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**Voicing Solidarity: The Ladies' Auxiliary and
The Retelling of the Empire Zinc Strike**

by

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**Voicing Solidarity: The Ladies' Auxiliary and
The Retelling of the Empire Zinc Strike**

**Approved by
Supervising Committee:**

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Dedication

This work is dedicated to my grandmother, Feliciano Pena Montoya and to the women strikers of the Ladies Auxiliary, Charter 209. And also dedicated to my parents Faustina D. Montoya and Porfirio R. Montoya.

Finally, this work is also dedicated to IUMMSW, Local 890 and to the Mexican American community in the city of Bayard, New Mexico, and to all of the mining families in Grant County who carry the union's legacy.

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Abstract

Voicing Solidarity: The Ladies' Auxiliary and The Retelling of the Empire Zinc Strike

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I will examine the representations in the film *Salt of the Earth*, which depicts an adaptation of the International Union Mill, Mine Smelter Workers, Local 890 strike against the Empire Zinc Corporation in 1950-1952. I highlight the active role *mujeres* in The Ladies Auxiliary played in the two-year strike, which ended in an historic victory. My methodological framework of oral history and feminist ethnography, I conducted interviews with four surviving *mujeres* involved in the strike. The *mujeres*' voices recall the private consequences of speaking out and challenging the patriarchal hierarchy within Mexican-origin families.

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Chapter 1

Rediscovering My Family History

This is a woman's attempt to document the history of her family and the women of Bayard, a mining community in Grant County, New Mexico. The project is enriched with historical narratives pertaining to the longest labor union strike in New Mexico's history.

Significance of the Study

The retelling of the Empire Zinc Strike by *mujeres* (women) contributes to the strike's history, which has almost exclusively been told by men. The women's perspectives, life histories, and experiences of oppression on life in Grant County during the McCarthy era, and the unionization of the Empire Zinc Strike introduce a missing perspective. My aim in using a feminist ethnography is to collect and document women's narratives and demonstrate the rise of their feminist consciousness.

Researcher Positionality

My quest and idea for my thesis was set in motion as an undergraduate student at San José State University, in California, where I began my preliminary research as a McNair Scholars Fellow in 2003. I was enrolled in a Mexican American Studies course titled *Comparative Latino Cultures in the Americas*, taught by lecturer Phillip Tabera. I had no idea I was about to embark upon a profound life journey. During the semester, Tabera lectured and showed the blacklisted film *Salt of the Earth* (1953). The film was directed by Herbert Bibberman and produced by Paul Jarrico. They together with

screenplay writer Michael Wilson were all listed among McCarthy's Hollywood Ten.¹ The film is based on a fictional adaptation of a strike waged by International Union Mine, Mill Smelter Workers (IUMMSW), Local 890, against Empire Zinc Corporation and the Grant County government between October 1950 and January 1952. Professor Tabera lectured on the context and significance of the film, as well as the history of the true life events which the film depicts during the 1940s-1950s. It was my first experience hearing someone outside of my family tell the story. Over the years, family members including my grandfather, Cipriano López Montoya, had shared this story. What stood out the most for me in Tabera's lecture was that neither he nor the readings assigned acknowledged my grandparents, Cipriano and Feliciano Peña Ríos Montoya, were both involved in the strike. My grandfather was the president of the Local 890 and my grandmother was the vice president of The Ladies' Auxiliary during the strike. In addition, my grandmother Felicana played a cameo role in the film as Chana Diaz, the wife of a union organizer.

Forty-two years earlier...

My grandmother's life ended on July 8, 1961, at the age of thirty-three at the hands of her husband. When my grandfather murdered her, she left seven children behind, including my father, Porfirio Ríos Montoya. Her murder occurred nine years after the strike. The *Los Angeles Examiner* reported that my grandfather "[K]illed his wife because her devotion to communism unsettled him to the point of homicide. He had testified [that] she opposed religion for her family and kept Communist literature in their

¹*Salt of the Earth*. Film by Herbert Biberman, Paul Jarrico, and Michael Wilson in 1953.

home at 4938 Gambier St.”² A second article in the *Herald Express* commented that my grandfather was,

[D]riven to his deed, the killing of his ex-wife, by Red conspirators who had turned Mrs. Felicia Rio Montoya, 33, into a disciplined member of the Communist Party. ‘She was among the party’s cadre,’ Montoya said. ‘She was not only trying to poison the world with filthy Communist propaganda, she was a threat to the future security of our seven children.’³

The media clearly misrepresented the cause of her death. My grandparents’ position(s) and political activity in the party remain unknown. The media also ignored the fact that my grandmother pled for a divorce a week prior to her murder and that she had filed a restraining order the day before her murder.⁴ The *Herald Express* also falsely reported that they were divorced at the time of her murder.⁵ According to my aunts and uncles, their divorce had not been finalized. My grandmother made the decision to divorce my grandfather after fifteen years of marriage because of my grandfather’s controlling and abusive temper.⁶ Members of my family believe that my grandfather’s abusive disposition was a result of both political hostility and *machismo*. The media, however,

² Author unknown. “Children Say Slain Mother Not a Red.” *Los Angeles Examiner*, 26 August 1961, national ed., Sec. 1, 6.

³ Frank Elmquist. “Slayer of Ex-Wife Blames Red Party.” *Herald Express*, 28 July 1961, national ed. Elmquist misspelled my grandmother’s name. The correct spelling of her name is Feliciano Rios Montoya. In addition, her divorce had not been finalized prior to her murder, according to her daughter Dolores Montoya. She and her brother were the only two children to testify at their father’s trial. She later shared with me, her mother requested a divorce from my grandfather the week prior to her murder and the day before her murder she filed a restraining order.

⁴ Dolores Montoya. Interview by Sonia Melitta Montoya, June 2003.

⁵ Frank Elmquist. “Slayer of Ex-Wife Blames Red Party.” *Herald Express*, 28 July 1961, national ed.

Author unknown. “Bullets Kill Mother of 7; Mate Held.” *Los Angeles Examiner*, 9 July 1961, national ed.

⁶ Montoya Interview.

used their party affiliation to dramatize the murder. My grandfather was convicted of first degree murder on August 28, 1961. The report read, “Cirpiano Montoya, 35, former New Mexico labor leader who testified he killed his wife Felicia, 33, because she was sentenced to life imprisonment by Superior Judge Mark Brandler.”⁷ He served ten years of his life sentence in San Quentin State Penitentiary Prison in California from 1961 to 1971. Further research is needed regarding my grandparents ties with the Communist party and why my grandfather did not serve his full sentence in prison. However, these questions are beyond the scope of my current research project. My grandfather’s actions and conviction further blacklisted my family’s name in Local 890 and the Empire Zinc strike’s history.

Twelve years later...

On October 23, 1983, my father received a phone call from one of his sisters informing him that my grandfather had not shown up for work that morning or returned home that evening. My father, mother, and I were instructed to meet at my *tia* (great aunt) Andy’s home, which was located across the street from my grandfather’s home. Unfortunately, the family had to wait 24 hours before filing a missing person’s report. In the meantime, the family formed small search groups with the hopes of finding my grandfather. I was eight-years-old at the time of my grandfather’s disappearance and lived in Aptos, California with my parents. I remember feeling sad and confused about my grandfather’s disappearance as my father drove the overcast hills of the Santa Cruz Mountains. As we proceeded along Highway 17, questions began circling in my head,

⁷ Author unknown. “Man who Slew Wife for Being Red Gets Life.” *Herald Express*, 7 September 1961,

“What’s happening? Where’s grandpa? What are we doing? Where are we going?” Not knowing whether I should acknowledge my gut feeling that something was terrible wrong, I remained silent staring out the car window. Once we arrived to my *tia*’s home, the smells of Mexican food and *tortillas* permeated the house as relatives mingled with somber facial expressions. My feelings of sadness and fear from the drive over intensified as members of the family greeted us with concern and an optimistic grace. These feelings and expressions drew me closer to my mother’s side as I sought comfort. Throughout the evening family and friends arrived at my *tia* Andy’s home. We waited for word from the search teams, which in the end were unsuccessful.

