirnalda* was known for its drawings and instructions on ornamental or embroidery goods. The usual goods in the embroidery *labores* (household tasks) section were "studded borders, festoons [and] friezes," as well as instructions to make initials and emblems to decorate bed sheets, table cloths and any item useful for the decoration of the home.

Among the different *labores* in women's magazines, the making of initials in home linens was especially representative of the connection between home sewing and women's social roles. They also embodied the increasing

¹⁸⁸ *La Guirnalda*, September 1875. HNE.

association between middle class values of respectability and the accumulation and possession of goods. In making the daughter or sister's trousseau, women in the house embroidered the bride and broom initials in pillow covers and bed-sheets. These celebrated the marital union and also symbolized ownership and the bride's specific contribution to the married couple's material possessions.

In magazines and manuals, the sewing goods that women's magazines instructed in were, in general, similar to the goods displayed by Singer in shop windows and fairs before the 1880s. Although embroidery motives varied across cultural preferences, the significance behind home embroidery was alike in Spain and Mexico, and hence related to Singer's displays in fairs. As in Philadelphia in 1876 when Singer promoted American monuments erected to represent the independence of the United States, women's magazines in Spain and Mexico emphasized Catholic symbols in their instructions, such as embroidered crucifixes or table cloths made in tulle for altars. In Mexico, like in Spain, women's magazines recommended that women always employ themselves in a productive activity, whether they were working or well-off women. Here, women writers commemorated Catholic women (such as Isabel I) and their achieved status by presenting them as household managers. In women's magazines such as *El Álbum del hogar*, *El Álbum de la mujer* and *El Correo de las señoras* in Mexico, hygiene instructions, along with household tasks instructions, increased along moral teachings. These portrayed the household as the most

recommended location for women to do any “labor appropriate to their sex.”¹⁸⁹

General newspapers, manuals and women’s magazines included large *modas* (fashion) sections, explaining the styles most worn in France or Great Britain.¹⁹⁰

Dress patterns shared the space in press publications and manuals and yet between the 1890s and the 1930s, embroidery retained its place in some women’s magazines, especially those dedicated to the women’s education and welfare.¹⁹¹

In 1879, *La Guirnalda* included an advertisement of the sewing manual *La costurera*, even more prompting women to take on home sewing as both an honorable and productive activity. Next to these advertisements and drawings of embroidery and dresses, Singer included its first advertisement in *La Guirnalda* in 1883 offering several models of sewing machines as well as all the new attachment and accessories. By then the company was already advertising its installment plan through which customers could pay two and a half pesetas a week to purchase their sewing machines.¹⁹²

¹⁸⁹ Elizabeth Q. Hutchison, *Labors Appropriate to Their Sex : Gender, Labor, and Politics in Urban Chile, 1900-1930* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001). *El Álbum del hogar* 1883, *El Correo de las señoras*, 1887. Hemeroteca Nacional de México (hereafter, HNM).

¹⁹⁰ Christine Ruane, *The Empire's New Clothes: A History of the Russian Fashion Industry, 1700-1917* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009). Cruz, *The Rise of Middle-Class Culture in Nineteenth-Century Spain*.

¹⁹¹ *El Correo de las señoras*, 1887. HNE.

¹⁹² 1867, 1870, 1879, 1883; *El Correo de las señoras*, 1887; *La Guirnalda* May 10, 1883. HNE.

Beginning of the 1880s, embroidery instructions in women publications included lessons on how to make these by machine. In 1882, an *aviso* (add) in the women's magazine *La Moda elegante* paralleled the 1876 Singer's Centennial catalogue's drive to modernize home sewing. The ad notified their subscribers that with the new attachments of sewing machines, an appliance that was "indispensable in all decent family households," women could make "all kinds of coats, dresses, bed hangings, curtains and execute the most varied and capricious arabesque decorations in even upholstery."¹⁹³ And like in the United States, the diffusion of dress patterns was also founded in the obsession with regenerating working women's social standing in modern societies. Women in need had to safeguard their appearance and maintain the semblance of decency through their public image. The education journal directed to improve the condition of the working population in 1875, the *Ilustración de la mujer* explained that women that knew how to sew also needed to use for herself to not "always wear her own ragged dresses."¹⁹⁴

¹⁹³ *La Moda elegante*. HNE.

¹⁹⁴ *Ilustración de la mujer*, 1875. HNE. According to Sarah Gordon, the sewing machine and the increasing availability of dress patterns also prompted social mobility. Women could make their own dresses imitating French styles wore by women in the upper classes. Sarah A. Gordon, "'Boundless Possibilities' Homesewing and the Meanings of Domestic Work in the United States, 1890-1930," *Journal of Women's History* 16, no. 2 (2004). In Spain and Mexico, women's magazines transmitted this taste as well –French clothing styles also denoted bourgeoisie identification among these regions societies. Wealthy women wore the last designs from France to express social status and their participation in modernity, gradually dismissing traditional or regional dress styles. Carmen Ramos-Escandón, *Presencia y transparencia: la mujer en la historia de México* (México, D.F: Colegio de México, 1987)., 143. Steven B.

AN UNIVERSAL "MODERN" SEWING. THE SINGER EMBROIDERY DEPARTMENT

Social reformers critics and agendas did little to impede the growth of garment production that resulted from the application of new sewing technologies in the making women and children's clothing.¹⁹⁵ Sewing machine manufacturers like Singer presented themselves as protectors of domesticity and they fostered the growth in garment production by manufacturing all the attachments necessary for mass-dressmaking. Singer generally avoided this part of the business in advertising, however.¹⁹⁶ When addressed it, Singer promoted women's opportunities in building their own small business and making their own clothes at home. The Family Sewing Machine model, Singer defended, was in "itself a "seamstress"—one which can be closeted in a cabinet case at pleasure—one which is never in the way, and never out of it." And for the "poor work-

Bunker, "'Consumers of Good Taste:' Marketing Modernity in Northern Mexico, 1890-1910,," *Mexican Studies / Estudios Mexicanos* 13, no. 2 (1998); *Creating Mexican Consumer Culture in the Age of Porfirio Diaz* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2012). Julieta Ortiz Gaitán, "Casa, Vestido y sustento. Cultura material en anuncios de la prensa ilustrada (1894-1939)," in *Historia de la vida cotidiana en México. Siglo XX. La imagen, espejo de la vida*, ed. Pilar Gonzalbo Aizpuru (México: El Colegio de México & Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2005)., 117. Heneghan, "Shopping Angel: Fashion, Gender, and Modernity in Galdós' La De Bringas."

¹⁹⁵ Coffin, *The Politics of Women's Work : The Paris Garment Trades, 1750-1915*. Wendy Gamber, *The Female Economy: The Millinery and Dressmaking Trades, 1860-1930* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997).

¹⁹⁶ *Directions for using the Singer's Manufacturing Company's New Family Machine. Manual*, WCBA, Folder 1. Instructions for using Singer adjustable zigzag, TCSM, Box- 18; Folder 0. Helen Campbell, *Prisoners of Poverty Abroad* (Boston: Roberts Bros, 1890)., 36-8.

woman, who has to sew for her daily bread,” the manual promised, the machine “will prove a treasure. No Vestmaker or Dressmaker can do without it.” As another Singer trade card went in the late nineteenth century, the sewing machine was the “link to perfect dressmaking.”¹⁹⁷

Concerns about the increasing participation of women in the ready-to-wear sector continued to increase in the late nineteenth century. In 1890, social reformer Helen Campbell denounced the working conditions in the garment-making sector in England, France and Italy. Campbell reported that an increasing number of women were participating in the sector, generally working “fourteen to sixteen hours at the sewing machine.” Campbell defended that “machinery ha[d] gradually revolutionized all feminine industries in Paris,” but had not improved the women’s working conditions. As more and more clothing was made in French styles, “the originality that once distinguished French productions” had decay and hence resulting in the “deterioration of all hand needlework.” In small size factories, Campbell reported, women were poorly fed and rested, sometimes along with boys and girls, working for very low wages.¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁷ Singer trade card, WCBA, Box 3.

¹⁹⁸ Sweaters are sewing workers, usually women, in charge of basting, hemming, and other tasks that prepare the fabric for the dressmaker. Critics about the expansion of sweatshops also recognized that these factories largely employed immigrant workers. In New York, for example, immigrant women from Europe filled this garments factories. Green, *Ready-to-Wear and Ready-to-Work : A Century of Industry and Immigrants in Paris and New York*. Green, *Ready-to-wear and Ready-to-work*, 10, 30, 60-67, 177. Coffin, *The Politics of Women's Work : The Paris Garment Trades, 1750-1915*.

Garment production grew in Spain and Mexico in the second half of the nineteenth century but it was mostly concentrated in large urban centers like Mexico City and Barcelona.¹⁹⁹ Social reformers and middle-class women in particular often criticized the working conditions of *obreras* (factory women). Yet they alluded to the *costurera* (in this case factory worker) as a necessary evil of the growth of consumerism. The Spanish women's magazine *La Última moda*, a publication directed to middle class women and strictly dedicated to beauty and adornment of women's bodies, frequently denounced the unhealthy and extreme working condition in which "the poor working woman" had been absorbed in by working "hours and hours moving the wheel of the monotonous sewing machine."²⁰⁰ *La Última moda*, however, went from being a biweekly publication to weekly in a decade, providing with more and more *figurines* or dress patterns and hence encouraging the consumption of clothing rather than the defense of the "*pobre obrera*" working conditions.

Within this context and "to benefit its world-wide reputation" as international markets were Singer's largest buyers, in exhibits, Singer continued and deepened its focus on ornamental sewing for the home and the possibilities of sewing within the domestic sphere. At the 1893 World Columbian exhibit in

¹⁹⁹ Adrian Shubert, *A Social History of Modern Spain*, A Social History of Europe (London ; Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1990)., 40-45. Porter, *Working Women in Mexico City: Public Discourses and material Conditions, 1879-1931*.

²⁰⁰ *La Última moda* was also read in Mexico throughout its years of publication between 1888 and 1921. *La Última moda* 1893, año vii. Crónica, 2; Biblioteca Lerdo Tejada (hereafter, BLT)

Chicago, Singer organized four exhibits. These “demonstrated, by a half score of young ladies, all the different kinds of sewing and Art Needle Work that can be accomplished on Singer Sewing Machines.” Some spectators described the rooms at the exhibit as displaying “the possibilities of the needle in the world of art.” As in Philadelphia, Singer reinstated its purpose of connecting the new sewing technology with home sewing practices, especially those performed by women. The corporation organized a “modern bedchamber,” in which all decorative goods had been made on a Singer sewing machine. The focus on family and decorative sewing had propelled Singer sales since the last international fair and in the 1890s this strategy helped the company detaching from continuous critics about the increasing number of women working in garment factories.²⁰¹

Until the 1890s no specific department within Singer managed advertising strictly. With president Frederick Bourne’s move toward vertical integration since 1889, the marketing the hearth strategy became part of Singer’s multinationals business organization. The creation of the Singer Embroidery Department in 1890s was a product of this marketing emphasis. The division had been in operation in London for four years when the company began to prepare for Chicago’s World Fair. The Department employed women, fundamentally, to address home sewing needs in exhibits but also in stores and through

²⁰¹ *Exhibit of Family Sewing Machines and Art Embroidery*. The Singer Manufacturing Co, 1893; Trade catalogue, SWC. Box 3. “Singer Exhibit Plan,” “The Singer Exhibits At The Fair;” *The Sewing Machine Times*, 1893; HML, Imprints and Pictorials.

canvassing. There were no women managers within the unit but male managers and employees were encouraged to participate in the Department's workrooms to be trained in artistic or ornamental sewing.

The structure of the Singer Embroidery Department reflected social perceptions and values of women's labor. Women worked between thirty and fifty hours a week doing samples to display in "Singer's stands in major exhibitions." "Every year there [was] a great project," for which women prepared thousands of goods. Women embroidered mostly pieces and patterns that would serve to decorate the home or house linens. At the Singer embroidery workrooms, women employees, and "not "hands,"" as garment operators were generally called, also tested new Singer sewing machine attachments and the multiple applications of it.²⁰²

By the beginning of the 1890s Singer's Embroidery Department was a globally operating division under the Singer Sewing Machine Company's Family Trade Department.²⁰³ The *Manual of Modern Embroidery* was the most acclaimed publications of this department in the last decade of the nineteenth century. Like in fairs and other in other advertising publications in previous decades, Singer represented machine sewing by women as an activity both modern as well as respectful of "traditional" social values that praised women as

²⁰² Joan Edwards, *Machine Embroidery: Dorothy Benson and the Embroidery Department of the Singer Sewing Machine Company* (Dorking, Surrey [England]: Bayford Books, 1988)., 3-5, 19. Later in the 1910s, when the demand of dressmaking instructions increased globally, Singer created the Education Department.

²⁰³ *Ibid.*, 19.

homemakers. The main image in figure nineteen represents Singer's view of modernity, which reinforced the gendered structure of home sewing. The image of a woman dressed in "modern" western style of clothes is sewing by herself with a modern technology embodied individualism and women's independence. Yet she is producing the work that her social duties as a woman dictated.

Figure 19. Front page of Singer's *Manual of Modern Embroidery*. SWC.

On the front page of the *Manual of Modern Embroidery*, Singer represented the change from traditional hand sewing practices, where women instructed each other to embroider different goods and patterns, to the modern

way, where a woman is sitting comfortably making an embroidered table cloth which pattern and instructions are all provided in one manual for her convenience. The change in the source of instruction reflects a tendency to devalue oral and home-based knowledge for a technical and more scientific method of performing a skill that women and men mastered as artisans. This is even more evident when women's skills were at stake, demonstrating the patronizing nature of home-tasks-related instructions of the nineteenth century, as these pretended to show women the modern way to perform the chores that had made them honorable for centuries.

The *Manual of Modern Embroidery* was intended to guide any woman in perfecting a task that they already performed by hand without upsetting the significance of this activity as a gender specific household chore. First, the instructions manual taught basic notions of drawing. The lesson "hints on shading" explained a "few general rules for shading that are absolute and invariable," so that the embroiderer could select "the variety of colors" to include in the embroidery of any figure. Then the manual explained how to adapt the hoop holding the cloth, something that most women were assumed to know how to get ready, for example a curtain or a bed-sheet where "the design [was] stamp[ed]," to the sewing machine. To proceed with the work, the sewing machine operator "may ... run [the machine] at its highest speed," while she "hold the hoops with both hands," something that she knew how-to as part of the

education in household chores, “[and] move them in any direction the design requires.”²⁰⁴

Manuals and women’s magazines in Spain and Mexico included similar designs as in the *Manual of Modern Embroidery*. In these countries, through manuals and magazines, but also at home and at school, girls and young women learned on how to draw for embroidering and the basics of making this “art.”²⁰⁵ Some of the designs explained in Singer’s manual were commonly used in Spain and Mexico to decorate furnishing, house linens and parts of garments such as necks, sleeves and wristbands. Silk embroidery and *pasamanería* (passementerie), for example, were common adornments for special tablecloths, church altar doilies, hats and to make initials in bed sheets. Other designs were more popular because they were less costly and applicable to any kind of fabric such as the *deshilado* (linen doily).²⁰⁶

Singer’s Embroidery Department was represented in Spain and Mexico in each store and branch office. Here, women formed the embroidery division by instructing and demonstrating potential customers on the multiple uses of the

²⁰⁴ The *Manual of Modern Embroidery* (New York: The Singer Manufacturing Company, ca. 1890), WCBA, Box 3.

²⁰⁵ *El Diario del hogar*, 1897; HNM, BNM. Anne Staples, "Una educación para el hogar: México en el siglo XIX " in *Obedecer, servir y resistir: la educación de las mujeres en la historia de México*, ed. María Adelina Arredondo (México: Miguel Ángel Porrúa, 2003)., 85-6. Graciela Hierro, *De la domesticación a la educación de las mexicanas* (México: Editorial Torres Asociados, 1993). Martha Eva Rocha, *El álbum de la mujer. Antología ilustrada de las mexicanas*, vol. IV (Mexico City: Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, 1991).

²⁰⁶ *La Moda elegante*, 1891, and *La Última moda*, 1891, Madrid. HNE.

sewing machine. The Spanish *Sección de bordados* (Singer's Embroidery Department), focused on instructing sewing tasks, specifically the "tedious and long work" that "your industrious grandmothers" used to do "in front of the fire, ... consuming [their] eye pupils." In Mexico and Spain, *profesoras de labores* (sewing instructors) were employed in attracting men and women in applying the sewing machine to home sewing activities. Inside stores "of all the branches in the provinces," women made samples of locally regarded goods, which later became expose in the shop window to demonstrate the "precision of the work," that although "startling, ... only one hour of practice was enough to learn." As in the United States, the focus was on embroidery, however, like in the *Manual for Modern Embroidery*. This meant that the instructions for the "new embroidery system" or machine embroidery were specifically directed to women who sewed at home for private purposes.²⁰⁷

Singer employees, women and men, were also in charge of preparing permanent exhibits in their districts and towns.²⁰⁸ The exhibition in Madrid in 1901 was well regarded both among managers in Spain and top executives in London and the United States. The exhibit was described as both *fabril* (industrial) and artistic. The artistic part of the display was the largest. The

²⁰⁷ *Máquinas "Singer" para coser. Álbum ilustrado de la exposición fabril y artística. Instrucciones para bordar con la máquina "Singer" para coser de bobina central*, (Madrid: Tipolitografía J. Palacios, 1901). X. Del Aro, *Instrucciones para bordar con la máquina "Singer" para coser* (Madrid: Tipolitografía J. Palacios, 1906). Museo del Traje (hereafter, MT).

²⁰⁸ Letter from Madrid's Central Office, Incoming correspondence, 1897, and President Bourne approval of exhibit, 1897; SSMC UM: AP 01 0041, Source 1; Project 2; Reel 1.

profesoras de labor demonstrated all the steps of machine embroidery, from drawing to the attachment of the embroidered piece to the household good. The goods and the rooms they decorated resembled the ones prepared for Chicago in 1893, especially in that they represented domestic interiors.