On the eve of October 24, 1983, police arrived with profound news that would change my family’s lives forever. Two eyewitnesses found my grandfather on the side of Highway 237, slumped over the front steering wheel of his black and white 1976 Dodge van. My grandfather had committed suicide. The police discovered his body with a gunshot wound to the head. No suicide note has ever been found. My family emotionally responded to the news with screams of heartache and pain for the actions my grandfather inflicted upon himself, leaving behind nine children, and ten grandchildren. In a state of shock and confusion, I hugged my mother tightly, crying for my grandfather’s return. Family and friends clutched to each other mourning over a loved man who lead a complex and tragic life unbeknownst to most.

Twenty-two years later...

As I began searching for resources which might document my grandparents’ participation in the Empire Zinc Strike, I found no evidence of their roles and

contributions to the strike. The limited information I have acquired, does not thoroughly nor accurately document their involvement. For example, I discovered a disturbing citation in my preliminary research regarding my grandmother's death. Deborah Silverton Rosenfelt (1952) comments within Wilson's screenplay, "Ironically, Montoya shot and killed his wife several years later when, she became involved with another man."⁸ I found this commentary offensive and insensitive. Rosenfelt does not include a citation for where she obtained her information.

I soon found that my grandparents' identities were not the only one's silenced in the strike's history. The women's delegation, The Ladies' Auxiliary Charter 209, whose actions were instrumental in the workers' victory, have not been extensively documented either. Their role, participation, and union struggles as *mujeres* organized in solidarity with men for worker's rights remains silenced. In the following I provide an historical overview of the mining industry in New Mexico to contextualize the Empire Zinc Strike and the *mujeres*' experiences.

Historical Background of Mining in Grant County

In Grant County, New Mexico, Mexican mine-mill workers faced the same kinds of problems evident elsewhere, including segregation and racial discrimination at work and among their Anglo union brothers. They comprised fifty percent of Grant County's population and ninety percent of the local's membership. Empire Zinc Corporation employed about 130 of the 2,205 miners employed in the county during the early 1950s.⁹

⁸ Rosenfelt, Deborah S. "Commentary." In *Salt of the Earth*, screenplay by Michael Wilson (New York: The Feminist Press, 1953), p. 165.

⁹ Acuña, Rodolfo. *Occupied America: A history of Chicanos, 5th Edition* (California State University at Northridge, 2004), p. 290.

The workers posed a threat to the mining industry in Grant County by forming their union and standing up for their rights.¹⁰ *Mexicanos* joined the union with the hope of obtaining equal rights. Before, Local 890 amalgamated into one collective union it was divided in separate districts (i.e. Bayard, Santa Rita, Hanover, and North Hurley) which weakened their position in filing grievances, negotiations, and obtaining a no-strike clause in their contract.¹¹

In 1949, Local 890 voted to merge all of the separate districts into one collective for improved bargaining power and a stronger negotiating force with management. The organization immediately drafted their contract, including the following grievances and demands: 1) equal pay (also referred to as, “portal-to-portal pay,” “collar-to-collar pay”), remuneration for all time spent doing underground work; 2) equal worker rights to process grievances on the job; 3) worker safety; 4) health benefits; and 5) improved corporate housing and sanitation.¹²

More than half of Local 890’s memberships were *Mexicanos*. But, Anglos filled most of the elected positions. Anglo members were privileged given their race and class standing. As members of the executive board, they handled union business, including negotiations with management. *Mexicanos* found themselves fighting two battles—one for worker equality and the other against racism within their own local. In 1949, a turning point occurred for Local 890 at the IUMMSW Convention in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Executive board members were assigned to represent the membership as delegates for

¹⁰ Cargill, Jack. “Empire and Opposition: The ‘Salt of the Earth’ Strike.” In *Labor in New Mexico*, ed. Robert Kern (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1983), p. 186.

their district and instructed to address issues of racism and leadership within the local. After hours of heated discussion and debate, Anglo delegates agreed to give equal opportunities to the Mexican members on the executive boards.

The union was affiliated with the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) which was connected with the Communist Party. A good number of Local 890 officers were associated with the Communist Party. The management at Empire Zinc looked to this association to discredit the union. Therefore, the management at Empire Zinc assumed the union as a whole was involved with the Communist Party and claimed they used “collective bargaining as a camouflage for their revolutionary aims...for the purpose of violently overthrowing the United States government.”¹³ The attempt by management to discredit the union for its association with the Communist Party was part of a larger strategy against unionism and the CIO during the late 1940s and 1950s. This climate of anti-unionism was supported by unfriendly legislation that included the Taft-Hartley Act of 1947. According to historian Jack Cargill (1983), the Taft-Hartley Act, “denied government certification and protection to unions if officers failed to sign noncommunist affidavits.”¹⁴ Therefore, union leadership who identified as communist kept their political affiliations outside of the union. Later, union members’ affiliation with the Communist Party would be questioned in the federal court. The real issue Empire Zinc needed to address was the union’s demands for social equality as discussed earlier.

¹¹ “[A] no-strike clause in the contract rejected union demand for time on the job to process grievances, refused to keep miners in pairs underground for safety, and kept multiple way classifications for shop workers that involved paying three different rates for the same job” (Cargill, 1983, p. 242).

¹² Ibid., 241-42.

¹³ Ibid., 186.

¹⁴ Ibid., 187.

However, since these demands went unmet for over a year, the Local 890 continued organizing and eventually called for a strike on the job and shut down the mine. In June 1951, Empire Zinc proposed to the local's negotiating committee to end the strike and reopen the mine, presumably with nonunion labor. The company was determined to use strikebreakers to reopen the mine. The union responded by picketing as tensions escalated throughout the month of June. Federal District Judge Archibald W. Marshall issued temporary restraining orders prohibiting Local 890 from picketing.¹⁵ If the men did not abide by the court injunctions, they would face a three-month jail sentence and a \$1,000.00 fine. However, these injunctions did not prohibit women and wives of union men from picketing. This omission provided an opening for *mujeres*' to begin bargaining and negotiating grievances with the local (including their husbands) and the company. A majority of Local 890 members did not agree to allow their wives to walk the picket line due to the dangers they may encounter. IUMMSW representative Bob Hollowwa and Clinton Jencks, an IUMMSW organizer and key figure in creating solidarity between Anglo and Mexican workers, maintained that women were capable of handling the picket line, "Having the women assume control of the picket line would allow Local 890 to circumvent Marshall's decree because his order only prohibited union members from picketing."¹⁶

The Ladies' Auxiliary Charter 209

¹⁵ Ibid., 29.

¹⁶ Ibid.

In the summer of 1948, the women formed a delegation called The Ladies' Auxiliary 209. It was officially chartered in May 1949.¹⁷ Their mission statement noted that the miners' families promoted trade unionism "because they have a special interest in safety, health, compensation, political action, housing, education, and child welfare."¹⁸ Sanitation and health care were the two pressing grievances these women presented to the union. These women not only envisioned a brighter future for their families but for the larger Mexican community of Grant County. The women's delegation was committed to fighting against the exploitation of workers for capitalistic gains in and outside of the home. They were especially interested in escaping "the monotonous routine of housework" and gaining "respect and appreciation accorded to union activists."¹⁹ Their social activism came at a price. *Mujeres'* encountered the same mistreatment by law enforcement as their male counterparts.