Figure 20. Singer *Profesoras de labores* at the Madrid's Exposición artística and fabril in 1901. Madrid's Singer Central Office. The instructors are showing all the machine embroidery steps, from the drawing to the installing of the hoop in the sewing machine. Museo del Traje .

The patterns and to which goods Singer recommended its application also appear in Singer's 1890s *Manual for Modern Embroidery*, marking an important juncture for the globalization of home sewing practices. The *deshilado* or “*calados mejicanos*” (Mexican fretwork or linen doily) in the English manual, for example, was commonly attached to towels, shawls and tablecloths, and served

popular and well-off pockets as any fabric may be used.²⁰⁹ In the manual *Instrucciones para bordar con la máquina “Singer” para coser* (1906), prepared from the organization of the exhibit in Madrid in 1901, the first instructions are basic calados’s patterns, which then can be applied as *calados mejicanos o de vainica*, “a labor (task) that is generally used for tablecloths and other domestic cloths” and typically also in “shawls, shirts, and to adorn any casual garment.”²¹⁰

Singer exhibits and the manuals prepared to guide visitors and promote embroidering by machine were the foundation of a worldwide standardization of home sewing practices. Instead of learning at home or from master embroiderers, Singer manuals outline and sought to simplify embroidery processes into one method when using a sewing machine. Manuals explained step by step the basics of such embroidery process and divided learning in different levels of expertise, depending on the goods the student wanted to make. Singer prepared these manuals with the intention of distributing them worldwide, without great adaptations to different regions, to foster the mechanization of embroidery.

Regional sewing practices, however, were key in making these manuals and thus they contributed to the gradual globalization of machine sewing

²⁰⁹ *Máquinas “Singer” para coser. Álbum ilustrado de la exposición fabril y artística. Instrucciones para bordar con la máquina “Singer” para coser de bobina central.* MT.

²¹⁰ From the 1901 exhibit in Madrid Singer published an extended instructions manual. Del Aro, *Instrucciones para bordar con la máquina “Singer” para coser.*, 24-31. *The Manual of Modern Embroidery.*, 22. MT.

methods and patterns.²¹¹ Local instructors added regional designs in exhibits to attract local consumers. Eventually, these designs also made their way into instruction manuals, then published by Singer in the first three decades of the twentieth century. Singer marketing strategies globalized local embroidery patterns. In figure twenty, women are embroidering mantillas, a popular Spanish shawl that women generally wore to attend mass on in special celebrations. Multiple embroidery patterns could be added to the mantilla or other female-worn accessories such as fans, gloves or hats. The *encaje de Almagro* or *de bolillos* (Almagro embroidery or bobbin lace), is an example of a regional pattern, a Spanish traditional embroidery, which made it to Singer manuals to adorn household interiors or garments. Made by young women and girls in this province especially, but not exclusively, since the thirteenth century, in the nineteenth century the *profesoras de labores* made it with a Singer sewing machine, which “could be done ... fast and admirably ... to then be able to use such a meticulous embroidery ... in casual clothing, petticoat and bed sheets.”²¹²

During the last two decades of the nineteenth century, sewing machines became more and more accepted in Spain as the machine had become “applicable to domestic tasks.” The *Manual de la costurera*, a pioneer sewing instruction manual in Spain assured that the

²¹¹ Andrew Gordon, "Selling the American Way: The Singer Sales System in Japan, 1900-1938," *Business History Review* 82, no. 4 (2008).

²¹² Monumento a la mujer encajera and exhibition at the Museo de Almagro, Almagro, Castilla La Mancha, Spain. Del Aro, *Instrucciones para bordar con la máquina "Singer" para coser.*, 60-61.

Influence of the sewing machine in the home is very positive as it makes pleasing the satisfaction of social needs, the permanence [of women] in the house and family life, which improves public morality and also has good effects toward the improvement of material and economic conditions of the family and the society as a whole.²¹³

More typical embroidery patterns, frequently advertised in women's magazines such as English, Persian, Brussels or the Richelieu embroidery patterns were thoroughly explained in Singer manuals across the Atlantic. This made Singer the immediate reference for home sewing, the company's goal throughout the last three decades of the nineteenth century.

In the United States and abroad, Singer asserted its focus on the home by displaying the wonders of embroidery and traditional (folklore) garment making applied to the sewing machine. This strategy not only propelled sales but also contributed to the corporation's reputation especially at the international level. In international fairs in the United States, every office worldwide worked to send samples to display at the Chicago's World Fair. To lie out its competitors, Singer displayed home-looking rooms. In Chicago, Singer shared the Liberal Arts Building, and not the manufacturing building, for its "Family Sewing Machines and Art embroidery." Singer's "central idea was to "demonstrate the value of the Singer Co.'s Machines, by the magnificent productions in needlework which are

²¹³ de Pereda, *La costurera: manual de la costurera en familia ó libro para la Enseñanza de la costura, del corte, armado y confección de las prendas de vestir y de las reglas para aumentar ó reducir toda clase de patrones*. Del Aro, *Instrucciones para bordar con la máquina "Singer" para coser.*, 50-51, 60-62, 88-89, 106-107. MT.

exhibited in the beautiful rooms.”²¹⁴ The exhibit in Chicago encompassed at least seven different exhibits as part of a central display on sewing machines especially prepared for “fine sewing and art needlework,” the catalog described. One of the groups of sewing machines on display was specific for “Sewing Machine on Domestic Purposes,” while the rest were dedicated to artistic sewing or embroidery. In the catalog handed out in the 1893 and later in stores and other exhibitions, Singer promoted the prizes the company’s sewing machines had received for their application to different needlework. In regards to making lace, Singer’s machine won the award based on “the perfection of the drawn work and Roman embroidery,” which instructors or an “unerring hand” were able to make with “lace stitches of kinds [in] such exquisite fineness and wonderful delicacy.” Other works done with the sewing machine followed these appraisals while the Singer “Artistic Sewing Machine Cabinets” were also commemorated as ideal home furniture, rather ornamental than invasive.²¹⁵

Singer’s only advertising innovation in international exhibits after 1893 was the representation of women’s sewing practices from around the world. By the 1890s, Singer selling structure had expanded to Europe, Russia, Japan, India, China, Australia, Canada, Mexico, and some parts of South America and the

²¹⁴ *The Sewing Machine Times*, October 1893. HML, Imprints.

²¹⁵ “World Columbian Exhibit. A New Era of Family Sewing Machines.” Pamphlet, 1893. HML, Pictorials. “The Singer Seam Unites Two Continents,” Pamphlet, 1901. The Singer Sewing Machine Co. Pan-American Exposition; SWC, Box 3. Advertising Card. The Singer Sewing Machine Co. Pan-American Exposition, 1901. HML, Pictorials.

Caribbean. As Singer's sales were larger abroad than domestically, in international exhibits in the United States, Singer commemorated and used its worldwide expansion to build up reputation among visitors and specialists in the trade.²¹⁶ Singer Embroidery Department prepared and reproduced almost the same "Costumes of All Nations" advertisement cards for the 1893, 1901 and the 1904 international fairs, representing the use of Singer sewing machines around the world in making traditional garments. These handouts were representative of Singer's "sense of superiority" placed on its technology over traditional handcraft, which was represented through other cultures' traditional dress. In advertising, Singer made the modernization of sewing practices around the world its civilizing mission. While intending not to be intrusive and in some way recognizing the value of regional identities, however, Singer defined less industrialized nations as backwards by representing other cultures in so-called "authentic" dress. Yet they were using the machine and thus they were only one-step-apart from civilization.²¹⁷

²¹⁶ Fred V. Carstensen, *American Enterprise in Foreign Markets : Studies of Singer and International Harvester in Imperial Russia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984). Andrew Godley, "The Global Diffusion of the Sewing Machine, 1850-1914," *Research in Economic History* 20(2001); Gordon, "Selling the American Way: The Singer Sales System in Japan, 1900-1938; Andrew Godley, "Selling the Sewing Machine around the World: Singer's International Marketing Strategies, 1850-1920," *Enterprise and Society* 7, no. 2 (2006). Singer World Results from 1902; SSMC UM AP93-0444, Source 2; Project 56; Reel 1.

²¹⁷ Peter Burke, *Eyewitnessing: The Uses of Images as Historical Evidence* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001)., 120-140. Adas, *Dominance by Design: Technological Imperatives and America's Civilizing Mission*. Domosh, *American Commodities in an Age of Empire*.

Figure 21. Postcard prepared for the World Columbian Exhibit in 1893. Also used in other fairs in the twentieth century.²¹⁸

By looking at Singer trade cards, visitors grasped the extent to which the company had dispersed its business – Singer had established offices from “the

²¹⁸ HML and the Wolfsonian Museum: Singer Postcards from the 1901 Pan-American Exhibit.

Island of Marken, a Province of North Holland in the Zuyder Zee, ten miles from Amsterdam,” and also in Algeria “a French Province on the North Coast of Africa ... [where] the climate is temperate and unhealthful” and Tunis, “one of the Barbary states of North Africa,” to the remote “country of South Africa,” Zululand, where “our agent at Cape Town supplies both the European and the native inhabitant ... with thousands of Singer machines.” In the Iberian Peninsula, Singer publicized its diffusion in any kind of environment, from the homes of provincial Portugal, to southern Spain, where the “mass of the population ... [were] essentially Moorish in appearance and character,” and also in fast-industrializing Barcelona in Northeast Spain, where the people “are industrious and intelligent.”²¹⁹

Singer geographic descriptions of all the places where the company did business in helped visitors feel part of America’s commercial expansion while also contributing to the idea that America’s industrial development and modern technology would improve the living standard of peoples around the world. Especially after the 1900s, American international expositions expressed clear aims of world hegemony, displaying and exhibiting stages of progress and differential development between the world’s countries and cultures. The Buffalo

²¹⁹ Margaret E. Hale, “The Nineteenth-Century American Trade Card,” *Business History Review* 74(2000).

and the Saint Louis exhibits especially show American companies goal of expanding throughout to Latin America.²²⁰

Figure 22. Singer Postcards from the 1901 Pan-American Exhibit.

²²⁰ Robert W. Rydell, *All the World's a Fair : Visions of Empire at American International Expositions, 1876-1916* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984).

Singer's advertising represented one of Edward Said's forms of modern Orientalism, as the company was celebrating its accomplishments of establishing the "means to disseminate capacities of modern ... professions." And according to Mona Domosh, this process was also gendered. Singer described women from other cultures achieving civilization through the use of American machinery. In Singer's representations, division and specialization of women's labor in the home exemplified civilization. Singer created hierarchies, representing women from different cultures around the world who universally would have the "desire for a better home," a space that a sewing machine would improve at the same time it provided for the family's and women's social roles. In addition, with the goal of propelling trade, Domosh argued, Singer created an ideal global "sisterhood," as no matter what culture women were entrenched in, they may become "civilized" and released from the burden of working outside the home to become owners of their own labor only by using a Singer sewing machine.²²¹

Singer's "classification" of women from different regions of the world fulfilled nineteenth century popular interest about the other and the consequent exoticism and "generalization" about peoples from cultures in seemingly less advance stages. American companies as well as business people, like intellectuals or colonial officials, sought domination, and trade, by way of "accommodating the east to western structures." In doing so, Said and

²²¹ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1978), 221-225. Laird, *Advertising Progress: American Business and the Rise of Consumer Marketing*, 148, Hale, "The Nineteenth-Century American Trade Card", 683-88, 685. Domosh, *American Commodities in an Age of Empire*, 56, 65-85.

Chatterjee agree, the domestic sphere became fundamental to find and allocate tradition and pureness and subsequently key spaces to order, reform, and thus control, in order to place so-called backward cultures in the adequate path to modernization. Said's second form of Orientalism, a "political doctrine" which he described as "willed over the Orient because the Orient was weaker than the west, which elided the Orient's difference" invited for colonization.²²²

Said also explained that at times, this doctrine, was also "the result of important convergence" between cultures. The descriptions of the East by westerners, he argues, are generally done unilaterally, from the distance. In doing so the westerner is seeking objectiveness through "translating [and] sympathetically portraying," representing "closeness" but irremediable difference. This approach helps us frame exoticization and universalism within Singer's representation of international potential markets. Yet it also separates us from the local and it leads to an argument for American exceptionalism. In Said's approach, the colonized is in a way isolated from the colonizer and it is her or his intention to maintain such separation. Domosh approach added to this idea by assuming that Singer, as the supplier of technology, along with its fellow Americans who had mastered the art of mechanization, maintained the lead of civilization.

The examination regional markets, however, help us understand how other cultures utilized similar discourses to articulate their own quests for

²²² Said, *Orientalism.*, 122-162, 207. Thomas F. O'Brien, *Making the Americas. The United States and Latin America from the Age of Revolutions to the Era of Globalization* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2007).

modernity. As Singer grew in regional markets, locals used the company's strategies as a way to participate in modernity at the same time local customs were integrated. As Susan Strasser explains, since the 1870s, advertising campaigns were "more effective" as these, she argues, "encouraged new needs and new habits ... by linking ... new products with the rapid changes in all areas of social and cultural life." Most companies in the United States, Strasser demonstrates, by promoting their products as tools to modernize every day home and working routines, signified and normalize the use of new appliances as "frequent habit[s]" of modernity.²²³

In cities and towns around the world, Singer's selling system had rapidly grown and, as I explained in Chapter Two, locals primarily made up the firm's staff in regional markets. This was especially so when it came to store demonstrations and exhibitions, local women and their labor were fundamental for the company. Male employees were also invested in these exhibitions and often the company recognized the managers of an office for their participation in the organization of exhibitions and thus in following Singer multinational policies.

In creating these exhibits, locals expressed an alternate way of participating in modernity. To attract local consumers and elide possible critics about machine sewing and the subsequent undermining of regional practices such as embroidering, Singer local agents tapped into cultural generalizations while describing regional traditions. In doing so, however, Singer agents, native

²²³ Susan Strasser, *Satisfaction Guaranteed : The Making of the Mass Market*, 1st ed. ed. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1989)., 95, 102, 110.

Spaniards in this case, represented a way of civilizing within. Historian Aurora Morcillo developed the idea of the “Orient within” to explain how Spain was imagined as “the Other” in the nineteenth and twentieth century construction of Europe’s and “Western cultural imaginary.” Morcillo argued that both foreign as well as Spanish intellectuals contributed to develop an image of an only close-to-modern-Spain founded on its “Islamic and Jewish historical roots” as well as on its Catholic faith.²²⁴

Singer agents in Madrid in 1901 featured an “*habitación árabe*” (moorish style room), with “embroidered Arabic style drawings, cloths for stools, cushions and table cloths.” This designs and planning came from Singer agent in Granada, Emilio Hernández, whose office also organized temporary exhibits in Granada in unison with local festivities. Celebrating the “Roman Catholic Feast of the Virgin of the Salud,” Singer agents in Córdoba “dress[ed] up the window in a manner which represents a typical Andalusian yard.” As “customary” of Southern Spain, the representative described, the exhibit displayed “a house of two floors and high columns.” Two girls and an older woman were also part of the exhibit, all “sewing with an electric sewing machine,” while a boy was simply playing in the “patio,” where the visitor could see “curtains ... made of artistic

²²⁴ Aurora Morcillo, “The Orient Within. Women “in-between” under Francoism,” in *Women in the Middle East and North Africa*, ed. Fatima Sadiqi and Moha Ennaji (Routledge, 2011).

needlework ... embroidery hoops [in columns],” and, as in every house in the region, “linen cloths” to decorate tables and chairs.²²⁵

Singer in London congratulated the Cordoba office and emphasized the low cost of such exhibits. The goods and matters on display constituted part of everyday regional practices, “things” that “the employees of the Cordoba shop [had] at hand.” The sewing machine represented modernity among these goods, but also the easiness of the machine, which increasingly came with an electric or a motor could be attached to it, to coalesce within local traditions. The exhibition in Cordoba used what Chatterjee calls “markers” of femininity to represent tradition (dress, home decoration, domestic chores), indicating locals’ appropriation of modern technology but also the preservation of local norms.²²⁶ Chatterjee argues that the search for “authenticity” to build national and regional identity in early-twentieth century India was focus on the domestic and private. The domestic had a fundamental role in shaping public spaces, which in my study are shops and exhibits. Furthermore, the traditional look of the home in the Cordoba exhibit granted Singer’s compromise with local costumes as well as with gendered ideologies of the home and the role of women in society, which although modernized, as both girls and elderly women were using the sewing machine for their sex-appropriate chores and spaces, these are done inside the home thanks to Singer’s domestic adaptability.

²²⁵ “Wonderful Window Dressing in Spain.” Red S Review. The Singer Sewing Machine Company. VI September 1924, No.1, UC at Riverside Library.

²²⁶ Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories*.

Around the world Singer employed similar gendered strategies using shops as major centers for advertising. A percentage of the expenses of central offices around the world were allocated for shops to decorate their stores following Singer standards. The model was the United States, where Singer had been decorating stores since 1857 in New York, a location renovated in 1882. In regional stores Singer agents were in charge of promoting machine sewing using instructors and local ornamenting and clothing costumes. By doing this, Singer placed “one’s true identity,” and thus authenticity, in regional culture and specifically in the home, which “must remain unaffected” even when new technology and new forms of selling are being introduced.²²⁷ This strategy promoted adaptation to cultural and social standards on the side of Singer, and as women were the multinational principal target, it continued to be employed in marketing throughout the twentieth century, especially in the Hispanic world.