On June 15, 1950, Silver City magistrate Judge Andrew Haugland, issued arrest warrants charging six women with resisting arrest and assault and battery.²⁰ The arrests did not intimidate or stop the *mujeres'* from picketing, but rather intensified matters in the months to come. One female picketer was run-over by a deputy car and a scab who was attempting to cross the picket line ran over a male picketer with his truck.²¹ The deputies were paid by Empire Zinc. In one day alone, sixty-four protesters were arrested: forty-five women, seventeen children, and a sixth-month-old infant were jailed in a

¹⁷ Ibid., 203.

¹⁸ Ibid., 203.

¹⁹ Cargill, 204.

²⁰ Ibid., 204-05.

²¹ A *scab* is a strikebreaker, a person who crosses a picket line.

facility that only accommodated twenty-four people.²² Following the arrests, the company commenced a public relations campaign with newspaper advertisements condemning the union for “exposing women and children to the dangers of the picket lines,” and labeling the union as “lawless.”²³ The company gained national exposure and sympathy for the women and children arrested on the picket line.²⁴ The arrests of The Ladies Auxiliary empowered *mujeres*’ to assume a central position in the strike. Virginia Chacón, former president of The Ladies’ Auxiliary recalled the *mujeres*’ position, “We’ll all go together or not at all.”²⁵ Chacón’s statement suggests that the *mujeres*’ were aware of the risks involved in assuming a central position in the labor movement. Singing songs such as, “Solidarity Forever” and “The Union is Our Leader,” vocalized their position on the picket line.

Overview of the Study

In what follows, I first examine the representations in the film *Salt of the Earth*, which depicts an adaptation of the IUMMSW, Local 890 strike against the Empire Zinc Corporation in 1950-1952. I highlight the active role *mujeres* played in the two-year strike, which ended in an historic victory. The formation of The Ladies’ Auxiliary is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 2. Chapter 3 narrates the *mujeres*’ voices as they recall the private consequences of speaking out and challenging the patriarchal hierarchy within Mexican-origin families.

²² Ibid., 207-208. Cargill uses the following sources: *Enterprise*, June 21, 1951; *Daily Press*, June 16, 17, 1951; Minutes, County Commissioners’ Records, Grant County, New Mexico, Book 7 (1946-1952).

²³ Ibid., 204-05.

²⁴ Ibid., 210.

²⁵ Ibid., 33.

In summary, my thesis explores the rise of feminist consciousness among the *mujeres* in The Ladies' Auxiliary, which consisted of Mexican-origin women, the wives and daughters of miners in the Empire Zinc Strike. Using the methodological framework of oral history and feminist ethnography, I conducted interviews with four surviving *mujeres* involved in the strike. This framework informs my analysis of these interviews revealing the following three themes: 1) gender solidarity, 2) cultural identity, and 3) the rise of a Chicana feminist consciousness. Interwoven within each theme, I describe how the *mujeres*' efforts and memories call attention to the intersections of public and private spheres, within labor, family, marriage, and traditional gender roles in Mexican culture.

Chapter 2

Exploring the Ladies' Auxiliary Identity in the Empire Zinc Strike Literature Review

The historical literature I review includes scholarly accounts and adaptation of historical accounts (e.g. in *Salt of the Earth*). Given the limited research examining the involvement of *mujeres* in the Empire Zinc Strike, I first turn to the film, *Salt of the Earth* although it depicts limited narratives of the *mujeres* experiences. Then I turn to scholarly literature in Chicana feminism to inform my methodological framework. The last section of this chapter discusses how Chicana feminism shapes my theoretical approach. What follows is an analysis of *Salt of the Earth*, the most widely cited account of the Empire Zinc Strike.

The Film: *Salt of the Earth*

One text that analyzes *Salt of the Earth* is James J. Lorence's (1999) *The Suppression of Salt of the Earth*. This historian provides a limited contribution to The Ladies' Auxiliary's narratives. Much of Lorence's analysis focuses instead on the making of the film *Salt of the Earth*. Lorence chronologically maps out how the McCarthy era impacted Hollywood filmmakers and actors, especially the *Hollywood Ten* (the filmmakers of *Salt of the Earth* were three of the ten blacklisted filmmakers). He describes the film as, "a record that chronicles a determined effort by socially committed men and women to question the accepted gender and racial relations of their time and to build better lives for themselves and their families through the medium of social conscious unionism."²⁶ Lorence examines the film as a glimpse into the paranoia and fear

²⁶ Ibid., 1-2.

displayed over a perceived communist power structure forming in Hollywood and in labor movements during this time. The author traces the accounts of the filmmakers and actors, as well as former union members “who believed they saw an alternative to the fear and repression that marked Cold War America.”²⁷ He also describes the “labor wars” that emerged in the context of McCarthy’s anti-communism to highlight the connection between Hollywood labor unions and other labor unions. As mentioned above, Lorence falls short in his account of the women’s narratives. In Chapter 3, I build upon Lorence’s findings and the film’s depictions of the women’s narratives through my informants’ stories of their experiences in the strike.

Outside of Lorence’s analysis I offer my own critique of *Salt of the Earth* and its historical role as an adaptation of real life events surrounding the Empire Zinc Strike. The film’s fictional representation of the strike is based on Michael Wilson’s screenplay. The movie was filmed in 1952 and premiered in March 1954. The screenplay, on the other hand, represented Wilson’s research findings during the striking efforts which were based on accounts supplied to him by selected strike participants. At some point, the representations failed to note verifiable information. I do not intend in my study to reexamine the film’s production of historical knowledge, but rather to illustrate how the film’s adaptation of *mujeres’* voices of oppression and feminist consciousness connect to my informants’ testimonies. In addition, has become a single-site of historicity, a primary source in the retelling of the strike. An ongoing examination of *mujeres’* voices of oppression and rise of feminist consciousness accompanies the analysis of narratives in Chapter 3.

²⁷ Ibid., 2.

Exploring Feminist Ethnography

Since an analysis has yet to be conducted among women involved in the Empire Zinc Strike, I look to Kamala Visweswaran's (1994) text, *Fictions of Feminist Ethnography* to inform my methodology. Visweswaran notes that a feminist ethnography can help women locate the potential of their experiences by retelling their life stories. Identifying the potential of their experiences can become a liberating endeavor especially when narrating experiences of oppression.²⁸ To begin locating a woman's self and her experiences of oppression, Visweswaran suggests an analysis of women's relations to men.²⁹ In "Histories of Feminist Ethnography," Visweswaran (1997) suggests, "Different forms of feminism have produced different understandings of gender, where gender itself cannot be separated from the categories of race, class, or sexual identity that determine it."³⁰ This is helpful in my analysis of the experiences of the *mujeres* as they narrate their positions within public and private spheres. Visweswaran argues that feminist ethnography can be defined by questioning the social inequalities between the lives of men, women, and children.³¹ As the *mujeres* began to question the social inequalities they experience in the home they make connections to the inequalities their husbands experience at work (i.e. during union meetings and with their work in the mines).

²⁸ Visweswaran, Kamala. *Fictions of Feminist Ethnography* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), p. 19.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Visweswaran, Kamala. "Histories of Feminist Ethnography," *Annual Review Anthropology* vol. 26 (1997):592.

³¹ Ibid., 593.

Unbeknownst to them, the *mujeres* began employing a Chicana feminist lens in their questioning of inequalities.

Exploring Oral History Through a Feminist Lens

Kristina Minister's (1991) essay, "A Feminist Frame for the Oral History Interview," proves helpful in examining the strike's history from a woman's point of view. Minister suggests that oral narratives help researchers understand how meaning is proposed, modified, and interpreted through signs of verbal and nonverbal communication.³² She proposes, "We will not be able to hear and to interpret what women value if we do not know how to watch and how to listen and how to speak with women as women."³³ Feminist scholars also encourage conversations so that their narrators can also ask questions.³⁴ I discovered that my informants were as interested in my project, my family, and myself. The two-way exchange between informants established trust. In addition, the exchange drew out my narrators' experiences that they had yet to address publicly.