Local salesmen and saleswomen made the preservation of local customs a Singer marketing strategy, especially in rural areas. In San José de Gracia in the Mexican state of Aguascalientes, the Singer canvasser from the Singer *encargaduría* in Leon, a “snappy dresser with a fedora hat,” was effusively welcome in 1905. He was the only nexus for the population in this small town to access sewing machines. To further propel the use of the modern appliance,

²²⁷ Picture of 1857 showroom in 458 Broadway, New York City, NY. Singer Light, Special Issue 1940; SSMC, Box 1. “The Singer Exposition in New York,” 1889, *The Sewing Machine Advance*; Smithsonian Institution, Textiles collection. *The Sewing Machine Journal* and *The Weekly Sewing Machine Journal*, 1882. HML, Imprints. Ibid., 129-134

however, Singer canvasser to San José de Gracia was accompanied by a woman instructor from Jiquilpán, a neighboring town, on his second visit to the town when he brought “five shiny” treadle sewing machines.²²⁸

Singer embroidery manuals also made it Mexico in the 1910s and 1920s. These reflected the level of global diffusion of uniform embroidery methods by the beginning of the twentieth century. The manuals in Spanish, published multiple times between 1911 and the 1950s, were similar to those used in Spain in the early 1900s and therefore alike to the United States’ 1890s *The Manual of Modern Embroidery*, which became the *Singer Instructions for Art Embroidery and Lace Work* in 1911.²²⁹ These included local patterns gathered in both regional and international exhibits from the 1870s, instructed orderly and scientifically based, just as any household chore recommended in *economía doméstica* manuals for women to run their households. The language and approach to embroidery as a uniquely feminine activity was reiterated in all editions, contributing to the further gendering of the modernization, i.e. mechanization and institutionalization of embroidery performance and instruction.

The *Libro “Singer” de Bordados* began its embroidery instruction by showing a desperate women figuring out how to make a *bordado* in the traditional way, this is by hand and using an embroidery loop. Below, another

²²⁸ Luis González, *San Jose de Gracia: Mexican Village in Transition* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1982)., 99. Mexico Shops. Expendios de la República Mexicana, 1905; SSMC, Box 109.

²²⁹ The Singer Sewing Machine Company. *Singer Instructions for Art Embroidery and Lace Work*. Foreword. (Education Department, 1941 – 7th edition).

picture showed an aglow woman, using an embroidery hoop as well as a Singer treadle sewing machine to make *bordados* in a tablecloth. Contrary to sewing by hand, the Singer “method,” made embroidery an activity “eminently practical, which simplicity made any women interested in this art able to perform.” By applying the sewing machine, Singer transformed an activity that belonged to the past, modern. Instructions meant to “scientifically” and orderly guide women to take over an activity that was traditionally done at home and that in the nineteenth century represented women’s role in society. Singer made embroidery professional by rationalizing its performance, making it ordered and based on delineated steps and instructions and separated from instinctive performance not considered civilized.

Like the 1911 Singer publication of embroidery instructions in English, the manuals distributed in Mexico integrated four separated courses. Note that the Spanish manual that was published after the 1901 exhibit in Madrid also condensed the same instructions. Teachers or other demonstrators could use the manual as pleased though Singer defined a rational method to learn and become professional embroidery by separating the learning process in four stages of difficulty. The courses reproduced the succession of steps that local manuals have followed for decades. First, women learn how to “prepare the labor (task).” Women in Spain and Mexico were assumed to had learned basic notions of drawing for embroidery and thus unlike 1890s *The Manual of Modern Embroidery*, Singer stopped providing these basic instructions. Then the 1922 Mexican edition suggested that women practiced with *calados* or “openwork

stitches” to get used to the speed of the machine. Also, the instructions reminded, these *bordados* were so useful and “of great need” for family sewing. It was no waste of time to “invest” extra time in doing them. Following lessons complicated the pattern of basic *calados* at the same time the manual provided examples of where to add the “simple” but necessary adornments. English and Richelieu *bordados*, so popular in manuals and magazines since the 1870s, were also part of the first course of machine embroidery.²³⁰

Tradition maintained its role in the mechanization of embroidery. Local patterns were included in all embroidery manuals, modeling a unique and in a way localized modernization of embroidery and home sewing practices. The *Libro “Singer” de bordados* “was dedicated” to improve “both for the humble hearth as well as for the well-off’s.”²³¹ An important *bordado* to learn for every decent family were initials. Traditionally, in women’s trousseaux, bed sheets and pillow covers came with the newlyweds’ initials. Another expression of how traditional patterns made it into global manuals was the *bolillos* embroidery or “bone lace”. In the 1922 manual, this was “one of the fineness and of better taste” of lace.

In the second and third course of embroidery, women in Spain and Mexico could continue learning how to make patterns typical of Brussels or Italy, at the same time they learned popular but more complex *calados mexicanos* and

²³⁰ *Libro “Singer” de Bordados*, 20-21. *Singer Instructions for Art Embroidery and Lace Work*. 54-55.

²³¹ *Libro “Singer” de Bordados*.

Tenerife lace, for example. Finally, in the fourth course, which corresponded to the fifth course in the English version, Singer *profesoras de labores* suggested how to apply the learned patterns to home goods such as bed spreads, bed sheets, table covers, cushions, altar cloths, table runners, towels and window panels or curtains. The manual also recommended adding the *bordados* to dresses and clothing accessories such as purses.²³²

By the 1920s, Singer embroidery instructions in every language followed the same standard. Singer distribution for use around the globe resulted in the normalization of certain ways and styles for performing embroidery. In doing so, Singer participated in an Atlantic trend towards the professionalization of housekeeping. Embroidery and garment making for the family were not necessarily separated tasks for women before the mid of the nineteenth century. At school and at home, girls in Spain and Mexico had learned both tasks broadly as part of their education for housekeeping in the 1860s and 1870s. By the end of the nineteenth century, manuals and vocational schools clearly differentiated between different household tasks such as cooking or home sewing, for which different and scientifically based instructions were needed.²³³ In Singer manuals, when instructing machine sewing, embroidery and dressmaking became different

²³² *Libro "Singer" de Bordados*, 24-25, 35-36, 62-63, 127-156. *Singer Instructions for Art Embroidery and Lace Work*, 32-33, 48-49, 195-220.

²³³ Strasser, *Satisfaction Guaranteed : The Making of the Mass Market.*, 201-205.

“arts” to perform. And this was Singer’s focus in Spain, Mexico, and in international exhibits, with almost no competition in this sense.

In the long run, this strategy made Singer lagged behind progress in the schooling and the professionalization of dressmaking as a profession for women at the turn of the twentieth century.²³⁴ Not until the 1920s did Singer created company dressmaking set of manuals. And although English embroidery manuals were out of print in England, Singer managers and agents in Spain and Mexico maintained their requests of embroidery manuals to New York and local agents, especially women instructors, continued to sample these to local costumers throughout the first two decades of the twentieth century.²³⁵ Women continued performing dressmaking in the home, however. Women in the dressmaking sector or making family clothing at home turned to local schools, manuals and women magazines, which increasingly standardized and instructed dressmaking instructions.

Strasser argues that as “private industry” began mass-producing household appliances in the second half of the nineteenth century, “the distinctions between the spheres of the household and the world of industry had

²³⁴ Elias, *Stir It Up: Home Economics in American Culture.*, 35-42. Dorothy Benson, employee in the Embroidery Department in London in the 1910s, suggested the cultural need recover machine embroidery, a practice performed “particularly in the Latin countries, [where] it has been developed to a very high degree. Exceptionally beautiful lace and openwork has been and it being produced in these countries, the fineness of which is incredible.” Benson, *Your Machine Embroidery*, 6., Edwards, *Machine Embroidery: Dorothy Benson and the Embroidery Department of the Singer Sewing Machine Company*.

²³⁵ Edwards, *Machine Embroidery*. Dorothy Benson, *Your Machine Embroidery*.

blurred.” Mechanization brought changes in embroidery practices, making it faster and thus gradually more affordable in the market and “moving work of the household from the private realm to the public.” Yet Singer concentrated and connected embroidery to domestic (and not factory-made) and folkloric women tasks. Singer resignified the home as the proper place for women, reinventing sewing as modern, yet gender and culturally specific.²³⁶

CONCLUSIONS

This chapter has sought to understand how the generally veiled sphere of the domestic was essential in Singer’s marketing and thus how the multinational contributed to signify and normalize the concept of the modern home and home sewing as feminine and concealed to the private sphere. Singer organized fairs and distributed embroidery patterns worldwide through its manuals while regional perceptions of home embroidery as a feminine activity grounded in the last three decades of the nineteenth century. International exhibits were the first stage toward the creation of a multi-nation advertising scheme that concluded with the publication of Singer standard machine embroidery manuals that were distributed worldwide. Singer marketed women and the home in a similar fashion worldwide, making advertising part of its organizational capabilities in each nation. And this generally benefitted the company’s both social and economic standing. Singer’s appropriation of traditional sewing practices to address a wide range of consumers made the company look as a protector of domesticity. This

²³⁶ Strasser, *Satisfaction Guaranteed : The Making of the Mass Market.*, 5-7. Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories.*, 147-150.

strategy favored the corporation's image at a time when women's participation in industry increased and became growingly denounced by defenders of women's role as mothers and wives. As historian Pamela Laird explains, it was a "compromise;" in this case, between traditional values about women's proper place in the home and the traditions associated with sewing and the increasing economic pressures that nineteenth century market society put on families.²³⁷

Gender analysis shows the centrality of the multinational in fostering globalization without disregarding localization. In an era of developing new business forms in the United States and abroad, the home and women were central in creating "modern," though not always public, spaces. Hispanic embroidery practices in part shaped the evolution of Singer's advertising strategies during the first two decades of the twentieth century. The merge between regional designs and more universalized patterns such as Richelieu or English lace resulted in a standardization of sewing methods. Patterns and cultures of sewing, however, hardly changed in Spain and Mexico. Furthermore, the focus on embroidery, which proved successful since the 1870s until the turn of the twentieth century, especially in Spain and Mexico, made this practice remain a home and gender specific activity.

²³⁷Strasser, *Satisfaction Guaranteed : The Making of the Mass Market.*, 3-10, Laird, *Advertising Progress: American Business and the Rise of Consumer Marketing.*, 109.

Chapter 4

Keeping it Tight: Singer in Twentieth-Century Mexico and Spain

The period from 1914 to 1940 was a difficult one for American multinationals. Nationalism in Europe after World War I increased the need for negotiation between governments of the host economy and multinationals. Sequestration during war and the nationalization of the property of American firms, like Singer, International Harvester and Ford during the 1910s in some of the largest markets in Europe, like Germany and Russia, fed the concerns of businessmen and the United States government. In Mexico, as the government began to play a larger role in the economy after the revolution (1910-1920), foreign companies also entered a new set of relations when operating in the country. The interwar years, although a decade of fast economic growth and a period of “revival of U.S. foreign investments” in the 1920s, also presented a variety of “difficulties abroad” as a result of protectionism and governments looking inward to foster national progress.²³⁸

Singer’s losses in Mexico and Spain during periods of war were severe. American business prospects during times of civil armed conflict and under

²³⁸ Mira Wilkins, *The Maturing of Multinational Enterprise: American Business Abroad from 1914 to 1970*, Harvard Studies in Business History (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1974)., 7-45. Geoffrey Jones, *Multinationals and Global Capitalism : From the Nineteenth to the Twenty-First Century* (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2005)., 76-77; and for more information about how some companies allowed more local autonomy in Europe during the interwar years see 173-176. Mira Wilkins and Frank Ernest Hill, *American Business Abroad : Ford on Six Continents* (Cambridge [England] ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011)., 81-85.

nationalist governments between 1910 and 1940 were adverse. Still, all was not bleak. As historian Julio Moreno shows, Mexico's government committed to a strategy of commercial development after 1917 to foster economic growth. And in Spain during the 1920s, dictator Miguel Primo de Rivera (1923-1930) also believed in the role of government to promote industrialization and commercialization.²³⁹

This context that sought economic growth benefitted Singer in both regions. In Mexico, Singer's recovered quickly after 1917. Figure twenty-three shows how Singer sewing machine sales in Mexico during the 1920s and early 1930s returned to their levels prior to the revolution. In 1926, Singer sold 37,630 sewing machines in Mexico, exceeding its pre-revolution peak of 34,728. Figure twenty-three also illustrates that the 1920s were Singer's most successful years of sales in Spain. The company reached the highest number of sales in 1922 with 95,734. Although Spain was a relatively poor nation, these sales almost matched those of France (100,365 between 1920 and 1925), and Germany with 96,490 average sales between 1921 and 1925 (see Table 1.1 and 1.2 in

²³⁹ Wilkins, *The Maturing of Multinational Enterprise: American Business Abroad from 1914 to 1970.*, 52, 61, 170-175, 210, 219-220. Gabriel Tortella Casares, *The Development of Modern Spain: An Economic History of the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000)., 234-238, 302. Julio Moreno, *Yankee Don't Go Home!: Mexican Nationalism, American Business Culture, and the Shaping of Modern Mexico, 1920-1950* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003). Susanne Einegel, "Revolutionary Promises Encounter Urban Realities for Mexico City's Middle Class, 1915-1928," in *The Making of the Middle Class. Toward a Transnational History*, ed. Ricardo López and Barbara Weinstein (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2012)., 258, 261-263.

appendices) Like all companies, Singer felt the effects of the worldwide depression beginning in 1929. From selling an average of 488,368 machines in the United States between 1925 and 1929, Singer's sales decreased to an average of 260,748 machines between 1930 and 1935. Sales plummeted in countries where Singer sales were just beginning to consolidate high, like Brazil and Argentina, where Singer sold an average of 51,949 and 41,150 respectively between 1925 and 1929. Here, Singer sales halved between 1929 and 1934. Likewise, the 1930s were difficult years for Singer in Spain and Mexico. Consumption levels decreased in both regions since 1931, and Singer registered its highest losses during the Civil War in Spain. Like in Mexico after the revolution, the Singer organization recovered quickly in Spain after 1939 and yet sales only grew slowly due to especially low purchasing power of consumers in the country and the success of local sewing machine manufacturers such as Alfa.²⁴⁰

²⁴⁰ Singer World Results from 1902. SSMC UM: AP93-0444; Source 2; Project 56; Reel 1 & 2.

Figure 23. (chart 5) Singer Sales in Mexico and Spain from 1910 to 1947. Source: SSMC UM.

In part, the fast recovery in Spain and Mexico was due to the company's ability to maintain its corporate structure between 1890 and 1940. Douglas Alexander became president of Singer in 1906 and until 1949 he barely modified the basic corporate and sales organization of the company. This chapter will show how Singer strove to maintain its cadre of salesmen and managers in both countries aware of the efficiency of local agents at reaching consumers on the ground. In addition, Singer's longevity and experience of more than four decades in both nations helped maintain the company's market share and its good standing against new and local sewing companies.

The continuity of Singer's business and organization in Spain and Mexico needs to be understood through the analysis of regional developments in the culture and business of sewing and the place of women within it. Singer's outcome in both Spain and Mexico from the 1920s to the 1940s was the result of the company's accommodation to the regained significance of home sewing in modern ideologies of womanhood in both nations. Singer consolidated its

Education Department (former Embroidery Department) to address new demands developing in local contexts in regards to the place of women within modern societies. The Education Department was an important unit of the multinational that historians of Singer have not studied. This chapter analyzes how Spanish and Mexican cultural constructions about the modern woman and the professionalization of women's work coincided with the discourses of Singer's advertising and education programs to understand how Singer participated in the building and the gendering of the modern *modista* and *costurera*, both *oficios* (trades) and also chores, that ideally maintained the home as the modern, and thus honorable, working space for women through the mid twentieth century.

THE MEXICAN REVOLUTION AND SINGER IN SPAIN AND MEXICO IN THE 1920S

The effects of war on Singer's sales in Mexico began in 1913. Different interpretations about the evolution of industry during the revolution have pointed out that general damage of manufacturing plants and other industrial infrastructure was scattered until the mid 1910s. Stephen Haber shows that manufacturing plants and businesses were key locations for revolutionary armies to gather both finances and weapons.²⁴¹ "The revolution was only sporadically violent," Jeffrey Bortz shows, which explains the decline of Singer sales in Mexico in 1913 and a high sales period in 1914 (see chart four in this chapter and Table 1.1 in appendices). American mining and oil companies, as Mira

²⁴¹ Stephen H. Haber, *Industry and Underdevelopment: The Industrialization of Mexico, 1890-1940* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1989), 123-37.

Wilkins explains, were particularly affected after 1917 when the Mexican Constitution regulated land reform and higher taxes. This regulation led to the expropriation of land that Americans had gathered during Porfirio Díaz's pro-foreign investment era (1876-1910).²⁴²

During the revolution, Singer was mostly affected by the damage to its ware. The majority of Singer's claims against the Mexican government after 1917 concentrated on railway companies and demands for losses caused by "acts of revolutionary authorities." Interruptions on railway transportation and assaults on trains caused a large amount of Singer's sewing machines to disappear. Singer agents were the object of armies' assaults and the establishment of forced loans. In regards to foreign retailing companies, the government of Venustiano Carranza's government (1914-1920) "promised" early on that, "upon assuming executive power he will appoint a committee of Mexican and foreigners to liquidate claims." In 1920, Singer filed a \$20,266 claim to the Mexican government amounted, and received \$8,130, less than half of the

²⁴² Mira Wilkins, *The Emergence of Multinational Enterprise: American Business Abroad from the Colonial Era to 1914* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1970)., 6-7, 25; for more information on the difficulties that oil and mining companies went through in post-revolutionary Mexico see 38, 96-98. Haber, *Industry and Underdevelopment: The Industrialization of Mexico, 1890-1940.*, 120-128. Jonathan C. Brown and Alan Knight, *The Mexican Petroleum Industry in the Twentieth Century* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1992). Linda B. Hall, *Oil, Banks, and Politics : The United States and Postrevolutionary Mexico, 1917-1924* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995). Jeff Bortz, *Revolution within the Revolution : Cotton Textile Workers and the Mexican Labor Regime, 1910-1923* (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 2008)., 32-33.

amount that the U.S. government requested on behalf of the New Jersey-registered company in 1944.²⁴³

Singer's structure was also disrupted by the disappearance of agents and therefore the loss of control of *contratos de alquiler* (hire-purchase) accounts. In this sense, the revolution's effects were felt even before 1910 when Diaz's reelection sparked the first anti-reelections reactions. The number of delinquent accounts increased from 1907 to 1912. From 1907 to 1909, the percentage of rental agreements that had not received payment in months grew from 2.2% to 2.9%, and in the next three years the percentage increased to 7.6%. Two reasons explain this data. First, as the value of the Mexican currency declined in the 1910s and the prices of sewing machines did not decrease, fewer people met the payments. The number of agents unable to meet the payments for their stored machines increased and some eventually left the company without balancing their accounts. Second, claims against customers were difficult to process given the displacement of the population. Not until 1917 did Singer begin to reestablish its selling structure, and agents loyal to the company filed numerous demands in search of delinquent account owners.²⁴⁴

Despite the destruction and disturbance, Singer maintained the majority of its *encargadurías* throughout the 1910s. The vertically integrated structure built

²⁴³ Claims Against Mexico, 1911-1942. SSMC, Box 161; Folder 6 and 8. For Singer claims against Germany see Wilkins, *The Emergence of Multinational Enterprise: American Business Abroad from the Colonial Era to 1914.*, 33-38.

²⁴⁴ Singer World Results from 1902. SSMC UM, AP93-0444 Reel 1; Source 2; Project 56.

up from the late 1880s proved greatly advantageous as violence was regionalized.²⁴⁵ While some offices were slow, many others continued their business with as much regularity as possible. Particularly, it was important that offices reported the various damages and forced loans experienced in various cities. During the revolution, Singer agents from various *encargadurías* such as Aguascalientes, Morelia, Pachuca, Zacatecas and Celaya, sent reports about their looted shops and forced loans that they had given to various revolutionary armies. Revolutionary authorities either “stole horses directly from traveling agents,” and the cash they carried, or agents “were arbitrarily apprehended and sent to prison” to be eventually stripped of their belongings.²⁴⁶ By 1917, Mexico’s *gerente* Edwin Ching, who took over Mexico’s business after Louis Harnecker, strove for reorganization and recentralization of the business structure. The company reached pre-revolution sales levels by 1924. Singer’s magazine the *Red “S” Review* echoed the good standing of the organization in Mexico in 1925. On October 19th 1924, the article told other Singer employees around the world, “the employees of the Federal District Division enjoyed their annual picnic.” In a very authentic environment in Mexico City, with a “a band of music accompany[ing] the party,” Mexican Singer employees gave example to other

²⁴⁵ Alan Knight, *The Mexican Revolution. Porfirians, Liberals and Peasants*, vol. 1 (Cambridge University Press, 1986).

²⁴⁶ Reclamaciones del Departamento Diplomático. Archivo Histórico Genaro Estrada. Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores (now Secretaría de Relaciones Internacionales) Mexico (hereafter AHRI). NC 639-12, 1914.

central offices of the importance of Singer's public image and also of Singer's corporate attention to its employees.²⁴⁷

Figure 24. Picture of Singer employees in Mexico, ca. 1925. Red "S" Review.

The interwar years were generally optimistic for Singer around the world.²⁴⁸ Although the Russian subsidiary, *Kompaniya Singer*, had been nationalized by the USSR in 1918 and the losses amounted to \$84.3 million, Singer recovered ownership of the rest of its subsidiaries and partnerships around the world. Central offices in Europe registered their highest number of sales during these

²⁴⁷ Singer Sewing Machine Company. Vol VI, January 1925, No 25. University California at Riverside. Library Special Collections.

²⁴⁸ For more information about world sales between 1875 and 1920 see Andrew Godley, "Selling the Sewing Machine around the World: Singer's International Marketing Strategies, 1850-1920," *Enterprise and Society* 7, no. 2 (2006)., 275.

years. In 1925, Paris listed 125,116 sewing machine sales, and 229,047 machines were sold in Germany in 1927. Markets in Asia and Latin America were booming too. Brazil reached 62,701 sales in 1928 and India 80,281 in 1929.²⁴⁹ In Japan, 1924 was Singer's most profitable year, reaching over 60,000 machines sold. As Andrew Gordon argues, these profitable results were in part due to the complete establishment of Singer's selling structure and the final integral implementation of the company's installment payment options.²⁵⁰

Singer machine sales in Spain were among the highest during World War I, as the country maintained its neutrality during the armed conflict in Europe. No competitor could exceed the diffusion that Singer had achieved in both Spain and Mexico.²⁵¹ Singer in Spain and Mexico, however, monopolized the sale of

²⁴⁹ See Table 1.2 in Appendices. Singer World Results from 1902. SSMC UM, AP93-0444, Source 2; Project 56 Reel 1 and 2.

²⁵⁰ Wilkins, *The Emergence of Multinational Enterprise: American Business Abroad from the Colonial Era to 1914.*, 39-45. Fred V. Carstensen, *American Enterprise in Foreign Markets : Studies of Singer and International Harvester in Imperial Russia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984). For more information about the nationalization process of Singer in Russia see Irinia V. Potkina, "The Singer Company in Russia: 1897-1917," in *American Firms in Europe: Strategy, Identity, Perception and Performance (1880-1980)* ed. Hubert Bonin and Ferry De Goey (Genève: Librairie Droz, 2009)., 296-298. For more information about Singer in Russia and the role of the sewing machine in the development of the Russian garment industry see Christine Ruane, *The Empire's New Clothes: A History of the Russian Fashion Industry, 1700-1917* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009). Andrew Gordon, *Fabricating Consumers : The Sewing Machine in Modern Japan* (Berkeley, Calif: University of California Press, 2012)., 50-55.

²⁵¹ German companies like Pfaff or Japanese sewing machine manufacturers like Pine constituted an obstacle to Singer's growth in the 1930s and after World War II in Germany, India and Japan. See Godley, "Selling the Sewing Machine around the World: Singer's International Marketing Strategies, 1850-1920.", 268.,

sewing machines, though such a monopoly lasted only until 1936 in Spain. The Spanish sewing machine manufacturer Alfa became an important competitor after the Civil War. Alfa produced around 6,000 machines annually in 1927 and in 1928. Because General Francisco Franco's dictatorship protected Alfa, this company grew exponentially in the 1940s. By 1947, the Spanish manufacturer exported 66,544 machines to countries like Portugal, Belgium, Holland, Brazil, Argentina, Chile, Peru, Mexico and Syria. In 1953, Alfa reached almost one thousand employees and expanded production to Latin America.²⁵²

MODERN MODISTAS AND COSTURERAS IN SPAIN AND MEXICO

The wars and revolutions in Mexico and Spain challenged gender roles in a variety of ways. After 1917, feminist Mexican women expected that the revolution (and the Constitution of 1917 and Venustiano Carranza's Law of Domestic Relations) would change patriarchal civil laws and social values, allowing them for further legal agency and political participation. Legislation aiming at women's legal and political equality also passed in Spain during the democratically elected socialist governments of the Second Republic (1931-1936). The Spanish Constitution of 1931 embodied many of early twentieth

and Gordon, *Fabricating Consumers : The Sewing Machine in Modern Japan.*, 153-161.

²⁵² Francisco Javier Iza-Goñola de Miguel, *Alfa, S.A. Motor Social y Económico de la vida Eibarresa* (Ayuntamiento de Eibar & Comisión Ego Ibarra 2005)., 97, 112-116.

century and 1920s Spanish feminism claims that included access to vote and changes in family law like the legalization of divorce.²⁵³

Regardless of this progress, maternity and domestic chores such as cooking, laundering and sewing were upheld as women's main contribution to victory during war and later reform. These views prevailed in the reconstruction of gender roles and their modernization.²⁵⁴ In the first half of the twentieth century, and especially after 1920, the perception of women's sewing work and thus the identity of the *modista* and the *costurera*, was re-imagined in light of new gender, economic, cultural and social roles. New ideas about the new and modern woman influenced women's performance of sewing, whether as a private or a market-driven activity.

The word *modista* comes from the word *moda*, which refers to new and generally imported dressing patterns. The difference between *costurera* and *modista* became well defined by the end of the 1930s in Spain and Mexico. The focus on the professionalization of women's labor since the 1910s and the

²⁵³ Aurora G. Morcillo, *True Catholic Womanhood* (Illinois: Northern Illinois University Press, 2000)., 20-21. Tabea Alexa Linhard, *Fearless Women in the Mexican Revolution and the Spanish Civil War* (Columbia, Mo: University of Missouri Press, 2005). Stephanie Mitchell and Patience A. Schell, eds., *The Women's Revolution in Mexico, 1910-1953* (United Kingdom: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2007). Lisa Margaret Lines, *Milicianas. Women in Combat in the Spanish Civil War* (Lexington Books, 2012)., 104-141.

²⁵⁴ Shirlene Soto, *Emergence of the Modern Mexican Woman* (Arden Press, 1990). María Antonia Fernández Jiménez, *Pilar Primo de Rivera: el falangismo femenino* (Madrid: Síntesis, 2008)., 131-140. Ángela Cenarro, *La sonrisa de Falange. Auxilio Social en la Guerra Civil y en la posguerra* (Barcelona: Crítica, 2006).

consolidation of both Mexican and Spanish middle classes and consumer societies at the time are key to understanding the stratification of the dressmaking sector.

In women's and popular magazines *modistas* were admired for their *elegancia* (elegance), a well-regarded attribute of the new woman, which signified the person's belonging to the middle class. Magazines referred to the modern *modista* as always dressing well and filling the streets of urban centers with joy. To be *bien vestida* (dressing well) was associated with composure and proper standing, an aspect viewed as part of middle class norms. Dress, therefore, was an important factor that determined the level of *elegancia* and the extent to which a woman had achieved certain economic and social status.

Modistas were working women, however, because they performed paid labor and also because they generally performed work privately, outside artisanship networks and professional recognition. Still, their familiarity with *modas* placed them in between class categories. Spaniards and Mexicans associated *modistas* with standards of middle class *elegancia* as producers of clothing and not necessarily as consumers. This position problematized the assumed role of women in the public sphere as consumers or mere recipients of middle class culture. *Mujeres elegantes* (elegant women) had to know and follow the latest dressing styles generally dictated by France's fashion magazines and Great Britain's and United States' always renovating dressing styles. Women's magazines and most of the general press included a *sección de moda* (fashion section) that had been directed at women since the late nineteenth century. The

latest dressing styles were easier to follow in the twentieth century because by the 1920s, *secciones de moda* on women's magazine filled the majority of their pages. The 1920s Spanish magazine *Elegancias* offered their readers monthly updates of women's fashion. The models coming from France were "models of supreme elegance," the magazine explained, that hundreds of women in the city of Madrid employed their hands in to dress the *señora* (married woman.)²⁵⁵

The business of making *sombreros* (hats) constituted an example of the halfway professional status of *modistas* in twentieth century Spanish and Mexican societies and also within the business of sewing. Hats were symbols of elegance in the 1920s. They had become necessary accessories in portrayals and representations of *gente de bien* or *gente decente* (well-off classes) in the nineteenth century, and thus the production of hats rapidly increased at the turn of the century. Women's magazines increased their focus on *sombreros* while also perfecting their instructions on how to make elegant hairstyles or coiffures.²⁵⁶ Like with other garments, there were gender-marked divisions within the hat-making business. Men generally made hats for men, and women

²⁵⁵ *Elegancias*. No 39 Año VI, 1926. Madrid. Other Spanish popular magazines and newspapers with *secciones de moda* were *La última moda* (1890-1927), *Estampa* (100,000 issues in 1928), *Esfera* (1914-1931). *El hogar y la moda* (1915-1928); HNE. In Mexico women's magazines like *Elegancias*. No 1 Año 1, 1923; *Femina*, ca. 1930 and *La familia* (1933-1975) and newspapers like *El mundo ilustrado* and *El demócrata* periodically supplied with dress patterns and latest fashion news; BLT and BNM.

²⁵⁶ *Elegancias* 1924, No13, *La moda práctica* November 1916. *La mujer mexicana* 1905, Vol I; No4. *La dama católica* 1923. *Elegancias* 1923. *La familia* 1933-1939. HNE, BLT, BNM.

generally made women and children's hats, thus not upsetting the gendered nature of the garment sector.²⁵⁷ In the 1920s, the number of women making *sombreros* was twice the number of men under 15 years old and three times the number between the ages of 16 and 20. Once women married, however, this production was likely moved to the house, where women continued making hats with the sewing machine (see tables 3 through 5 in appendices).

Talleres de modista –and *sombrereras* (hat makers)– reflected the in between spaces of *modistas* as their production determined social *personae* and economic status, and yet within the sector they continued be considered less professional than tailors. In the 1920s and 1930s, *modistas* prepared customers' clothing, and also were women's most direct dressing advisors. Between ten and twenty women worked at *talleres de modista*, generally situated in the back of a store. The back of the store also served as a space to show customers the latest dressing styles. In a *taller de modista* in Madrid or Barcelona, "a dozen of *modistas* hemmed and mended dress orders next to their sewing bags and mannequins." *Modistas* also worked cutting the orders, measuring them on the mannequins, composing the dresses on the sewing machine and finally ironing the piece.²⁵⁸

An important part of the *modista's* job in a *taller de modista* was to try the dresses themselves and show customers the latest dressing styles. Despite

²⁵⁷ Taller de sombreros, Sociedad Protectora de la Mujer Mexicana. *La mujer mexicana*. 1905, Vol II; No 3. *La dama católica* 1920, No 2., BNM.

²⁵⁸ *Elegancias* 1926, Año VI; No 39; Madrid. HNE.

knowing, recommending and making well-to-do women's wardrobes, *modistas* received small salaries and a limited social gratification. *Modistas* generally lacked of formal education, and their economic standing limited their connection with the middle class's public culture to the *taller* and on the street. An article in the Spanish magazine *Elegancias* lamented how limited was the reward of the "laborious young women" who "sewed with her fine hands the expensive dresses that only the *señora* would get to wear." Still, this job permitted many to foster their role in the garment sector. The master *modista* of a *taller* in Madrid in 1926 explained that young women generally started "running basic errands" in the shop for "one *peseta* a day." Performing this job permitted young women to familiarize themselves with the workings of the shop. As the master *modista* explained, "the young women are generally very intelligent and alert." One day these young women could become more advanced *modistas* who earned between "three and a half and five pesetas a day." Young women in *talleres* first learned basic sewing stitches and drawing tips, and once they knew how to cut and use the sewing machine they became *ayudantes adelantadas* (advanced assistants) of the *oficiala* (highest skilled dressmaker.)²⁵⁹

Oficiala was the highest position for a dressmaker. The *taller* gave women the opportunity to ascend the ranks in the dressmaking business, yet gendered

²⁵⁹ *Elegancias* 1926, Año IV; No 39. *Estampa*, December 1935. *Talleres* as part of shops were also advertised in Mexico's newspapers as part of department stores. *El Puerto de Liverpool* announced the opening of its own *taller* in 1910 and *El Centro Mercantil* in Mexico City also had a *modista* working in the clothing section. *El Mundo ilustrado*, Anuncios. June, August 1910. HNE, HNM.

views of labor led to a popular underestimation of *modistas* as a profession throughout the first half of the twentieth century. In newspapers and magazines *modistas* were sometimes dismissively called “*modistillas*” (little dressmakers), as *talleres*’s dressmakers were in some way defying gendered norms in regards to women’s role in society. *Modistas* who worked outside of the home were generally not married, for example. In Spain, once women married, their numbers in the clothing industry halved in the 1920s and decreased even more in the 1930s (see appendices).²⁶⁰ Garment making could be moved to the home. Like in the hat making business, many women moved the business to their own houses, where they complied with current gender roles while participating in the household economy from home.²⁶¹

Part of the explanation for the low consideration of *modistas*’ labor within the garment sector and as professional women in general was rooted in an extended perception that *modistas* were little more than regular *costureras*. The number of *costureras* increased as garment factories opened in large urban centers beginning in the late nineteenth century. Although performing a “labor appropriate to their sex,” professionals in the garment sector and government officials considered *costureras* as women in need rather than women seeking employment for economic independence and further autonomy from their

²⁶⁰ In the 1930s occupational census marriage is not a category anymore. INE.

²⁶¹ For more information about women’s work and marriage in France see Judith G. Coffin, *The Politics of Women's Work : The Paris Garment Trades, 1750-1915* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1996)., 151-154.

families. *Costureras* in factories received low wages and were not paid as much as their male counterpart, as Susie Porter shows. In the textile industry, gender norms continuously informed pay and the work routines of women workers in the factory. “When they found a job in textiles,” Bortz explains, “women discovered that most workplaces treated them differently than men and not better.” Aside from receiving lower salaries, women’s male coworkers generally assumed authority over them, not on the basis of their skills, but because they were working women and therefore believed to be less honorable.²⁶²

Costureras also worked in private homes during the day, an activity that only required basic sewing abilities. These ‘contracts’ were precarious because private families most likely did not legally employ *costureras*. *Costureras*, however, most likely preferred the autonomy that going, and possibly choosing to go, gave them. Like any other profession, the remuneration and the availability to *coser ajeno* (hired *costurera* in private homes) was based on the *costurera*’s skill level. Ads demanded that the *costurera* had sewing skills beyond mending, hemming and repairing garments. An *aviso* in 1913 in the newspaper *El Imparcial* requested that the *costurera* was “*apta en moda*” (knowledgeable of the latest dressing styles) and had to know how to “ornament and cut clothing patterns.” Another *aviso* in 1920 solicited a *costurera* that “knew how to use the

²⁶² Susie S. Porter, *Working Women in Mexico City: Public Discourses and material Conditions, 1879-1931* (University of Arizona Press, 2003), 25, 34-42. Bortz, *Revolution within the Revolution : Cotton Textile Workers and the Mexican Labor Regime, 1910-1923*, 61.

electrical sewing machine.”²⁶³ In houses with sewing machines and in houses where the women needed more than garment repairs, *costureras* could request a higher salary if they knew how to use the machine.