In "Learning to Listen: Interview Techniques and Analyses," the authors, Kathryn Anderson and Dana C. Jack (1991), note, "Oral history interviews provide an invaluable means of generating new insights about women's experiences of themselves in their worlds."³⁵ For Anderson and Jack, oral history provides the narrator with an "opportunity

³² Kristina Minister. "A Feminist Frame for the Oral History Interview," In *Women's Words, The Feminist Practice of Oral History*, ed. Sherna Berger Gluck and Daphne Patai (New York: Routledge, 1991).

³³ *Ibid.*, 31.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 36.

³⁵ Kathryn Anderson and Dana C. Jack. "Learning to Listen: Interview Techniques and Analyses." In *Women's Words, The Feminist Practice of Oral History*, ed. Sherna Berger Gluck and Daphne Patai (New York: Routledge, 1991), 11.

to tell her own story in her own terms.”³⁶ An emphasis on listening becomes important as Anderson reminds oral historians, “to hear what women implied, suggested, and started to say but didn’t. We need to interpret their pauses and, when it happens, their unwillingness or inability to respond.”³⁷ Chicana feminists also call attention to moments of silence. Exploring moments of silence and body language for their intended meaning—what is said, not said, and what is intended—becomes important.

Therefore, when women talk about relationships, the interviewer’s response and methods for probing for more detail “can create an opportunity to talk about how much relationships enriched or diminished life experiences.”³⁸ As aforementioned, verbal and nonverbal cues also communicate meaning. Women use verbal and nonverbal communication to convey their experiences. Researchers must be aware of such expressions to grasp a greater understanding of the experiences of women, including the social conflicts they face in public and private spheres.

The Rise of Chicana Feminist Thought

Anna NietoGomez (1997) states, “When you say you’re Chicana, you mean you come from a particular community...When you say you are a feminist you mean you’re a women who opposes the oppression of not only the group in general, but of women in particular.”³⁹ She outlines the “double standard” of male privilege and female submission. NietoGomez extends her analysis regarding the emergence of Chicana feminists as always maintaining their traditional and cultural roles, “in spite of their

³⁶ Ibid., 11.

³⁷ Ibid., 17.

³⁸ Ibid.

socio-economically oppressive conditions.”⁴⁰ In addition, she claims “Chicana feminism has been calling attention to her socioeconomic oppression as a Chicano and as a woman since 1968.”⁴¹

Chicana scholars acknowledge the triple oppression faced by these *mujeres*, as involving racism, imperialism, and sexism.⁴² This scheme can be used to examine Chicanas’ social and economic oppression within Mexican and Anglo cultures given that the *mujeres* experienced this triple oppression at the hands of their husbands, the Empire Zinc management, and law officials. Yet they continued resilient and strong in their efforts. As mentioned in Chapter 1, the *mujeres* found a loophole in the court injunctions, which prohibited men from walking the picket line, therefore they proposed and won the union vote to enter the strike. Understanding women’s life histories within the context of the Empire Zinc Strike and their gender position within Mexican American culture deepens our understanding of their desire to challenge hegemonic narratives which set them apart from the Anglo women’s movement. In their individual scholarship, Alma García (1997) and bell hooks (1984) explore the development of feminist discourses from margins to center. The basic historical writings García (1997) provides help examine relations between Mexican and Anglo women in the labor movement.⁴³ An ongoing exploration of Chicana feminist thought accompanies the analysis of narratives in Chapter 3.

³⁹ Anna NietoGomez, Anna. “Chicana Feminism.” In *Chicana Feminist Thought: The basic historical writings*, ed. Alma García (New York: Routledge, 1997), 52-53.

⁴⁰ Anna NietoGomez. “La Feminista.” In *Chicana Feminist Thought: The basic historical writings*, ed. Alma García (New York: Routledge, 1997), 87.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Elizabeth Martínez, “La Chicana.” In *Chicana Feminist Thought: The basic historical writings*, ed. Alma García, Vol. 32 (New York: Routledge, 1997).

Finally, this study explores the *mujeres'* roles and participation in the Empire Zinc Strike. What can a feminist frame offer in documenting the power of women's voices that provide a new meaning to unionization, at the same time that they develop their own strategies towards the common cause for the union? The Ladies' Auxiliary informs other social movements by addressing race, gender, and class-based exploitation in a labor movement. The women's experiences in the longest strike in New Mexico's history continue to be told and shown through a limited lens in the depiction of the film *Salt of the Earth*. Therefore, an expanded narrative of their stories is crucial to the retelling of one of the most significant labor movements in Mexican American History and Women's and Gender Studies.

⁴³ hooks, bell. *Feminist theory from margin to center*. Boston: South End Press, 1984.

Chapter 3

Unlocking Mujeres Silenced Voices: The Rise of Chicana Feminist Consciousness

We had won something they would never take away – something I could leave to our children – and they, the salt of the earth, would inherit it.
–Esperanza Quintero⁴⁴

The Mexican American women of Grant County, New Mexico, had hoped that the film *Salt of the Earth* would give voice to their struggle as workers and as women. The film represents an adaptation of real-life events; however, it does not adequately acknowledge the voices of *mujeres* as essential to the victory of the workers in the longest strike in New Mexico's history. The strike involved primarily men at the beginning. But, scholars and Grant County residents also remain uninformed of the extent of the *mujeres* participation in the strike.

In this chapter I will first explain the importance of doing feminist ethnographic work, including oral history interviews among surviving members of The Ladies' Auxiliary, Charter 209. I conducted interviews during three visits to the city of Bayard in Grant County in June 2005 and October 2005. I also attended a commemoration event celebrating Local 890 and the women members of The Ladies' Auxiliary. In addition to attending the event, I reconnected with my family's community roots with the hopes of meeting new informants and interviewees for the project. Second, I will introduce my informants and their histories while also explaining my own connection to the strike and the *mujeres* in it. Then I will show how the *mujeres*' stories expressed in three themes:

⁴⁴ Michael Wilson, *Salt of the Earth*. (New York: The Feminist Press, 1953), p. 90.

gender solidarity, cultural identity, and the rise of a Chicana feminist consciousness and discourse. Each of the themes related to their emerging voices as powerful *mujeres*.

Their oral narratives show how they claimed agency in a new form of unionism. This political work produced different understandings of gender in a struggle of workers seeking to create a better future for their families and for their people, herein noted as Mexicanas/os, Chicanas/os, and Mexican Americans. My main objective is to examine the solidarity that *mujeres* maintained through the lens of Chicana feminist thought, challenging hegemonic paternal hierarchies within the public and private spheres. Secondly, I will attempt to document the power of *mujeres*' voices that provided a new meaning to unionization, at the same time that they developed their own strategies towards the common union cause. I use a feminist ethnography methodology to evoke a "women's point of view" in the history of the strike. As feminist anthropologist Kamala Visweswaran notes, a feminist ethnographic approach does not treat women as a mere subject of identification that conforms to a universal category, but as "the filter through which cultural and racial difference is both apprehended and abstracted from unequal relations of power."⁴⁵ She argues that feminist ethnographic work "foregrounds the question of social inequality vis-à-vis the lives of men, women, and children;" in addition, different forms of feminism (i.e. Chicana feminist thought) provide diverse understandings of gender, "where gender can not be separated from categories of race, class, or sexual identity that determine it."⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Vasweswaran, "Histories of Feminist Ethnography," 605.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 593.

I conducted semi-structured interviews with Mexican-origin women involved in The Ladies' Auxiliary and women who experience the strike as children. They included Lou Martinez a former union organizer and Ladies Auxiliary striker; Mary Lou Chavez, a child striker; Gloria Maya, a child striker and now an art professor at Western New Mexico University; and Patricia Morales Cano, daughter of Joe Morales, child picketer, and currently an associate professor of Chicano Studies at Western New Mexico University. Joe [Morales] was a union organizer who portrayed the union president in the film, *Salt of the Earth*. The participants were tape recorded with their permission in one session interviews in the privacy of their home or office. Each recording period was between one to two hours in length. The *mujeres* were asked to respond to a series of questions in an attempt to draw life stories from their memories. Additional historical data was also secured from photographs, union *newspapers* and records inherited by my family; as well as secondary source that included scholarly publications. Historian Michel-Rolph Trouillot, the author of *Silencing the Past, Power and the Production of History* offers some observations that have been useful in my study in examining the historical data collected.

The Social Process of Historical Production

Trouillot would see my four informants fulfilling different roles in the social process of historical production: 1) as *agents*, or occupants of structural positions; 2) as *actors* in constant interface with a context; and 3) as *subjects*, that is, as voices aware of their vocality.⁴⁷ The workers and their families are *agents* belonging to a class and

⁴⁷ Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past, Power and the Production of History*. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995), 23.

participating in roles associated to their status as workers and people of Mexican-origin. And individually, they are *actors* living a struggle in a specific time and place, “both their existence and their understanding rest fundamentally on historical particulars.”⁴⁸ Trouillot explains that workers as *actors* are *subjects* of an historical event, “There is no way we can describe a strike without making the subjective capacities for the workers a central part of the description.”⁴⁹ In a larger historical context mine-mill strikers in Grant County had a great impact in desegregating their communities and politics at the local and state levels. According to Trouillot, “[P]ower begins at the sources.”⁵⁰ This explains why historians have depended on the men’s narratives the dominant sources in the production of historical knowledge of the Empire Zinc Strike. Historians and the filmmakers, on the other hand, have failed to use *mujeres*’ narratives in the telling of the history. Why is this the case? The *mujeres* narratives are clearly important. They provide a women’s perspective on the events as well as a basis for understanding the inequality in the production of historical knowledge. This study seeks to correct the silencing of the *mujeres* in the Empire Zinc Strike can offer a more complete rendering of the story.

As historical *actors* (i.e. strikers) they were “purposeful subjects aware of their own voices,” who refused to work and demanded negotiations over their grievances. The women’s delegation was seeking “to escape the monotonous routine of housework, they wanted to gain the respect and appreciation accorded to union activist.”⁵¹ *Mujeres* picketed with a purpose and a dedication to gain agency over their gender performance as

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 29.

⁵¹ Cargill, 204.

grassroots feminist activists. Their subjectivity was an integral part of strikes' events. In the following section, I will introduce my informants and discuss their backgrounds, and family connections to the strike. In addition, I will examine the importance of using a feminist lens to examine *mujeres*' oral narratives to better understand their subjectivity in their efforts in the strike.

In Minister's (1991) work, she recommends a feminist approach to interviewing women in order to guarantee their voices. She notes that, "[W]e will not hear what women deem essential to their lives unless we legitimate a female sociocommunication context for the oral history.⁵² The *mujeres* in The Ladies' Auxiliary essentially provide a different perspective and experiences of gender, race, and class. A feminist approach, according to Minister, also prepares us to appreciate the special experiences of women that they communicate in particular ways: "We will not be able to hear and to interpret what women value if we do not know how to watch and how to listen and how to speak with women as women. We first need to know consciously how women do communicate privately and with each other," according to Minister.⁵³ For example, each of my informants shared and described their mothers and the strikers' wives as the main caretakers of the home. Traditionally, Mexican culture have encouraged and socialized *mujeres* to stay home and to work when absolutely necessary for the survival of the family. The *mujeres* recalled their husband or father's as being absent most of time from the home because of his involvement in the union. Using a feminist frame will examine

⁵² Kristina Minister. "A Feminist Frame for the Oral History Interview." In *Women's Words, the feminist practice of oral history*, ed. Sherna Berger Gluck and Daphne Patai (New York: Routledge, 1991), 31-32.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 27-31.

the personal stories and emotions *mujeres*' communicate regarding the absence of the male figure in the family structure and in traditional Mexican cultural.

Introducing the Informants

The *mujeres* of The Ladies' Auxiliary and their daughters also expound on special experiences that include unequal gender relations and they do it in a way that reflects their subjectivities as women in Mexican cultural world. By taking the time to examine the informants' lives will reveal intimate details of their childhood and marriage, and provide context to Mexican women's oppression, and meaning to their accomplishments.

Lou Martinez, for instance, describes herself within the context of her family. She was born into a large family and was raised by her grandparents, saying, "My parents had a lot of children."⁵⁴ Her grandparents migrated from Mexico in search of job opportunities during the railroad boom in the early 1900s. Martinez is a first-generation Mexican American born and raised in Taos, New Mexico, and Spanish is her first language. Her mother and grandmother were housewives, while her father worked in the mines. When Martinez started attending school, she did not understand why speaking Spanish was not permitted in school. When she and other Mexican American children spoke Spanish to each other their teacher's would scream, "*Speak English, speak English!*"⁵⁵ Martinez ended her education at the eighth grade and went to work for her grandfather at their family's farm mill. It was not uncommon for *mujeres* to end their education after sixth or eighth grade. Vicki Ruiz notes in her work *Cannery Women, Cannery Lives* (1987), "Aspirations aside, many young Mexican American women never

⁵⁴ Lou Martinez, interview by Sonia Melitta D. Montoya, 4 October 2005.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

attended high school but took jobs directly after the completion of the eighth grade. Some left earlier because of financial or health crises in their families.”⁵⁶ She and her siblings learned how to work at seven years old. Martinez added:

My grandpa use to have a [farm] mill. We use to go and get water, while he used to grind up wheat, corn, and flour. I use to be there with him all the time. At twelve o’clock in the morning, I had to go shut off the water and he use to wake me up to go with him.⁵⁷

Soon after Martinez turned eighteen years old, her family moved to Grant County. She remembered:

“I got a job as a waitress in Grant. I worked there for a long time till I met my husband Felix [Martinez]. We got married in 1944.”⁵⁸

Felix [Martinez] was twenty-two years old. He began working in the mining industry of Grant County as a teenager. According to Martinez, her husband only had a third grade level education. He lost his job when he attempted to organize a union. Shortly thereafter, Martinez found new employment at the U.S. Mine where he worked till the mine closed down.

In the 1940s, it was difficult for *mujeres* to find employment in Grant County due to racism. Martinez remembered the experience when she and her husband moved to North Hurley, New Mexico in 1945:

⁵⁶ Vicki L. Ruiz. *Cannery Women, Cannery Lives: Mexican women, unionization, and the California food processing industry, 1930-1950* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1987), 13.