Skills using the sewing machine and ownership of a sewing machine increased women’s place within the female-based dressmaking and home sewing activities in general. In both Spain and Mexico, Singer sold sewing machines through installment payments. Both ownership and credit are important concepts to address when analyzing women’s participation in sewing. The sewing machine and Singer’s selling options gave women the opportunity to make their own money and be more economically independent within the limits placed by gender norms. Singer offered rental agreements directly to women (see Chapter Two). Singer agents brought the sewing machine to women’s houses and *talleres*, and offered them for 6 pesos a month in Mexico and 2.5 pesetas a week in Spain.²⁶⁴

²⁶³ *El Imparcial*, Avisos de Ocasión, 1911 and 1914. *El Demócrata*. Anuncios clasificados, 1920. BNM, HNM.

²⁶⁴ Secretaría del Gobierno del Distrito Federal. Ramo de Empeños, 1907. Sección 3; No 9. AHDF.

Figure 25. Singer *contrato de alquiler* in Spain, 1922. The different stamps show the weekly payments done by the to-be sewing machine owner. This *libro de pagos* is from Ávila (C. León.), a rural area in central Spain. Author's private collection.

When all payments were made, sewing machine renters were issued a property title from Singer, which not only granted repairs and maintenance by a Singer mechanic, but also total ownership.

Although based on Mexico's and Spain's 1920s civil codes and constitutions husbands and fathers could restrict women's rights to work and to own property, Singer issued *títulos de propiedad* (ownership titles) to women in both nations. As Jocelyn Olcott observes, the revised and modernized 1928 Mexican Civil Code granted "equal capacity" to women and men to decide on legal relations, "yet the Civil Code also allowed husbands to prevent their wives from working outside the home if it interfered with their 'mission' of directing and caring for the household." Likewise, women in Spain were individual owners of sewing machines, despite the Spanish Civil Code of 1889, in place until 1958,

which limited women's access to property and work.²⁶⁵ The possibility of sewing machine ownership allowed women great social mobility, but also physical mobility and cultural grounds within the family. Women moved their sewing machine from house to house, and also passed them down from mothers to daughters as a fundamental in-home appliance for women.

Although marriage made some *costureras* leave the factory or the *taller*, this did not mean that they stopped working completely. *Talleres de modista* were generally small and family-based. The number of women employed in *talleres*—and in *la casa de la modista* (the dressmaker home)—is hard to document and yet we know, mostly through popular literature, that private homes were regular employment sites for seamstresses and dressmakers. In the book *Cuentos*, by the Catalan female writer of the mid twentieth century Mercè Rodoreda, a *costurera* working the sewing machine at home is a regular character. Rodoreda also alludes to women sewing in the streets together while waiting in their homes' door steps for their husbands to return from work.²⁶⁶ Women built up their own businesses based out of their homes only by owning a sewing machine and the necessary skills that they might have acquired while working in the *taller* when younger. The *casa de la modista* and the image of the *costurera* who constantly

²⁶⁵ Morcillo, *True Catholic Womanhood.*, 55. Jocelyn Olcott, *Revolutionary Women in Postrevolutionary Mexico*, Kindle ed. (Durham [N.C.]: Duke University Press, 2005)., Loc 275.

²⁶⁶ The *cuentos* used for this study are part of Mercè Rodoreda's *Veintidós Cuentos* that she wrote in the 1940s and 1950s. Mercè Rodoreda, *Cuentos* (España: Edhasa, 2008). 17-19, 34, 69.

sews at home became and still today constitute part of Spaniards narratives and popular imagination of the lives of women in the twentieth century.

THE PROFESSIONALIZATION OF DRESSMAKING AND THE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT

Wendy Gamber demonstrates for the case of milliners and dressmakers that “gender did matter, for women who contemplated commercial enterprise” in late nineteenth-century Boston. Although certain of the economic independence that owning a business may produce, only “few modistes saw themselves as crusaders against the restrictions of [the] ‘woman’s sphere’.”²⁶⁷ Female-owned dressmaking businesses in Spain resembled this pattern. The *modista* created her own professional space, separate from the place of men in the dressmaking business, by publishing dressmaking manuals for women’s and children’s clothing as well as opening *academias de corte y confección* (private schools to form professional dressmakers.) *Academias de corte y confección*, were mostly run by women, and offered flexible class schedules to reach both working women as well as middle-class women seeking for a professional positions. Aware of the rather low economic possibilities of women in the sewing business, *academias* offered *cursillos* for “*precios módicos*” (modest prices) to reach more

²⁶⁷ Wendy Gamber, *The Female Economy: The Millinery and Dressmaking Trades, 1860-1930* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997)., 27-29, 38. Susan Ingalls Lewis, *Unexceptional Women. Female Proprietors in Mid-Nineteenth-Century Albany, New York, 1830-1885* (Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 2009).

seamstresses.²⁶⁸ These prices were still not affordable for many, however. Becoming certified in a private *academia* in Madrid in the 1920s cost between five and ten *pesetas*.²⁶⁹ Also, these kinds of businesses largely opened in urban centers. To reach a wider audience, *academias* began to offer to send lessons “*por correo certificado*” (mail) to any working seamstress interested in improving her skills.²⁷⁰ Between five and fifteen women were accepted per class, and most of the *academias* assured that the *cursillos* would prepare any woman—regardless of her skills in basic sewing—quickly and with the most appropriated skills to expand their opportunities in the business of dressmaking.²⁷¹

Women from all political fronts were aware of the limits that gender norms placed on their economic opportunities. The Spanish Catholic magazine *Voluntad* explained in 1919 that the “economic feminine horizons” had been for long surely “limited and narrow” at best. Within this context of limited working opportunities outside the home, the magazine approved of labor done within the home, and considered sewing an empowering tool and a unique strategy for women to address any economic need. In the Mexican socialist 1930s magazine

²⁶⁸ *La Mujer mexicana* 1906. Vol III; No10; HNM.

²⁶⁹ *El Hogar y la moda*, 1927; HNM.

²⁷⁰ *El Demócrata*, October 1923. *Sección Reino de la moda*. Anuncio Academia Acme. *El Hogar y la moda*, September 1927. Anuncio Academia Codina. *Estampa*, September 1928 and January 1929. Academia Corte de París. HNM and HNDM.

²⁷¹ *Estampa*. Anuncios 1928, 1929; HNE. In Mexico, today, especially in smaller cities such as Oaxaca, these *academias* still exist and instruct an average of ten female students per year.

Senda Nueva, an add for the *academia* Mainou argued that by learning sewing and dressmaking “women could decide their future” and therefore not depend so much on their husbands.²⁷²

Each *academia* published its own *sistema* or *método de corte y confección* (dressmaking method) to provide students and future *modistas* with all of the necessary training to improve their working conditions. A dressmaking manual began by showing the student basic principles of geometry so that she could properly copy or make dress patterns onto the fabric. Other basic training included measuring, cutting and composing dresses as well as basic information about the most appropriate fabrics to use depending on the dress, season and economic possibilities of the person being dressed.²⁷³ Dressmaking authors believed that to improve seamstresses’ conditions, sewing for women and children needed to be understood both as an art and also as a science. As a home economics teacher at the *Escuela de Artes y Oficios para Señoritas* in

²⁷² *Voluntad* 1919, Spain. *Senda Nueva*. Anuncios. 1938, HNM. México. Gamber, *The Female Economy: The Millinery and Dressmaking Trades, 1860-1930.*, 17, 38.

²⁷³ Consuelo Sotomayor de López del Vallado. *Manual práctico de costura* (Toluca, 1904). CM Schmidt. *Sistema práctico de corte*. (Paris & México: Bouret, 1920), Magdalena L. de Villanueva, *Instituto de Corte de Ropa. Sistema ‘Magda’*. *Enseñanza verdadera, rápida y moderna* (México, 1931) Biblioteca Nacional de Mexico and Fondo Reservado Biblioteca Nacional de México (hereafter BNEFR).

Mexico City explained, “sewing and dressmaking was art, as it needs to be subject to fixed rules.”²⁷⁴

Women publishing dressmaking instructions believed that technical education was the key to supporting women’s professionalization in the sector and thus a higher consideration of their labor. The lessons in the *métodos de corte y confección* and *academias* prepared women to improve their skills when working in a *taller* or in their own business. Skilled seamstresses were in demand to both make and repair clothes. Even as garment-retailing options increased in large urban centers and more size-standard clothes were available for direct purchase, seamstresses continued providing their services by adjusting, hemming and altering garments purchased in the shop.

Modistas created a female-specific economy by the late 1920s in Spain and Mexico. The process, by which this economy grew demonstrates that gender did not exclude the dressmakers from the “trappings of modern commerce” and the development of multinational business.²⁷⁵ The development of *academias* and home-based businesses were not isolated regional processes. The development of dressmaking as a gendered sector and profession was part of a global history in which Singer’s marketing strategies played a fundamental role.

²⁷⁴ Consuelo Sotomayor de López del Vallado, *Manual práctico de costura* (Toluca 1904). C. M. Schmidt, *Sistema práctico de corte* (Paris & México: Bouret, 1920). BNEFR.

²⁷⁵ Gamber, *The Female Economy: The Millinery and Dressmaking Trades, 1860-1930.*, 98-100.

Singer created its Educational Department in the early 1900s as an extension of the company's Embroidery Department, which had organized advertising campaigns around the world since the 1890s. In the twentieth century, the Educational Department turned its focus to dressmaking—while continuing its interest in embroidery—and thus joined its contemporaries in the process of building modern dressmakers and seamstresses. The majority of the employees in the Educational Department employees were women. They occupied high management positions such as coordinators of sewing schools, but they were mostly instructors in stores or in private homes.

In the 1920s, the department saw itself as a tool for women's advancement around the world through the promotion of the self-reliant and independent woman. In Spain, an article in the company's magazine affirmed "the Singer Company was a pioneer in the gradual emancipation of the sex by utilizing girls and women as saleswomen, instructors, bookkeepers, shop assistants, and embroidresses." Singer had not only opened doors to modern commercial professions to women, who society often saw as under the influence of "traditional attitude[s] ... and with Moorish influence upon manners and customs," but had also engaged the international and regional gendering of this process by agreeing that anything related to sewing made it an "agreeable occupation" for a woman and her social roles.²⁷⁶

²⁷⁶ Red "S" Review. Singer Sewing Machine Company. Vol VI, January 1925, No 7.

Singer's advertising division focused on instruction manuals and opening sewing schools for women where that the company had shops or businesses. Singer's dressmaking manuals were first published in the early 1920s, and the company distributed them widely in both Spain and Mexico during these years and particularly in the 1930s. The Singer Sewing Library constituted four volumes focused on dressmaking. "Out of [a] daily contact with thousands of home sewers" the first volume of Singer's dressmaking manual pointed out, "Singer experts have developed a constant succession of improvements in the machines." Even as the ready-to-wear industry grew in countries like France, United States and England, family clothing and fancy dresses remained largely done in homes or individually made by dressmakers.²⁷⁷

Meanwhile, in the United States at the turn of the twentieth century, Singer's publication formed part of a nearly obsessive systematization of dressmaking led by marketers once the sewing machine had become widely accepted.²⁷⁸ The Singer manual's "object [was] to show and explain [the] methods ... to develop the full possibilities of your sewing machine in the creation of the many stitches articles so essential to the comfort and pleasure of yourself, your family and your home."²⁷⁹

²⁷⁷ *Singer Sewing Library. Short Cuts to Home Sewing*, Volume 1. (The Singer Sewing Machine Company, Educational Department, 1923). Foreword.

²⁷⁸ Gamber, *The Female Economy: The Millinery and Dressmaking Trades, 1860-1930.*, 137-156.

²⁷⁹ For more information about the United States' movement toward the systematization of dressmaking see *ibid.*, 137-156. *Singer Sewing Library. Short*

Singer introduced its dressmaking manual *Short Cuts to Home Sewing* in both Spain and Mexico through the company's widely established system of shops. In the Spanish-speaking world the manual was translated as *La costura Singer en el hogar*. To attract consumers, Singer offered the manual for free to all owners of its machines.

In addition, Singer opened sewing schools that offered free instructions and new ways to use the sewing machines' attachments to achieve the latest fashionable dress styles. "All Singer shops" a Singer advertisement in the Spanish women's magazine *La mujer en su casa* announced in 1934, "offered a *curso de costura, corte, zurcido y bordado*, completely free." Singer believed in the role of local women to direct this service. During the 1920s, Singer encouraged women employees to travel around the country to make sure that in "every shop [in Spain] there is at least one girl thoroughly instructed in working family machines." Although Singer mentioned the benefits to women's social and economic statuses, the company conceived this service as an advertising strategy that was advantageous for the company's image and business in different countries. The "salon system," as it was called, improved the "inartistic presentation of our goods" and thus attracted more women to the store.²⁸⁰

Cuts to Home Sewing, Volume 1. (The Singer Sewing Machine Company, Educational Department, 1923). Foreword.

²⁸⁰ Singer's Educational Department in Japan opened the Singer Sewing Academy in 1906 to promote the use of the sewing machine among women as a symbol of their compliance with domestic roles and also to further introduce western dress styles and thus to achieve a wider usage of the machine in the

MADRID.-- *Curso de perfeccionamiento de Corte, confección y bordados, organizado por doña Angeles de la Torre, con la cooperación de la Compañía Singer, y patrocinado por el ministerio de Instrucción Pública.*

Figure 26. Picture of a Singer free course of *corte y confección* in Madrid. 1928. Hemeroteca Nacional de España²⁸¹

country. For information about Japan see Gordon, *Fabricating Consumers*, 22, 70-80.

²⁸¹ *Estampa*, 1928. HNE.

SHORT CUTS TO HOME SEWING

The Modern Singer Way

PUBLISHED BY
SINGER SEWING MACHINE CO. INC.

Figure 27. Front page of *Singer Sewing Library*. *Short Cuts to Home Sewing*, Volume 1, 1923.

Another example is Japan's Singer's Educational Department. Here, Singer opened the Singer Sewing Academy in 1906 to promote the use of the sewing machine among women as a symbol of their compliance with domestic roles and

also to further introduce western dress styles and thus to achieve a wider usage of the machine in the country.²⁸²

Through these practices, Singer incorporated Spain and Mexico in a transnational process by which dressmaking practices were standardized and gradually globalized. And back to the local, Singer sewing schools endured the feminization of dressmaking by allowing only women to attend these centers. Singer reinforced the “modern” association of dressmaking (as opposed to male tailoring) at both a local and a global scale with its easy use and learning process of home sewing, especially as women learned “short cuts to home sewing” with Singer’s manuals.

Historians have argued that the development of scientifically based dressmaking methods led to the undermining of female dressmakers’ skills. In the United States and in France, the increased publication of dressmaking manuals deprived dressmakers of their expertise in making women’s clothing.²⁸³ Singer published its dressmaking manuals to attract non-professional consumers, and thus the company democratized dressmaking and the ability of dress well. *The Modern Singer Way*, Singer’s four-volume dressmaking manual, assured readers that the attachments and improvements of the company’s

²⁸² Gordon, *Fabricating Consumers : The Sewing Machine in Modern Japan.*, 22, 70-80.

²⁸³ Gamber, *The Female Economy: The Millinery and Dressmaking Trades, 1860-1930.*, 61-70. Mary Lynn Stewart, *Dressing Modern Frenchwomen : Marketing Haute Couture, 1919-1939* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008)., 146-153.

sewing machines were “not difficult to make,” and that any woman with sewing abilities would learn fast. Singer placed the company as the authority on dressmaking, whereas “the great Singer organization ha[d] devoted itself to the solution of women’s sewing problems in every country of the world.” Historians argue therefore that women’s authority in the sector was put aside.²⁸⁴

Singer translated these manuals to Spanish and supplied stores and Singer salons in Spain and Mexico with it. In both nations, Singer services were convenient and in tune with *modistas*’ and *costureras*’, professional and non-professional, interests and demands. Singer could offer the entire package; this was the machine, the instructions on the technology, and an unlimited list of goods with detailed explanations that women could make without having professional training. Singer’s accessibility permitted the company to form part of the emergent female-based dressmaking sector and also brought the standardization of sewing methods to the home by employing then-current ideas about home sewing and women’s household duties. The manuals did not include instructions on how to make men’s clothing, only women’s, children’s and household linens. They included advice on how to apply the modern technology to the goods that women were expected to make in the building and maintenance

²⁸⁴ *Singer Sewing Library. Short Cuts to Home Sewing, Volume 1* (The Singer Sewing Machine Company, Educational Department, 1923).

of a proper modern home or, if needed, all the tips to turn the home into an enterprise.²⁸⁵

In the 1920s, public initiatives in Spain and Mexico also participated in the 1920s' growing focus and interest on women's professionalism. This attention was part of Mexico's post-revolutionary state concentrated in professional education as a tool to foster progress and to "finally" integrate Mexico in to the modern world. As Haber explains, the *científicos* or Porfirian "national ruling class" believed that the secret for "building a vibrant economy" was in "replet[ing Mexico] with railroads, steel mills, and large scale commercial agriculture," which was unsuccessful by the 1910s. The lack of federal funds through the last three decades of the nineteenth century had led *científicos* to embrace foreign direct investment, which states negotiated for their own interests. As Haber explains, the increase in railroad networks activated Mexico's economy by fostering commercial activity. Indigenous populations were deprived of their lands as railroads expanded and the economic growth result of the expansion of railways network spurred exports rather than the development of an integrated national economy. By the turn of the twentieth century Mexico's income inequality in Mexico put into question Díaz's political strategies for modernization.

Mary Kay Vaughan and Federico Lazarín Miranda argue that the creation of the *Secretaría de Educación Pública* (Ministry of Education) in 1921 was part of the new political elite's project to enhance and monitor the country's

²⁸⁵ *Singer Sewing Library. How to Make Dresses*, Volume 2 (The Singer Sewing Machine Company, Educational Department, 1923).

incorporation and assimilation into modernity. Unlike the *científicos*, however, state public education regulations in the 1920s envisioned a greater participation of Mexicans in the future of Mexico, for which the government anticipated the development of public education throughout the country, especially in rural areas.²⁸⁶

Government strategies in Mexico benefited Singer after the revolution, as machine sewing was a fundamental part of vocational school's programs after the revolution. The *Secretaría de Educación Pública's* project on technical and commercial education for women ceremoniously set their goals on the advancement of women. Revolutionary and immediate post-revolutionary governments considered renovating and transforming the condition of women and indigenous people as they had been left and "remained in perpetual backwardness." Legislators and female teachers promoted the cultivation and rationalization of traditional tasks that women performed, such as sewing, so that

²⁸⁶ Leslie Bethell, *Mexico since Independence* (Cambridge [England] ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991). Haber, *Industry and Underdevelopment: The Industrialization of Mexico, 1890-1940.*, 11-21, 120-133. Federico Lazarín Miranda, *La Política para el Desarrollo: las escuelas Técnicas Industriales y Comerciales en la Ciudad de México, 1920-1932* (Mexico: Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana. Unidad Iztapalapa, 1996). Patricia Arias, "Three Microhistories of Women's Work in Rural Mexico," in *Women of the Mexican Countryside, 1850-1990*, ed. Heather Fowler-Salamini and Mary Kay Vaughan (The University of Arizona Press, 1994)., 6-20. Federico Lazarín Miranda, "Enseñanzas propias de su sexo. La educación técnica de la mujer, 1871-1932," in *Obedecer, servir y resistir: la educación de las mujeres en la Historia de México*, ed. Adelina Arredondo (Tlalpan, México, D.F: Universidad Pedagógica Nacional, 2003)., 257-274. Stephanie J. Smith, *Gender and the Mexican Revolution: Yucatán Women & the Realities of Patriarchy* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009)., 110-112.

they may progress and join the nation in becoming modern. The goal of the *Escuela Nacional de Artes y Oficios* in 1919 was to “provide an adequate and proper education to the different trades that women perform to make them lucrative.” This way, the study program planned, “women will be able to provide for themselves in an independent way.”

Furthermore, the *Secretaría de Educación Pública*’s vocational schools helped in democratizing the sector, as education officials and society saw machine sewing as a modern women’s profession. The *escuelas industriales* for women included the certification in dressmaking and embroidery. Over the years, all of the schools for women increased their focus on dressmaking, especially hat making, embroidery by machine and machine sewing. In the 1919, students at *Escuela Nacional de Artes y Oficios* students took classes in drawing first to later improve their sewing skills; other classes included embroidery with both white and color thread, *corte y confección* or dressmaking, lacing, hat making and machine sewing. All schools followed similar study programs, and by the mid-1920s more than thirty schools for women were inaugurated in the states of Guadalajara and Aguascalientes and in the cities of Puebla and Mexico City. These extensively developed their dressmaking and embroidery study programs. Eventually, considering the type of commercial-driven and complementary education available in *escuelas*, women could be ready to open their own businesses. Like *métodos de corte y confección* and *academias*, the first course in *corte aplicado* (practical dressmaking) program at *Corregidora de Querétaro* in 1922 included two hours per week of practical

drawing, which integrated geometry and drawing applied to dressmaking. Complementarily, women learned some basic of bookkeeping and accounting and basic chemistry principles for the proper care of fabrics while washing or ironing them.²⁸⁷

To be sure, while more women accessed technical education since the 1920s, gender continued marking divisions in the sewing business. Not all the *escuelas industriales* or *escuelas de artes y oficios* or professional schools were fully public but they were more affordable than private *academias*. By the late 1920s, there were even more *escuelas industriales* for *obreras* (working women). Also, the idea of the “*escuela fabrica*” (factory-school), where women could sell the goods produced at school, developed fast.²⁸⁸ As Stephanie Smith argues, however, the creation of modern vocational schools where women could receive a more technical and thus efficient education, “reaffirm[ed] established gender relations that privileged male power over women at all times and to

²⁸⁷ Programa de Estudios Escuela de Artes y Oficios para Señoritas, 1919. Secretaría de Educación Pública, Exp 3. And Programa de Estudios Corregidora de Querétaro, 1922. Dirección de Enseñanza Técnica Industrial y Comercial. Caja 6; Exp 26; Ref 91; Archivo Histórico de la Secretaría de Educación Pública, Mexico (hereafter AHSEP). *Gender and the Mexican Revolution: Yucatán Women & the Realities of Patriarchy.*, 4, 32

²⁸⁸ The designing of *escuelas industriales* in both urban and rural areas began in the last years of the revolution, when Venustiano Carranza was in office (1914-1920). President Carranza created the *Dirección de Enseñanza Técnica Industrial y Comercial* (Department of Technical and Commercial Education) in 1915 to foster the modernization of former *escuelas de artes y oficios*. Jesús Ávila Galinzoga, *La educación técnica en México desde la independencia, 1810-2010. De la educación técnica popular a la diversificación e integración del sistema productivo, 1910-1940*, vol. II (Instituto Politécnico Nacional, 2011)., 48-50.

preserve men's exclusive access to the world outside the home." Women and men continued to attend *escuelas industriales* (vocational schools) separately, and *escuelas* for women were designed to rationalize and possibly convert household tasks and chores into profitable trades to potentially guarantee women's economic emancipation.²⁸⁹

PROFESSIONALISM IN THE HOME: THE *MODISTA EN CASA*

Businessmen and education officials conceived women's professionalization in dressmaking as part of their domestic roles in the 1920s and 1930s. Sewing education served as a scenario where debates about the redefinition of gender roles took place. Despite the evidence for professionalism and the attempts to promote women's skilled labor, Mexican public initiatives to improve the position of women in society reinforced gendered perspectives of women's labor. Jocelyn Olcott observes, "factions of all sides of the 'woman question' claimed *abnegación* [abnegation] advance their causes." Women on post-revolutionary Mexico centered their renovating discourses on womanhood to how fundamental the woman's role in the home was for the prosperity of the nation.²⁹⁰ At the *Escuela Hogar Gabriela Mistral* and at the *Escuela Nocturna de Obreras* in Mexico City civic lessons were mandatory. A report by inspector Juan

²⁸⁹ Smith, *Gender and the Mexican Revolution: Yucatán Women & the Realities of Patriarchy*, 22.

²⁹⁰ Elizabeth Q. Hutchison, *Labors Appropriate to Their Sex : Gender, Labor, and Politics in Urban Chile, 1900-1930* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001). Olcott, *Revolutionary Women in Postrevolutionary Mexico*. (kindle edition loc 228). Lazarín Miranda, "Enseñanzas propias de su sexo. La educación técnica de la mujer, 1871-1932.", 249.

León in 1922 congratulated the *maestra* Dolores Castillo for her adequate approach to the Mexican new “women’s civic duties.” In his address, León spoke about how Castillo was properly lecturing about “the multiple options that the household provided” for women to really proclaim their fundamental place in society. León explained how Castillo focused on the role of women as “wives, daughters, sisters and mothers.”²⁹¹

Economía doméstica (home economics) constituted an important part of the *escuela socialista* (socialist project/school), as the magazine *Senda Nueva* of the *Departamento de Enseñanza Técnica Industrial y Comercial* asserted. For all courses offered in the *Corregidora de Querétaro* in Mexico City in 1922, women had to attend a home economics class one day per week. In this weekly meeting, students acquired all of the “knowledge that a woman must meet to run her home properly.” If seeking training to become professional in machine embroidery, filmmaking, cooking, hat making or dressmaking, women were required to learn the basics of “house cleaning” and the “general rules to set up a proper table” taking much care of the organization of the menu and following etiquette standards. Women also had to attend a weekly childcare class. Here, they learned about the “physical and moral conditions that a child must meet in order to grow up healthy, strong and well-organized.” “Food basics,” common diseases and “tips about toys and playing” were also fundamental for the

²⁹¹ Departamento de enseñanza técnica industrial y comercial. Caja 1; Exp 11; 1922. AHSEP.

government officials and women directors of the *Corregidora de Querétaro* and other educational institutions developed for women.²⁹²

The introduction of home economics and civic classes into Mexico's modern vocational schools is representative of not only how gender shaped policy, but also of how popular views envisioned gender complementarity rather than gender equality.²⁹³ As Smith demonstrates, female teachers found that men widely rejected their modernizing mission when women established schools in rural areas in Yucatán. Smith explains how fathers and even *hacienda* owners refused to take their daughters to school or to even open schools that would

²⁹² *Senda Nueva*. No 24; 1938-9. Study program Corregidora de Querétaro, 1922. Caja 6; Exp 26; Ref 91. AHSEP.

²⁹³ The concept of gender complementarity has been widely used by historians of Spanish America and by anthropologists to understand pre-conquest gender relations. In a way, some scholars idealized the idea of complementarity by assuming a sort of joined authority between indigenous women and men in pre-Hispanic times. The use of the concept reflects how scholars have imposed present struggles for gender equality on the past and have assumed that Latin American feminist struggles have been hindered by the burden of tradition. However, the idea of the modern housewife as professional homemakers was a middle class ideal in western modern societies where feminism had developed to the point of gaining the right to vote in 1919 (the United States and Great Britain). In this study I employ the term as "catholic feminists" used it in the 1920s and 1930s, as a response to the emancipation discourses of the women's movement in Mexico and Spain. Karen B. Graubart, *With Our Labor and Sweat: Indigenous Women and the Formation of Colonial Society in Peru, 1550-1700* (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 2007). Megan J. Elias, *Stir It Up: Home Economics in American Culture* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008). Smith, *Gender and the Mexican Revolution: Yucatán Women & the Realities of Patriarchy.*, 108-109. Soto, *Emergence of the Modern Mexican Woman.*, 97-143. Fernández Jiménez, *Pilar Primo de Rivera: el falangismo femenino.*, 89-96. Morcillo, *True Catholic Womanhood.*, 102-109.

bring education to girls in their lands.²⁹⁴ Students also expressed their distress when teachers expressed their values of womanhood outside the ideal of the *mujer, madre* or *esposa* (woman, mother and wife). In Mexico City, after the civic class of Dolores Castillo where she defended divorce as a way to not “endure humiliation treatment from husbands” and also “she affirmed that having too many children was not convenient,” *Escuela Hogar Gabriela Mistral* student Consuelo Rafels complained to the *directora* arguing that “*abnegación*” was preferable to the “scandal of proceeding to divorce.”²⁹⁵ Although socialist governors and policy makers believed that “a modern nation could not be created without elevating women’s position” their policies maintained rather than upended traditional roles. The socialist governor of Yucatan, Salvador Alvarado (governor from 1915 to 1918) thoroughly believed that “women’s most important occupation in society was that of a wife.” Although “education was the principle remedy for the majority of women’s problems and would provide the foundation upon which women could comply with their revolutionary responsibilities to help build a new society,” Alvarado and others agreed that the home was women’s unique space of action and representation.²⁹⁶

²⁹⁴ Smith, *Gender and the Mexican Revolution: Yucatán Women & the Realities of Patriarchy*, 40-50.

²⁹⁵ Informe sobre la enseñanza de moral y civismo de la Escuela Hogar “Gabriela Mistral” Departamento Enseñanza Técnica y Comercial. Caja 1; Exp 11; 1922. AHSEP.

²⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 27.

Like in Mexico, the *Escuela de Hogar y Profesional de la Mujer* (created in 1911), the *Inspección Femenina* (1930) and the *Institutos Femeninos* (1929) in Spain opened as a result of public initiatives that called for technical education to women. These schools were to enhance women's economic and thus enhance their economic independence while at the same time maintaining a discourse of womanhood that placed women as household managers. The schools were a part of a movement about "protecting female morality," however, for which education on housework was fundamental. In the 1910s and 1920s, feminist and *maestra* at the *Escuela de Hogar* and the *Escuela de Artes y Oficios*, Carmen de Burgos, defended the teaching of *economía doméstica* in technical schools. Childrearing and housework were women's responsibilities to guarantee the well-functioning of the family and thus the nation, De Burgos argued. During the dictatorship of General Miguel Primo de Rivera (1923-1930), the *Escuela de Hogar* became an important institution where women could become certified in a variety of housework tasks and also in new fields like office work and photography. Even though the government of left-wing president Alcalá Zamora, under whom the Constitution of 1931 was approved, fostered the increase of primary education for girls and supported coeducation, women's professional education continued to focus on housework.²⁹⁷

²⁹⁷ The Krausists in Spain began influencing the development of Normal Schools in Spain since the late 1860s, as Pilar Ballarín Domingo and Aurora Morcillo explain. Since 1888, women could attend Normal School to become *maestras* without asking for their father or husband permission. Pilar Ballarín Domingo, "Carmen de Burgos y la educación de las mujeres," in *Carmen De Burgos: Aproximación a la Obra de una Escritora Comprometida*, ed. Miguel Naveros and

Figure 28. *Corte y Confección* course at an Escuela de Hogar in Spain in the 1930s. Archivo General de la Administración, Spain.²⁹⁸

Ramón Navarrete-Galiano (Instituto de Estudios Almerienses, 1996)..., 56-59. Morcillo, *True Catholic Womanhood*.. 10-23.

²⁹⁸ Archivo General de la Administración, Madrid (hereafter AGA).

Singer's marketing to home sewers contributed to regional constructions of the modern woman as a professional housewife. As I noted, the *Singer Sewing Library* provided lessons for the *costurera* to become a professional dressmaker without spending time and money in the *academia*. Singer concentrated its instructions in home sewing without missing the "woman's creative instinct and love of beautiful things" as opposed to women opening their own businesses or working outside their homes. Volume Two of the *Singer Sewing Library*, "How to Make Dresses" introduced women to a variety of dressmaking methods through which she could make a "modern wardrobe ... for herself." Singer agreed with contemporaries that the "modern" consideration of the home as women's own space had brought them independence and women could use to demonstrate their role in society. To safeguard the company's image as a protector of gender roles, Singer criticized women's work at factories or *talleres* by affirming that "Making dresses should be a delightful adventure." No longer was dressmaking the "laborious [and] time consuming" practice that only some *modistas* were able to do.²⁹⁹

In furthering the idea of the *modista en casa*, volumes three and four of the *Singer Sewing Library* were dedicated to home linens and to making clothes for the family—for the newborn and children specifically. Singer used images of mothers and children enjoying their use of a sewing machine together to represent how happiness of family life was based on women's ability to stay

²⁹⁹ *Singer Sewing Library. How to Make Dresses, Volume 2.* (The Singer Sewing Machine Company, Educational Department, 1923). Foreword, i.

home and produce for the home while teaching their daughters how to become the future proper wives and mothers. Singer glorified home sewing as women's tool to embrace gendered social roles. Through sewing, the mother created a bond with other female members of the family, with whom she shared the natural enjoyment and even the fervor for fashion and clothes, as well as demonstrating good-motherhood practices. Likewise, in Singer's advertising, sewing signified women's dedication to the well-being and progress of the nation as they were employed in dressing and ornamenting the household. With the publication of Volume 4 *How to Make Draperies, Slip Covers, Cushions and Other Home furnishings*, Singer completed the necessary instructions for women to fulfill the expectations in regards to part of her household dedication.³⁰⁰

Singer distributed its *Singer Sewing Library* in Spain and Mexico, where local women's magazines also emphasized the idea of the *modista en casa* through their technical/practical teaching of dressmaking and more importantly, *labores*. While dressmaking was still seen partly as a profession, and, therefore in some ways a threat to gender norms, embroidery kept its complete association with the home. In Spain, more conservative women's magazines like *La Moda práctica*, *La Mujer en su casa* and *El Hogar y la moda* explained both dressmaking and embroidery. More and more of this type of publication became focused on *labores* (embroidery). These explained that home dressmaking and embroidery were essential chores of a proper woman of the home.

³⁰⁰ *Singer Sewing Library. How to Make Children's clothes*, Volume 3 and *How to Make Draperies, Slip Covers, Cushions and Other Home furnishings*. (The Singer Sewing Machine Company, Educational Department, 1923). Foreword

Likewise, the Mexican magazine *La Familia, revista de labores para el hogar* was the epitome of 1930s publications that focused on defining home sewing, and most importantly, home embroidery, as the embodiment of women's modernity. All of the *labores'* instructions in the magazine associated women with their roles as mothers and wives. In 1933, an article explained that the most honorable woman out of all the types of women in world was the *esposa* or *compañera* and the "*verdadera madre*." In accordance to this discourse, which connected with both *ligas femeninas* (left wing women organizations) or *sociedades de beneficencia* (Catholic charity organizations), director of *labores* Maria Dolores Posada included lessons to make *bordados* (embroidery) to ornate newborn and children's *ropa blanca*, bed accessories and kitchen goods. In addition, *La Familia* created a *taller* that women could attend for *precios módicos* "to learn all things related with the ornamentation of the home."³⁰¹

Catholic and conservative women's magazines and organizations focused more deliberately and particularly on the home as the ideal space for women to demonstrate their role in society. The "Catholic view of woman," as Victoria Enders puts it, considered the role of woman in society as "of a separate nature, which prescribed for her a separate sphere of activity." Like in Mexico, despite assumptions that Catholic women would only advocate for the idea of the *mujer abnegada*, however, Catholic women and the organizations they directed saw

³⁰¹ *La Familia* 1933-1937. BNM.

their role in the home as fundamental “to stabilizing societies in flux.”³⁰² As a reaction to rising feminism, some used the terminology “*feministas del hogar*” (hearth feminists), which implied a conscious claim for social reform yet within the limits of the house.³⁰³

The Mexican magazines *La Mujer mexicana* and *La Dama católica* fiercely promoted home sewing as an activity through which women demonstrated their bequest to the nation’s both economic and social progress. These publications offered *figurines* in all of their issues, and advocated for women to become *modistas en casa*. In contrast to less conservative magazines, ones that would advocated for the possibility of women working outside of the home –like the *escuelas industriales*–Catholic magazines not only included *modas*, but they also filled their issues with *labores de hogar*, usually embroidery and house linens. In unison, Catholic women’s organizations, which had assembled charity organizations since the late nineteenth century to promote both work and professionalism to improve women’s economic and social standings, also established their own *talleres de bordados*.³⁰⁴

³⁰² Victoria Lorée Enders, “‘And We Ate up the World’: Memories of the Sección Femenina,” in *Right-Wing Women. Conservatives to Extremists around the World*, ed. Paola Bacchetta and Margaret Power (New York and London: Routledge, 2002), 85, 89-90, 7. Fernández Jiménez, *Pilar Primo de Rivera: el falangismo femenino*.