⁵⁷ Martinez Interview.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

When we got here, we were just married. We were so disgusted with this place because there was so much discrimination. We would see signs in the bars and everywhere, “NO MEXICANS ALLOWED!” It was bad. Oh, we were so disgusted with this place...When we came here he promised me, he wasn’t going to get involved in the union. So, when he started working at the smelter Kennecott he saw the signs, “NO MEXICANS!” They had separate showers and lunchrooms, everything!⁵⁹

Her husband soon broke his promise. He announced,

“I’m sorry I broke my promise, but I can’t stand it! I’m going to the shop steward and you name it!”⁶⁰

Martinez supported her husband’s decision to organize a union and to fight against segregation. She wanted to return to work, but didn’t have many options due to her level of education. And did not consider returning back to school to obtain her high school diploma, because of her new duties at home as a mother and wife. She expressed her frustration when she remembered an enduring hope among women, as Ruiz (1987) notes, “Despite the lack of encouragement at school, many women had dreams of white-collar careers as actresses, nurses, social workers, teachers, and secretaries.”⁶¹ Martinez eventually found work outside of the home from time to time, which she found enjoyable and empowering. Her wages were lower than her husband’s. Nonetheless, she saw that her earnings as a contributed to the well-being of her home and that it allowed her to work at home.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

My second informant Mary Lou Chavez, her father, and her grandfather Juan Gonzales were strikers who held strong traditional values and maintained corresponding gender roles in their families. For instance, how her father did not allow her mother to participate in the Ladies Auxiliary. Chavez stated:

He's from the old history...You know how men were at that time. I'm surprised that some of those women even participated, because at that time women were not allowed to. They were supposed to stay home and not work. Nothing!⁶²

Chavez grew up in Ferro, New Mexico, as the middle child of three brothers and one older sister. She was first in her family to graduate from high school. Her childhood memories of racism are still fresh. She recalled an insensitive teacher who "didn't let us speak Spanish, she wanted us to speak English only".⁶³ Chavez's childhood illuminates the relations of gender within her family. She hoped for a higher education, but her father did not care.⁶⁴ He believed that a woman's place was in the home, as a homemaker,

"He thought you grow up, you get married have kids and stay home. He didn't believe you should get an education, for what? I didn't want to, so I got my high school diploma because I wanted to go to college."⁶⁵

Sexist ideologies existed among union men in the local, but Chavez remembered her time on the picket line with her father. She recalled:

I use to love to go to the picket line. We didn't go too often, but I use to love it...to me it was like a party because the women there and the men, they'd be

⁶¹ Ruiz, *Cannery Women, Cannery Lives*, 13.

⁶² Mary Lou Chavez, interview by Sonia Melitta D. Montoya, 6 October 2005.

⁶³ Chavez Interview.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

cooking and drinking. They had two picket lines, one on one side of the mine and the other side. We usually went to the one by the bridge...You would think of the hardship that they weren't getting any money, but they really made the best of their situation.⁶⁶

At the age of sixteen of age, Chavez's brothers went to work in the mines and never completed their high school education. At eighteen, they enlisted in the military. When Chavez turned ten, her brothers returned home from war and returned to work in the mines. Her father worked for the Peru Mining Company and Harley Mining.

In the process of rediscovering my family's history through the *mujeres'* narratives, I uncover a part of my own cultural identity. My personal discovery involved a purpose described by Gloria Anzaldúa: "Seeing the Chicana anew in light of her history...I seek new images of identity, new beliefs about ourselves, our humanity and worth no longer in question."⁶⁷ Consequently, my study is also autobiographical, interlocking informants' narratives with my own identity as a Chicana, a feminist scholar, and as a Montoya.

The Present - Commemorating the Past

I began corresponding with archivist David Hays at the Labor Collections at the University of Colorado at Boulder (UCB) Libraries during the summer of 2005. Through a series of emails and a couple of phone conversations, I tried to get a sense of the union archives. In one of my daily correspondences with Mr. Hays, he informed me of a

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands, La Frontera The New Mestiza*. (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1987), 109.

commemorative event taking place in Bayard, New Mexico, during Father's Day weekend:

Seems they thought that a mural celebrating the "Salt of the Earth" strike would heal old community wounds. I wonder if that will work. [The] mural was drawn from images from our collection and is quite striking.⁶⁸

Can a mural project heal "old community wounds" in the Mexican American community in the city of Bayard? Mr. Hays imply the mural project may not be the solution to healing "old wounds" fifty-years ago in the Mexican American community, and alludes to the exploitation of miners and their families by the mining industry. It is necessary to examine the mural to understand the present state of the community, and the ways in which the community is preserving its history. According to my informants Cano and Maya, the Mexican American community, students, and Chicano/a faculty at Western New Mexico University applied pressure on the county and city to acknowledge the 50th year anniversary of the Empire Zinc strike. I would suggest the mural project flourished as a result of community pressure.

Mr. Hays also directed me to an article titled "Solidarity in Paint," in the local newspaper *Desert Exposure*. The article informed readers of the mural's artistic vision and why it was painted on the Bayard Union Hall, Local 890. The artwork was a part of the Youth Mural Arts Project, sponsored by Grant County and Mimbres Region Arts Council, and funded by New Mexico Arts and the National Endowment of the Arts.⁶⁹ In

⁶⁸David Hays, email to author, 9 June 2005.

⁶⁹ David A. Fryxell, "Solidarity in Pain," *Desert Exposure* (June 2005) [online newspaper].

addition, the Southwest Activities Network Society (SWANS) presented the union hall with a \$750 endowment.

Diana Ingalls Leyba founder of Leyba & Ingalls Arts, along with local artist Fred Barraza, conceptualized and spearheaded the mural project. Ingalls Leyba noted that, “When he was going through old photos, Fred found his grandfather in the picket line...”⁷⁰ and was presumably moved to reproduce the event in a mural. She described it as an attempt to capture local history and encourage community to engage its past: “The mural is based on original photos, though of course it’s a composite...By trying to identify the people in it, I also hope we can engage the community in further, to look and guess and figure it out.”⁷¹

After reading the article, I was intrigued and hopeful by Leyba’s vision of the mural’s project reconnecting the community with its past. I phoned her the following day. I introduced myself and informed her of my family connection with Local 890, and identified one of the people painted in the mural, my grandfather. She sounded happy and excited by my phone call, and invited me and my family to commemoration of the mural. My father Porfirio, my aunt Vangie, my cousin Nicki, and I attended the event. My father and I had discussed what we had hoped to come away with. He and I both wanted the organizers and community to acknowledge my grandparent’s leadership and efforts in the strike. In addition, I also had the expectation of meeting women and men who knew both of grandparents.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid.

The speakers at the event included the board members of the Mimbres Region Arts Council, who funded the project, Joe Villalobos, the current president of Local 890's, and Leyba. The organizers used the film *Salt of Earth* to acknowledge the men and women and the worker struggles that they were recognizing. The speakers acknowledged surviving union men and women including, Virginia Chacón, Juan Chacón's sister, and Lou Martinez. The commemoration event introduced me to two of my informants, and additional leads with other *mujeres*. My family, however was not recognized. I felt pride standing among them, but I was disappointed that my grandparents had been excluded. Tears ran down my cheeks as I turned to observe father's response. He appeared composed and nodded his head suggesting he was all right. However, I noticed disappointment and sadness in his eyes as held back his own tears.

We viewed the film followed by the acknowledgements, while family members celebrated and mingled around the hall retelling stories of their past union days. On a back table in the union hall, piles of black and white copies of the original photographs of the strike were spread out for people's viewing. The photographs were provided by the Labor Collections at UCB, and paid by the mural's project fund. The event's organizers encourage family members to identify individuals in the photographs by writing their names on the pictures for the archives at UCB. Families reconnected with their past as they viewed the photographs of their relatives. This underscored their limited knowledge of the archives at the university.

The Film – Salt of the Earth

Cano and her daughter Lupe, a local activist was troubled by the film's depiction of the strike, especially the role attributed to Juan Chacón: "We're always bothered that

people see the movie and they think that Juan Chacón did everything.”⁷² According to them, the leaders served on the executive board of Local 890. They included Cipriano Montoya, president; Ernest Velasquez, vice president; Albert Munoz, financial secretary; Joe Campos, recording secretary; Fred Young, warden-conductor; Juan Chacón, trustee; and Clinton Jencks, IUMMSW organizer. My grandfather did not appear in the film due to union business prioritizing most of his time. According to my grandfather, he was apprehensive toward the film because he didn’t trust the Jewish-Anglo filmmakers would portray the Mexican American community struggles accurately. The filmmakers did not cast him in a lead role due to his unattractive appearance and his role as the union president during production. Therefore, Chacón played the role of the union organizer named Ramón Quintero. But, during the strike Chacón held the trustee position and a year after the strike ended, he became the union president. As noted earlier, the film does not clearly inform the audience of his role, but historians and film scholars have also misunderstood his role in the strike as well. As a result, his lead role in the film and promoting the film around the world representing the union magnified his role and status in Local 890 and in the community.