³⁰³ *La Mujer mexicana* 1904. *Femina* no 28, 1928. HNM.

³⁰⁴ Sociedad Protectora de la Mujer Mexicana. Academia Taller de Bordados, *La mujer mexicana*, 1905. Catholic women’s organizations in 1920s and 1930s Spain gained presence through their opposition to the rise of modern feminism

Catholic and right-wing women's magazines in Spain also focused on *labores* or embroidery. The magazine *Labores* began publishing in the 1920s, and used colored front pages of decorative flowers representing female sexual organs. In doing so, the *Labores* magazine created a union between the making of embroidery and women's sexuality, thus linking women's nature and biology (reproductive abilities) with their labor in the home. Embroidery, like home dressmaking came to embody women's most important social duties: motherhood and to being an ideal wife.³⁰⁵

and as Aurora Morcillo explains, they "favored a return to domesticity." Morcillo, *True Catholic Womanhood*, 18.

³⁰⁵ *Labores*, 1928-1930.

Figure 29. Front page of *Labores*, 1928. Museo del Traje

The magazine *Labores* gave women instructions on how to apply a distinct “feminine touch” and ornate every single piece of furniture and garment in the

house. While the magazine contributed to making the home a distinctively feminine space, the instructions also represented the different functions that were expected from women—and girls also while growing up—in the house. First, the magazine urged women to do the cooking in the home. To further demonstrate its embracing with such gendered household tasks, *Labores* included monthly designs for *cubrevasos*, *mantelitos* and *manteles* (table linens), which instructed women on how to appropriately adorn food and drinking-related objects. While representing her role as a mother, wife or daughter, the magazine explained that these table linens also helped women follow modern hygiene standards, as the linens saved furniture from rusting.³⁰⁶

To intensify the focus on embroidery was important because this sewing activity was tightly connected with women's traditional roles and household duties rather than to the marketplace. As opposed to dressmaking, which increasingly was seen as an activity that women could do in search of economic independence and fashion recreation, embroidery and the goods to which it was applied better represented the women's sphere. Although embroidered goods were increasingly sold in stores for women to decorate their houses, it was usual that women gathered to embroider goods that represented their social role in society as household caretakers. An early twentieth century *ajuar* (trousseau), for example, like in the nineteenth century, continued to include all kinds of household linens that women of the family would have prepared for the bride.

³⁰⁶ *Labores*, 1928-1930. MT.

As wives and mothers, the magazine *Labores* recommended women make and adorn all of the garments and linens for the *cama de matrimonio* (marriage double bed) and for the newborn's bed. Conservative magazines also emphasized that through embroidering for the house and for the family, women demonstrated their compromise to the Catholic Church and its values and practices. *Labores* published a variety of patterns for ornamenting bed sheets, but most importantly, the magazine included a variety of forms and shapes in which brides and wives could sew the initials of the married couple in the bed sheets and pillowcases.³⁰⁷ Like *Singer Sewing Library's* volume three for the newborn, the magazine offered instructions on how to make *canastillas* (newborn baskets). *Labores* advised women about which goods should be included in the *canastillas* and the ways to ornate them. For example, the magazine taught women how to make *baberos* (bibs) and the different utensils to maintain an appropriate hygiene, which were fundamental for modern childrearing. In 1927, the monthly magazine *El Hogar y la moda* reminded female readers that baptism was "children's first official act in their life," and that mothers needed to be concerned with and work on the "*tocado elegante*" (elegant dress) with which the newborn would enter the Catholic community.³⁰⁸

³⁰⁷ *Labores*, 1928-1930 and *El Hogar y la moda* 1915-1928; MT. Both magazines advertised each other and other magazines and manuals like the *Almanaque de la familia* published to guide women in modern family care and childrearing.

³⁰⁸ *Labores* and *El Hogar y la moda*, September 1927; MT.

In both Mexican and Spanish conservative and Catholic magazines and organizations, embroidery for women represented women's acceptance of modern gender roles and therefore their social duties within the nation. In Spain, the *Sección Femenina* (Women's Section of Falange), was created in 1934 to give a voice to reactionary voices within radicalized left-wing government in 1933 and 1934. The *Unión Femenina Católica Mexicana* (Mexican Catholic Women's Union) has its roots in the generalized anti-clericalism during the Mexican Revolution and in the Cristero Rebellion from 1926 to 1929. It was also a reaction to the secularizing educational policies of the Mexican Department of Education in place since its creation in 1923.³⁰⁹ Like other right-wing women's organizations created in the 1930s, the women of Falange and Mexican women Catholics endorsed the gendered ideal of women as mothers and wives of the nation. Domesticity ideals empowered women, Catholic groups believed, and these ideals embodied their fundamental role in the public arena because they fostered progress and/or regeneration of the nation by avoiding the transgressing

³⁰⁹ George Richard Esenwein and Adrian Shubert, *Spain at War: The Spanish Civil War in Context, 1931-1939* (London: Longman, 1995), 13-30. Knight, *The Mexican Revolution. Porfirians, Liberals and Peasants*, 1., 202-208, 504-510. Kristina A. Boylan, "The Femenine "Apostolate in Society" Versus the Secular State: The Union Femenina Católica Mexicana, 1929-1940," in *Right-Wing Women. From Conservatives to Extremists around the World*, ed. Paola Bacchetta and Margaret Power (New York and London: Routledge, 2002), 169. 171-175

of gender roles that many women had embraced in the advent of socialist and communist governments in Spain and Mexico during the twenties.³¹⁰

Conservative women understood the sewing machine in a way very much like that of the political left. The machine permitted and promoted sewing inside the home. The sewing machine satisfied demands in the Hispanic World for the making of home embroidery and therefore did not upset reactionary women's views on gender roles. And Singer was unique in this arena because the company targeted conservative women's magazines, like *La Familia* in Mexico, to include its advertisements. Books like the *Libro "Singer" de bordados* instructed all of the embroidery patterns taught in Catholic schools and conservative magazines. Both the Mexican *La Familia* and the Spanish *Labores* affirmed that *Richelieu* embroidery style was the easiest and most extended embroidery pattern to attach to tablecloths and the family's underwear, for example. Singer's embroidery manuals from 1922 and 1948 pointed out that *Richelieu* "was a embroidery that is widely accepted for its easiness and its multiple applications," especially, the explanation pointed out, "lingerie and

³¹⁰ Enders, "'And We Ate up the World': Memories of the Sección Femenina.", 85, 87-90; Aurora G. Morcillo, *The Seduction of Modern Spain: The Female Body and the Francoist Body Politic* (Bucknell University Press, 2009). Alan Knight, *The Mexican Revolution. Counter-Revolution and Reconstruction*, vol. 2 (Cambridge University Press, 1986)., 206-210. Boylan, "The Feminine 'Apostolate in Society' Versus the Secular State: The Union Femenina Católica Mexicana, 1929-1940.", 176-9. Nancy Ruth Reagin, *Sweeping the German Nation: Domesticity and National Identity in Germany, 1870-1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007). Sandra McGee Deutsch, "Spartan Mothers: Fascist Women in Brazil in the 1930s," in *Right-Wing Women: From Conservatives to Extremists around the World*, ed. Paola Bacchetta and Margaret Power (New York and London: Routledge, 2002)., 155.

personal garments.” English embroidery and Venetian lace were also constantly published in Spanish and Mexican magazines, and like in Singer’s manual, these were “strong and simple” *bordados*, applicable to “ladies and girls underwear, toiletries, tablecloths and curtains,” and were therefore “some of the most useful embroideries for the home.”³¹¹

In the 1910s and early 1920s, Singer emphasized the use of sewing machines for home dressmaking as the Spanish and Mexican governments opened schools for girls and women and articulated that sewing was fundamental in women’s professional education. And embroidery returned to the center of the company’s advertising. In 1925, an article in Singer’s own magazine the *Red “S” Review* recognized the work of Spanish Singer embroidery *profesora* and affirmed that sewing machines only employed in dressmaking should be considered “half-used sewing machines.” As a result, the article stressed, the company’s cadre of instructors (generally female) needed to emphasize the applications of the sewing machine to embroidery around the world.³¹²

The increasing inclusion of a variety of regional stitches and practices into the standard Singer embroidery manuals between the 1920s and 1950 was the result of Singer’s adaptation to Hispanic—and other regions—embroidery practices

³¹¹ *Libro “Singer” de Bordados*. (Singer Sewing Machine Company, 1922). 18-20, 22-23, 26-28, 41-43, 66-68, 84, 108, 126-155.

³¹² Gordon, *Fabricating Consumers : The Sewing Machine in Modern Japan*. Red “S” Review. Singer Sewing Machine Company. Vol VI, April 1925, No 8, 9, 10.

and patterns. Singer manuals included Mexican and Spanish stitches, which illustrate the accommodation of so-called global practices to regional practices, as well as the role of the Hispanic world and its embroidery in shaping corporate structures. The lessons on how to make initials were key in all of Singer's manuals including the English version, for example, to address regional local customs. The *calados mejicanos* were included in all the issues of the *Libro "Singer" de Bordados* along with Spanish-related stitches such as *bolillos* or Tenerife stitches. In the 1948 manual, the "*encaje punto de España*" (Lace of Spain) made it to the Singer manual.³¹³

Outside of the domestic space, Singer had a direct connection and flexible adjustment to regional developments in the business and culture of sewing. The role of the company's strategies in contemporaries' discourses on womanhood was significant through the presence of Singer sewing machines and Singer agents in the various spaces where women's social roles were constructed and contested. When making budgets for vocational schools in Mexico and Spain, Singer sewing machines were the most expensive but also the most requested from all girls schools. School budgets specified the brand Singer most likely because the company's selling system was widely established in both Spain and Mexico. In 1928, teachers in Orizaba (Ver.) requested the purchase of fifteen Singer sewing machines to be able to supply the increasing number of students

³¹³ *Libro "Singer" de Bordados*. (Singer Sewing Machine Company, 1922)., 48, 64-67, 112. The same embroidery patterns were included in women's magazines like *Labores*, *La Familia*, *El Hogar y la moda*, *La Mujer de su casa*, *La Dama católica*.

with machines for embroidery course. Officials approved this petition as well as the request for a machine embroidery manual. They sent the *Libro “Singer” de Bordados* instead of a subscription to a Mexican magazine that would include *labores*.³¹⁴

Throughout the 1920s in Spain, Singer was the largest supplier of sewing machines to rural and urban schools for girls. A report in the *Gaceta de Madrid* in 1926 considered the sewing machine a “special pedagogical tool” that all national—and thus public—school for girls should purchase.³¹⁵ As education officials in Spain saw home sewing as an activity worthy of employed girls and women to inculcate important civility—and gendered—values, jails for women also included sewing lessons as a part of their agenda to reform and transform women’s souls and lives. In 1925, an article in Singer’s magazine the *Red S Review* pointed out that the company was “glad to think [that] ... happy homes” were among “the destinies which await the millions of machines produced at the Singer Company’s various factories.” “Nevertheless,” the writer noticed, “Singer machines proverbially make their appearance in most unexpected situations and under most unusual circumstances.” The 170 inmates at the women’s jail in Alcalá de Henares (Mad.), the article told, were employed in multiple household tasks such as laundering and cooking while serving their sentences. Eventually,

³¹⁴ Correspondence April-September, 1928. Secretaría de Educación Pública. Caja 9; Exp 58; 1928. AHSEP.

³¹⁵ *Gaceta de Madrid* No 110; 20 April 1926, p 395. By the early 1930s the Spanish government also bought Alfa sewing machines for public institutions.

all of them “engaged in embroidery [or] ... knitting stockings” as well as received basic lessons to sew *ropa blanca* and uniforms. “Our machines” the article agreed with the nuns who ran the Alcalá jail, “serve to keep [women] employed ... unhappy women who find some measure of contentment and of self-forgetfulness in their work with [sewing machines], and great alleviation and some excitement in their monotonous existences.”³¹⁶

Figure 30. Woman of the Sección Femenina sewing on a Singer sewing machine. Notice the Falange symbol on the woman's apron, ca., 1940. Archivo General de la Administración.

³¹⁶ Red “S” Review. Singer Sewing Machine Company. Vol VI, April 1925, No 8.

After General Francisco Franco's coup in April 1936 against the democratically elected Republican government and the start of the three-year cruel and violent civil war across Spain, women were called to support each army as nurses, cooks and sewers, both on the frontlines and in the rearguard. Singer sewing machines found their role in war through the hundreds of *Escuelas Hogar* and various organizations, from all political sides, that were converted to *talleres* to supply both armies with uniforms and basic clothing.³¹⁷ Some women even participated in combat. Republican women fought in the battlefield alongside men against Franco's *sublevados* (rebel army) until 1937 when former elected president Largo Caballero ordered women to withdraw. In civil war Republican propaganda, household tasks became women's most symbolic ways to demonstrate patriotism and their contribution to the war effort. Likewise, the female section of Falange joined efforts with other various charitable organizations such as *Auxilio Social* to organize relief efforts and rearguard *talleres* serving the *sublevados*.³¹⁸

Like in Mexico, Singer faced significant losses in Spain due to forced loans requested to the company—like any business was obliged to. Singer's main loss was the machines and other company property that was requisitioned for the war

³¹⁷ Cenarro, *La sonrisa de Falange. Auxilio Social en la Guerra Civil y en la posguerra*. Inbal Ofer, *Señoritas in Blue: The Making of a Female Political Elite in Franco's Spain: The National Leadership of the Sección Feminina de la Flanage, 1936-1977* (Sussex Academic Press, 2009). *Estampa* April, 1937.

³¹⁸ Lines, *Milicianas. Women in Combat in the Spanish Civil War*, 135.

effort and possibly never returned to the company.³¹⁹ In the territories held by the Republican army, left-wing political organizations and municipal-based civilian groups organized *talleres* contributing to the war effort. They made a number of requisitions for machines in 1936 and never returned the property to Singer (see table 6 and 7 in appendices).

Singer's losses increased in the last year of the Civil War. Most importantly for Singer, however, were the effects of the war in the selling organization due to displacement of population and the consequences of bombardment to a number of shops. By 1937, Singer's *gerente* Manuel Márquez García had moved to Valencia (Val.) from where he continued to direct the business in places like Valencia or Catalonia where selling and collecting was still possible. By May 1938, however, the number of Márquez's available salesmen had decreased from 733 to 439; there were only 445, who were in charge of collecting payments from the rental agreements remained, down from the 608 that Singer counted in the first year of the civil war. To worsen the fate of Singer's top executives in Spain and in the United States, Catalonia's Republican government supported the region's workers unions in their aim to control the management of both national and international businesses. Although threatened with nationalization, the workers committee that formed to supervise Singer in April 1937 was soon

³¹⁹ Boletín Oficial del Estado. Madrid No 366, 23 December 1938.

dissolved once Franco's forces took total control of the country.³²⁰ In the territories where the *sublevados* army (Franco's army) took over, Singer also faced restrictions over its management as the 1938 *Ley del Trabajo* (Labor Law) forced businesses to maintain and also raise the salary of workers due to the high cost of living.³²¹

The expansion of Singer's selling organization in Spain by the 1930s assured the company's continuity after the war. *Gerente* Márquez García had become a well-known and a respectable businessman in Spain. Particularly, Márquez was a part of women's, and not men's, business of dressmaking.

Empleados de la Organización «Singer Española» que han obsequiado con un banquete a su director, don Manuel Márquez, al cumplir cincuenta años de servicio en dicha Organización. (Foto Savas.)

Figure 31. Picture of a ceremony organized in homage to the fifty years anniversary of *gerente*'s Manuel Márquez as part of Singer Spain. 1932. Hemeroteca Nacional de España.³²²

³²⁰ Correspondence from Managing Inspector Antonio Pérez de Hinojosa and Manager in Barcelona Luis Gavilanes to Madrid Central Agency and Paris Central Agency. October-November 1936. SSMC, Box 159; folder 1, 3.

³²¹ Report on losses in Spain, 1936-1939. SSMC Archives. Box 159; folder 7. Boletín Oficial del Estado. Madrid. No 366; 23 December 1938.

³²² *Estampa*, Junio 1932. HNE.

Márquez had supported the enlargement of Singer's cadre of *profesoras* to travel to both urban and rural stores and Singer locations to make sure every Singer shop could provide instructions to potential consumers. In addition, Singer's credit options were the company's main advantage over other companies. Even when Alfa began offering machines on installment payments, their presence in the territory was rather small in the 1930s. The majority of Singers' leased accounts holders were still women. During the war, Singer put their accounts on hold and only some payment cycles were reactivated after 1939. Márquez continued as head of the company in 1939 and was relieved with the end of the collectivization threads in Catalonia. Once the war was over, Márquez coordinated the recovery of destroyed shops, around twenty throughout Spain, and most importantly, the reestablishment of the canvassing-collector system and the "training of young people to be instructresses and mechanics." The latter two, Marquez considered to be "the best to fulfill" the needs of the situation at the time, as repairs and new sales were most wanted.³²³

Women were a part of Singer in Spain after 1939, even when women were not allowed to work under Franco's government, since Singer's service continued to be key to home sewing practices that developed in the postwar years. With their husbands' permission, women were mostly employed in textile and sewing-

³²³ Correspondence and Report on War from *gerente* Manuel Márquez from Madrid (January through June 1939) and Report of Spanish Civil War to Singer President Milton Lightner, April 1953. SSMC, Box 159; Folder 10 and 11.

related work and in agriculture. Women's sewing at home increased after 1939 for two reasons. First, sewing regained the symbolic values related to the family rather than as symbols of women's independence like in the 1920s and 1930s. The category of employed on *sus labores* (household tasks or housewives) in 1940 was established in the census and the majority of women fell into this category. Second, ready-to-wear retailing options only increased in the late 1950s and 1960s once Franco's Spain integrated in the circle of Western nations' drive to consolidate capitalism. Until then, women of the house, mothers, wives, and daughters were in charge of and encouraged by the female section of Falange and the established National Catholic ideology, to make their own clothes. Upper and middle class women's interest in fashion did not disappeared, which continued providing *modistas* with the option of having their own businesses at home.³²⁴ And Singer thus continued to be fundamental element for a clothing sector that the company itself had helped to build throughout the late nineteenth century and the first three decades of the twentieth century.