My fourth informant, Gloria Maya, who is now an art professor at Western New Mexico University, also reflected on the credibility of the historical narrative embedded in the film:

When we talk about “Salt of the Earth,” we really are talking about the filmmakers from outside of New Mexico, who gained an interest about the unionization going on here in this area...If it hadn’t been for the filmmakers it

⁷² Patricia Morales Cano, interview by Sonia Melitta D. Montoya, 7 October 2005.

would have been another oral story, another *queñito*, another oral history...I think they were interested in the unionization of this area, that concept...Those filmmakers probably had never been around Mexican people at any length of time...⁷³

Maya's observation of the film alludes to the filmmakers Wilson, Biberman, and Jarrico's interests lied primarily in the concept of "unionization," due to their political affiliation. In her opinion, if the filmmakers didn't take the time to tell the local's story of unionization, the workers' stories would have been preserved as oral histories. Wilson interviewed the strike participants in a good faith attempt to tell their story. The film however, fails in its distinction. According to Trouillot, "what happened and that which is said to have happened is not always clear."⁷⁴ Cano commented on the boundaries between sociohistorical process and its depiction in the film:

"I think at some point people got on the bandwagon and said, 'I had this role' or something...People have not separated the actual strike from the movie."⁷⁵

She is suggesting, individuals who played a role in the film have continued to play their role in real-life, as well as telling the history of the strike from the film's narrative. What follows is, an examination of the *mujeres*' identities using their narratives to describe the formation of The Ladies' Auxiliary.

⁷³ Gloria Maya, interview by Sonia Melitta D. Montoya, 4 October 2005.

⁷⁴ Trouillot, 3.

⁷⁵ Cano Interview.

Forming My Identity: Chicana Feminist Thought and the Beginnings of The Ladies' Auxiliary

I arrived in Grant County, New Mexico on October 2, 2005. Prior to my arrival I scheduled four interviews that I confirmed upon my arrival. With interview questions in hand, I was ready to set out on my journey to unveil the *mujeres'* stories of the Empire Zinc strike. How will my informants respond? Will they be willing to open up to me and share their life histories? I was prepared and hopeful that my informants would trust and feel comfortable to tell me their life histories. In what follows, I will examine the formation of The Ladies' Auxiliary that led them to question their role(s) in the household and their rise of feminist consciousness in a patriarchal family structure characterized by traditional Mexican culture. The patriarchal structure is one of the major sources of women's oppression. This is evident in the role of the father and husband's power within the home. According to Bernice Rincón (1997), "Women are [considered by traditional Mexican culture] inferior beings, because in submitting, they open themselves up. Their inferiority is constitutional and resides in their sex, their submissiveness..."⁷⁶ Thus, the *mujeres* challenged the men's role by questioning or challenging the patriarchal structure pointing out the men's inadequacies and power regarding the exclusionary practice and their rights in the workers struggle.

Women Challenging the Union

In the late 1940s, forums of *mujeres* development in the Chicano/a community began forming. The Ladies' Auxiliary, Charter 209 was formed in 1948. The auxiliary

⁷⁶ Rincón, Bernice. "La Chicana: Past and Future Roles." In *Chicana Feminist Thought*, ed. Alma M. García (New York: Routledge, 1997). p. 25.

was led by Virginia Chacón, president, my grandmother, vice president as mentioned earlier, and Virginia Jencks, as International Union organizer. The *mujeres* organized a delegation as a result of conversations they were sharing with each other regarding the inequality inherent in their daily household routines. They also began to question why the union did not consider their work at the home in equal terms. The *mujeres* made significant contributions despite the refusal by the men to recognize them. According to NietoGomez (1997), in such situations men reasoned that if “men oppress women it was not the men’s fault but the systems fault.”⁷⁷ The *mujeres* were not accorded the status or treatment granted the male-dominated international union and other mine-mill locals in the county. Ruiz (1998) notes, unionization became an opportunity for women to, “[D]emonstrate their shrewdness and dedication to a common cause. Mexicanas not only followed the organizers’ leads, but also developed strategies of their own.”⁷⁸ The auxiliaries, for example, contributed twenty-four percent of the funds to support the strike benefits.⁷⁹ They contributed motions during the union meetings that called for improved sanitation facilities, including plumbing (i.e. warm/hot running water in homes). The union denied their motions, which expressed their male dominance and control. Rather, the union’s focus was on equal pay and worker rights, the elimination of the “no-strike” clause in their contract, and worker safety. Eventually, the women’s efforts to participate using the delegation as a forum of expression and political platform for equality called attention to their issues of social change for the betterment of their families.

⁷⁷ NietoGomez, “La Feminista,” 87.

⁷⁸ Vicki L. Ruiz. *Out of the Shadows*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 82.

⁷⁹ Cargill, p. 196.

District Judge Archibald W. Marshall granted a temporary court injunction against the union, if the union defied the courts, authorities would have the men arrested and the strike would have been lost.⁸⁰ According to Wilson, the women representatives of The Ladies Auxiliary made the convincing case:

“We have a solution. You have none. Brother Quintero was right when he said we’ll lose fifty years of gains if we lose this strike. Your wives and children too. But this we promise – if women take your places on the picket line, the strike will not be broken, and no scabs will take your jobs.”⁸¹

As a result, the *mujeres* of Grant County entered the picket line against the company. The *mujeres* message of solidarity created a new type of unionism. Elizabeth Martínez (1997) notes the position of solidarity held by Chicanas in a social movement, “We will not win our liberation unless the women move together with the men rather than against them. We must work to convince the men that our struggle will become stronger if women are not limited to a few, special roles.”⁸²

The women’s “[F]eminist consciousness emerged from the struggle for equality with Chicano men and from a reassessment of the role of the family as a means of resistance to oppressive societal conditions,” notes Alma Garcia’s in “The Discourse of Feminist Discourse, 1970-1980” (1989).⁸³ The reassessment of *mujeres* role highlighted their husband’s absence from the home. Cano remembered her father being absent from

⁸⁰ Ibid., 202-03.

⁸¹ Wilson, 52.

⁸² Martínez, Elizabeth. “La Chicana.” In *Chicana Feminist Thought*, ed. Alma M. García (New York: Routledge, 1997), 33.

⁸³ Alma M. Garcia. “The Development of Chicana Feminist Discourse, 1970-1980,” *Gender and Society* 3 (1989): 219.

home most of the time because of his involvement in the union. Her mother gave him an ultimatum. She recalled:

My dad was so involved that he was never home. My youngest brother got sick and ended up in the hospital. My mom gave home an ultimatum. The union is important, but your son is pretty sick, so make a choice...I'm sure it was tuff on marriages back them.⁸⁴

Cano also recalled mother's devotion to her father,

His supper was right there, it didn't matter what hour. My mother never said a word about where he was, nothing! Never questioned...I mean, she was pissed, but she never said a word.⁸⁵

Her mother adheres to the submissive stereotype in Mexican culture. Traditionally, Mexican women were socialized never to question your husband's whereabouts thus reinforced the patriarchal family structure. Therefore, perpetuating sexist behavior and attitudes among the men. The film provides an accurate example, according my informants of the men's attitudes and sexist behavior when *mujeres* began speaking up, proposing their issues to the union. In the following scene, Consuelo, the wife of union organizer Sal Ruíz, stands up to before the local to express *mujeres* initial concern over sanitation:

Sal: Yes? You ladies have an announcement?

Consuelo: Well – it's not an announcement, I guess. The ladies wanted me to...

Voice from the floor: Louder!

Sal: Consuelo, will you speak form over here?