CONCLUSIONS

After the Spanish Civil War the recovery of sales' levels took longer than expected, even when the selling organization was reestablished soon after 1939. In both Mexico and Spain, however, Singer continued to supply sewing machines

³²⁴ Luis Otero, *La Sección Femenina. Madrid: EDAF, 1999.* (Madrid: EDAF, 1999). María Dueñas, *the Time in between*, trans. Daniel Hahn (New York: Atria, 2009). 1940 and 1950 Occupational Census. Instituto Nacional de Estadística. Madrid, Spain.

and related services after each revolution and war was over. This chapter has demonstrated the significance of home dressmaking and embroidery in twentieth century Spain's and Mexico's constructions of modern womanhood and how these ideals allowed Singer to maintain its business after war and revolution. Singer was able to provide for the modern *modista*, the home seamstress and the *costurera* without upsetting gendered and regionalized sewing practices. In addition, the sewing machine, and Singer's brand specifically, made it to the private homes of Mexicans and Spaniards gaining a special symbolism that associated the appliance with women's roles in society rather than with work. This helped Singer maintain the business for decades in both nations. Only when mass production and distribution of ready-to-wear garments became widely available in Mexico during the 1970s and in Spain in the 1970s and 1980s, did women find cheaper fashionable clothing in the department store as opposed to home sewing. It was not until the 1970s that the domestic sewing machine lost its economic and cultural significance in Spain and Mexico.³²⁵

³²⁵ Fiona Wilson and Patricia Arias, "Clothing, Identity and Consumption in a Mexican Region," *Center for Development Research - Working Paper* 95, no. 9 (1995 (November)). 15-18. Jones, *Multinationals and Global Capitalism : From the Nineteenth to the Twenty-First Century.*, 102.

Appendix 1. Singer Global Sales.

1.1 Singer gross sales in Spain and Mexico, 1910-1948.

	MEXICO	SPAIN		MEXICO	SPAIN		MEXICO	SPAIN
1892		28213	1911	34401	66443	1930	30631	60862
1893		23500	1912	34728	80745	1931	14828	38916
1894		24000	1913	3586	78218	1932	11043	26210
1895		24000	1914	34728	73314	1933	11856	27143
1896		24000	1915	17791	65344	1934	14932	27449
1897		20500	1916	4556	74367	1935	16285	26961
1898		22734	1917	1463		1936	21169	14372
1899		31028	1918	11780	47436	1937	23511	5715
1900		32331	1919	14861	63523	1938	13517	3865
1901		36083	1920	19996	61383	1939	11368	1340
1902	21459	45243	1921	21883	76449	1940	11157	72
1903	23193	48694	1922	21964	95170	1941	17761	153
1904	24779	45092	1923	26296	83142	1942		8635
1905	26488	39916	1924	30400	58200	1943	5114	5820
1906	35476	43449	1925	37652	61531	1944	5416	6018
1907	37362	44313	1926	37157	64127	1945	5877	5028
1908	29646	43702	1927	28632	62598	1946	8141	5952
1909	30034	43918	1928	30164	65895	1947	9994	5328
1910	32164	56059	1929	30149	67779	1948	15350	4119

Sources: The data for Spain between 1892 and 1907 refers to net sales and is taken from Andrew Godley, "Selling the Sewing Machine Around the World," table A2. Until 1907 Singer Spain also reported the sales of Italy and Lisbon as both offices worked through Madrid's central office. For the rest of the years the data refers to gross sales as I consider that some of the reposed machines might have been used. This data and tables 1.2-1.5 also use the World Results, SSMC UM, AP 93-0444, Source 2; Project 56; Reel 1.

Table 1.2 Singer Sales in a Selection of countries between 1920 and 1948.

YEAR	U.S	CANADA	CUBA	P RICO	IRAQ	EGYPT	AUSTRALIA	TURKEY	BRAZIL	ARGENTINA
1920	534391	32483	89966	15858		12900	30775	3185	39493	86396
1921	518058	27978	19913	18948		12306	26199	2394	18199	29118
1922	498506	27690	16908	8813		16448	35560	1488	25819	33729
1923	581374	27078	30200	13055		10611	39949	1152	41928	40609
1924	545537	24945	31330	12947	968	10140	42439	3548	40040	46754
1925	527201	22936	29679	15226	1180	11162	43864	4878	41033	5432
1926	495759	21611	24251	12235	1176	11939	42693	6422	41780	49771
1927	482347	23038	18903	12292		12975	41878	7109	51587	49462
1928	471830	34287	15813	12158		14464	42657	7627	62701	51123
1929	464704	34150	13465	12952	3164	15780	36725	8737	62644	49965
1930	382599	28270	6707	10445	2889	17247	28549	4805	38171	43420
1931	248981	19318	2483	7466	2154	14179	11718	4714	18766	26546
1932	179089	18268	2585	5564	2239	10336	12118	3214	19058	9451
1933	230837	18054	1760	4908	2334	10572	16190	2986	23484	10222
1934	262234	21575	3659	5575	2245	8831	20749	3149	34279	14257
1935	262121	21801	3988	6031	2140	8441	22773	3707	48152	17174
1936	303492	23773	4376	8733	2330	9335	27709	6254	43404	20764
1937	301727	25849		10889	2061	8234	29707	8470	51582	26396
1938	250837	25243		11280	234	1136	34520	11121	43272	25998
1939	272860	27392	7220	11344	1858	7238	35051	8158	42675	26933
1940	310403	35783	6526	13321	844	5381	30530	7292	44994	22710
1941	388869	43790	8485	17412	616	5414	28751	5383	59128	27353
1942	276823	32054		10857	733	4046	21395	3953	32199	13014
1943	143500	19880	2141	6942	655	1044	15137	3121	29367	7473
1944	123579	18375	3189	6971	493	3825	6644	2745	32046	4641
1945	112910	23970	2663	7576	713	3652	10529	1777	20496	5418
1946	205152	36647	2640	11396	1175	4305	21526	2534	29913	12798
1947	291556	40298	6480	11559	2353	5413	37398	5170	39036	17729
1948	359267	52142	7526	23145	2441	5306	45168	8006	45606	14450

1.2 (continued). Singer Sales in a Selection of countries between 1920 and 1948.

YEAR	NETHER LANDS	GREECE	FRANCE	GREAT BRITAIN	GERMANY	SUDAN	SOUTH AFRICA	INDIA	PHILIPPINES	COLOMBIA	PERU
1920	31831	14226	98104	201826	37289		22347	64705	34919	10498	14308
1921	30288	13834	72055	108988	80677			49566	13995	5249	9636
1922	25168	13259	113243	114899	108064		13614	56641	11670	5982	4989
1923	23919	6735	119319	107730	56166		16515	56333	16508	7902	7612
1924	25172	16747	99108	111695	141053	458	18722	58104	21151	9509	10815
1925	26071	30919	125116	120942	182663	1505	20429	65610	22777	14600	11081
1926	26276	20883	95984	116771	155835	1534	20833	72212	25585	20775	12903
1927	26583	23940	76851	125105	213625	1886				25679	11985
1928	39565	23606	105154	126451	229047	2580		79719	34100	27524	11713
1929	28908	24386	120503	137343	223374	1860		80281	35247	24717	12427
1930	28067	15427	118412	131832	185455			71144	28992	12275	10635
1931	22164	10850	89225	111046	147956		23332	60481	20076	5935	4036
1932	18184	4497	84399	99779	106545		18243	40997	14200	3640	1914
1933	16687	3733	87644	106472	116662		20686	44773	10696	3847	836
1934	11080	4900	81640	118380	152170		24873	61749	12449	6297	1610
1935	9854	6021	80240	124994	162602		27764	69445	16068	7716	4264
1936	11020	4659	94281	131165	178888		29810	65880	22400	9731	6556
1937	10326	6988	93879	140951	196659		33306	71815	33328	10611	7200
1938	10951	8747	84080	117198	194336	1008	34642	63280	26959	7628	6177
1939	13211	5833	62339	141935	133737	1002	34556	6061	2483	8756	6078
1940	10129	2958	54984	142705		498	30488	64638	18044	7846	7429
1941	3881		29466	115332			39049	46512	16111	9021	9297
1942			15875	40826		581	19350	26074		4845	5986
1943			13565	25990		715	9738	21729		2229	2246
1944	97		12221	26700		477	7978	16348		2580	3023
1945	96	307	17082	39256		600	11526	21551		2160	4071
1946	2148	1357	22876	71680		894	22555	50929	5819	5042	5111
1947	5514	2055	24745	108429		1240	34081	58974	19531	4932	4946
1948	5782	2614	30433	104458		385	47088			6582	7079

1.3. Open Lease Accounts.

	MADRID	AMSTERDAM	MEXICO	BUDAPEST	CPTOWN	NORWAY	TK& EGPT	HAMBURG
1907	62890	37949	61424	18051	20361	12656	62722	544066
1908	65654	41692	58928	21681	19282	14779	63504	579524
1909	67138	43736	55243	24611	17760	16839	67235	591246
1910	74952	44703	54746	28217	19613	19333	68201	609762
1911	90798	46519	60187	31702	21616	21616	82109	616962
1912	115760	49231	67996		24292	22366	98458	644087
1913	134442	51843	73387		27173	23539	94797	666141
1929	108889	67603	46536		40956	20793		282456
1930	107005	68912	45607		42416	21497		280000
1931	92765	67496	35090		42235	22425		234939
1932	69084	63786	27385		40410	21988		203869
1933	56515	59502	24793		39452	22191		198677
1934	52965	50701	26870		40474	21317		226008
	LONDON	PARIS	ST.PETESB	US	HAVANA	BS AIRES	S. PAULO	LISBON
1907	355902	142442	799157	8704142				14678
1908	352943	168203	934521	8786997				14822
1909	353803	177627	1076681	751798	19841	12377	20619	15510
1910	342500	171976	1151213	769961	20814	16184	26512	15905
1911	332784	172788	1236765	807043	33649	21199	45967	18249
1912	329509	178724	1378350	835277	40547	27075	27925	21592
1913	326776	179489	1568597	876338	44922	43104	42854	24631
1929	93000	84438		642623	31309			23821
1930	98496	93650		570005	20546			23233
1931	102000	92727		463175	12445			22384
1932	90950	90475		388309	8055			18536
1933	86503	90505		396163	6486			14582
1934	91375	91344		376776	6360			13432

1.4. Delinquent Accounts, 1907-1913.

	MADRID	AMSTERDAM	MEXICO	BUDAPEST	CPTOWN	NORWAY	TK& EGPT	HAMBURG
1907	10804	1679	20544	6994	9642	3997	29095	141448
1908	12490	8287	20782	9290	9581	4188	31560	152667
1909	12470	6680	18096	9929	7560	4929	28880	145957
1910	12888	6576	17500	10334	7723	5432	30626	142401
1911	14190	6789	20335	10000	8784	5389	35214	147796
1912	16666	6501	25577	*	9894	4328	48172	144588
1913	19294	6779	36613		10442	4784	34642	155948
	LONDON	PARIS	ST.PETESB	US	HAVANA	BS AIRES	S. PAULO	LISBON
1907	65814	9793	250891	374983				3068
1908	63194	49664	391232	359416				3125
1909	60724	50242	443968	310683	7788	3662	7330	3578
1910	57236	14777	298936	309516	9349	4783	8003	3824
1911	50012	15236	407900	320295	12755	4867	13114	4019
1912	51226	14341	434024	334507	17191	4993	6133	4276
1913	48172	13568	495062	354158	20194	10205	10829	4620

Table 1.5. Paying Accounts, 1907-1913.

	MADRID	AMSTERDAM	MEXICO	BUDAPEST	CPTOWN	NORWAY	TK& EGPT	HAMBURG
1907	51320	28503	40479	10655	10780	8548	30151	395659
1908	52220	31293	37173	12144	9640	10415	28209	417458
1909	54668	35199	36043	14482	10200	11752	32106	434022
1910	61835	36391	37246	17220	11775	13606	35682	447330
1911	76608	38012	39857	21134	12833	15614	42485	457202
1912	99094	41242	42419		14398	17765	45669	485313
1913	115118	45064	36774		16869	18353	54392	515225
	LONDON	PARIS	ST.PETESB	US	HAVANA	BS AIRES	S. PAULO	LISBON
1907	284155	109703	537049	334624				11390
1908	281307	118539	542353	353254				11539
1909	288779	127385	625909	413782	13026	8715	13289	11765
1910	285264	129416	850610	438064	18728	11404	18509	12044
1911	282777	131061	823342	465416	20894	16314	27853	14056
1912	276300	139187	933109	476300	23356	22082	21792	17052
1913	3306117	135305	1563603	496018	24728	32899	32025	19716

Appendix 2. Garment Trades in Spain and Mexico, 1920-1940.

2.1. Registered women and men working in the textile and clothing business in the 1920s. Data extracted from the 1920s Spanish census.

Source: Instituto Nacional de Estadística. Spain.

INDUSTRY	MEN >21	WOMEN >21	MEN 21-60	WOMEN 21-60	MEN 60<	WOMEN 60<	MARRIED MEN	MARRIED WOMEN	WIDOW MEN	WIDOW WOMEN
TEXTILE	17990	23182	15471	26666	188	491	49434	44699	2113	13745
CLOTHING	27291	29654	22504	27653	244	670	43084	14209	3019	9152

2.2. Registered women and men working in various garment and textile industries. Data extracted from the 1930s Spanish census. Source: Instituto Nacional de Estadística. Spain.

	MEN >15	WOMEN >15	MEN 16-20	WOMEN 16-20	MEN 21-60	WOMEN 21-60	MEN 60<	WOMEN 60<
TEXTILE INDUSTRY	5458	7799	12082	29601	79793	74841	7999	2340
SASTRES (tailors)	1727	2341	4625	4784	47988	5417	2362	226
MODISTAS (dressmakers)	36	5562	91	13890	410	23499	19	521
ROPA BLANCA, LINGERIE, UPHOLSTERY	305	2951	739	7999	2335	16110	186	1013
SOMBREROS (hats)	146	317	405	1140	5624	2434	293	144

2.3. Registered women and men working in various garment and textile industries. Data extracted from the 1930s Mexican census. Source: Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía. Mexico.

	MEN	WOMEN
TEXTILE	48411	8610
ROPA BLANCA	2845	2411
PASAMANERIA	339	76
MEN CLOTHING AND HATS	22418	607
WOMEN CLOTHING AND HATS	743	45670

Appendix 3. Singer during the Spanish Civil War.

3.1. Singer requisitioned property in Spain 1936-1937.

MACHINES	CARS	EMPLOYEES	ORGANIZATION
	4		Red Cross
	1		Granada (And.)- Republican Front
		1 driver	Alicante (Val.) - <i>Izquierda Republicana</i>
	1		Roda (CLM.) House of the People
14			<i>Partido Socialista Obrero Español</i> (PSOE)
7			<i>Juventud Socialista Unificada</i>
17			Murcia (Mur.) House of the People
7		Female instructor	<i>Izquierda Republicana Femenina</i>
9			Municipality of Lorca
33			Municipality of Elche (Val.)
9			Alicante and Lorca (Val.) <i>Socorro Rojo Internacional</i>
1			Sangre de Aquilas Hospital
5		Porter	<i>Partido Comunista de España</i>
3			Novelda (Val.) Frente Obrero Antifascista de
2			<i>Asociación Popular de Inquilinos</i>
		Agent	Office and Business Employees Union
3			Alicante (Val.) <i>Sindicato de Trabajadores del Vestir</i>
5			<i>Izquierda Republicana Femenina</i>
10			Municipality of Lorca (Val.)
12			Antifascist Militia Committee
3			Catalonian Government - Department of Defense
58			Garment <i>talleres</i> in the cities of Gijón, Llana de Langreo, Villaviciosa(Ast.)
80			City of Alicante (Val.)
39			City of Badajoz (Ext.)
16			City of Badalona (Cat.)
12			City of Barcelona (Cat.)
11			City of Bilbao (PV.)

3.2. Singer requisitioned property in Spain 1936-1937 (continued)

MACHINES	CARS	EMPLOYEES	ORGANIZATION
69			City of Asturias (Ast.)
12			City of Granada (And.)
79			City of Tarragona (Cat.)
160			City of Valencia (Val.)
120			City of Malaga (And.)
660			City of Madrid (Mad.)
8			City of Toledo (CLM.)

3.3. Singer Total losses by 1939.

Machines Heads (destroyed or lost)	1116
Stands	1212
Tables	1148
Singer Lights	246
Electric Motors	236
Canvassing Cars	42
Dubious Leased Accounts	4206
Value of Dubious Accounts	\$1571585,36
Value of Sundries (thread, silk, cutlery, etc)	\$64615,86
Value of parts destroyed (parts, needles, oil)	\$36196.93

Sources for tables 3.1. – 3.3: Correspondence and Report on losses in Spain, 1936-1939. SSMC, Box 159; folder 1, 3, 4, 5.

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