Consuelo: The ladies have been talking about sanitation...and we were thinking...if the issue is equality, like you say it is, then maybe we ought to have

⁸⁴ Cano Interview.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

equality in plumbing too...I mean, maybe it could be a demand...and some of the ladies thought – it might be a good idea to have a ladies auxiliary! Well, we would like to help out...if we can...

Sal: I'm sure I can speak for all of the brothers. We appreciate the ladies offering to help, but it's getting late and I suggest we table it. The chair will entertain [condescending women's proposed motion] a motion to adjourn.

First miner: Move to adjourn!

Second miner: Second!

Sal: So ordered. Why didn't you check with me? It's embarrassing!

Ruth: Why didn't you support her? You're the worst of the lot.

Frank: But Ruth...

Ruth: Or why don't you just put a sign outside? "No dogs or women allowed!"

Charley: But Teresa, you can't push these things too fast.

Teresa: You were pushing all right – pushing us right back in our place.

First miner: That's a pretty good idea – making sanitation one of the demands again.

Ramon: At least you didn't make a fool of yourself – like Consuelo.⁸⁶

The scene reveals how men's the issues and demands superseded *mujeres* in the union, and dismissing the *mujeres'* issues and possible solutions. Excluding *mujeres* from joining the union revealed men's sexism, especially because the men did not acknowledge their wives work and their abilities outside of the home.

The women's delegation to the union, on the other hand, demonstrated an ability that Vicki Ruiz observed in her work *Out of the Shadows* (1998) that women elsewhere integrated the "public and private worlds, worlds in which family and community have been (at least) metaphorically intertwined."⁸⁷ The *mujeres* from Grant County advanced their political agenda by enlisting "the aid of all miners' families to further the principles of trade unionism, because they have a special interest in safety, health, compensation, political action, housing, education, and child welfare."⁸⁸ In addition, the auxiliary also participated in *mutualista* (mutual aid societies), organizations composed of Mexican

⁸⁶ Wilson, 25-27.

⁸⁷ Ruiz. *Out of the Shadows*, 73.

immigrants and Mexican American. Middle-class leaders and working-class members regularly discussed issues related to health care, education and social services.⁸⁹ The *mutualistas* represented a “space between family and community where volunteer work was accepted and respected”⁹⁰ *Mujeres* did their best to provide food, clothing, and a home for them their children during the strike. For example, the local and the auxiliary would organize weekly food rations of flour, beans, rice, potatoes, and sugar, paid utility bills, and issued gas allowances to picketers.⁹¹ Rationings even required some families to hunt for food (i.e. deer meat) in the mountain ranges of Grant County. My aunt Dolores describes family rationing, which required her parents to skipping meals and eating leftovers. She recalled:

Mom would always make sure we were fed first, before her and dad. If there wasn't enough food, mom would eat our leftovers. I remember her skipping meals because we either didn't have enough food or she was rationing food for the week.⁹²

In addition to rationing, preparing and storing food was also essential for the families Cano remembered her family's food preparations:

That's the way my parents were they always had a supply of everything. I remember them talking about how things were during strikes that people would bring something for members...and people would take it...My brother says that

⁸⁸ Cargill, p. 203.

⁸⁹ Ruiz, *Out of the Shadows*, 86-88.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 89.

⁹¹ Cargill, 196.

⁹² Dolores Montoya. Interview by Sonia Melitta Montoya, June 2003.

my dad never took anything because he figured that there were other people that needed it more than us, there were only seven of us kids.⁹³

Along with the preparation of food, *mujeres* provided their children with handmade clothes since they could not afford to purchase any. Chavez recalled that her mother sewed her dresses out of floral cloth flour sacks:

We had one pair of shoes and we all dressed alike. I remember my mom making me dresses out of flour sacks, they were really pretty and came in cloth and pretty designs...My mom would ask me to pick the flowers on the sack of flour and then she'd make me clothes out of that and we were all the same. So, to us it wasn't like we were poor. I didn't consider myself poor."⁹⁴

As a young girl, Chavez had no perception of their family's class standing or the financial struggle her family were faced with. Since, she was not exposed to any other class structures within her mining community. Mexican and Anglo families predominately resided in corporate housing in Bayard. The mining industry created racial divisions in the working class by giving Anglo families better housing conditions than Mexican families. For example, Anglo households had warm running water in their homes, as well as a bathroom in the home. Whereas, Mexican households had no warm water, which *mujeres* had to fetch from a well and chop wood to boil before use, and used an outhouse for their bathroom. Yet, in households *mujeres* were experiencing oppression in their roles as homemakers. In "Gender, Labor History, and Chicano/a

⁹³ Cano Interview.

⁹⁴ Chavez Interview.

Ethnic Identity,” Sarah Deutsch (2002) notes, “Women’s consciousness, like men’s, emerges in a particular context, a particular set of economic and social relations.”⁹⁵ The Ladies’ Auxiliary rise of feminist consciousness emerged as they examined the racial and sexual division in the labor movement, which impacted their families and identity as women. Deutsch also suggests that families adopt different gender social positions in relation to work.⁹⁶ She states that these differences reflect “ideologies of family and gender,” illustrating the split between men’s and women’s labor. ⁹⁷ For example, Martinez daily routine included chopping wood, washing clothes, and other miscellaneous housekeeping duties while her husband worked in the mine. She remembered,

“By the time he would get out, I would already have chopped the wood. We only had a wood stove, a table, and a bed that’s all we had...It was nice, I loved it there.”⁹⁸

Deborah Rosenfelt also observed that *mujeres* of Bayard formed their feminist consciousness during a time of crisis: “[W]omen emerge from their homes to perform work demanding reservoirs of strength, courage, and skill, and sex roles become less clearly defined; in periods of normalcy the ‘old way’ reasserts itself.”⁹⁹ She defines the “old ways” as “the limited options for the women of the strike...miners’ wives, with few opportunities for work outside the home;” the limited opportunities available were in the

⁹⁵ Sarah Deutsch. “Gender, Labor History, and Chicano/a Ethnic Identity.” In *Chicana Leadership*, ed. Yolanda Flores Niemann, Susan H. Armitage, Patricia Hart, and Karen Weathermon. (University of Nebraska Press, 2002), 183.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 181.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁹⁸ Martinez Interview.

⁹⁹ Rosenfelt, “Commentary,” 135.

service industry, such as housecleaning, waitressing, and the kitchen.¹⁰⁰ The women sought to escape their daily routine of housework and wifely duties, they wanted to gain respect in the union from their men, as well as having their demands meet. Martinez remembered the *mujeres* emerging from mining communities from Hurley, Bayard, Silver City, Santa Clara, and Hanover in their response to take over the picket line:

Ah, these ladies! God almighty were all cooperative, because they didn't let the men picket, so we all did it for them...Oh, there were a bunch of ladies!¹⁰¹

They astounded the men once they began organizing, proving their abilities to rally people together to register to vote, which she and others proved otherwise: "We use to have meetings and decided what to do about helping them when they couldn't picket."¹⁰² For example, Martinez understood the importance in voting, which would create better opportunities and changes in the community, and most importantly end segregation within their communities. Their goal was to nominate and vote for a Mexican American representation in Grant County's government. Martinez and other *mujeres* walked house-to-house registering women, and attended union meetings registering men to vote. Martinez recalled:

I use to register people to vote, because people here didn't vote because they were not registered. I use to go house to house. That's bad you know, how in the heck expect for our Chicanos to come up, if they didn't vote! I use to participate whenever I could. I was a union member with all of my heart!¹⁰³

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 136.

¹⁰¹ Martinez Interview.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

Registering people to vote provided another opportunity for *mujeres* to organize and participate in the union efforts for social equality. According to Ruiz (1998), “Mexican women have taken direct action for themselves and others. This claiming of public space has occurred at several levels and with differing trajectories across time and region.”¹⁰⁴ In Ruiz (1998) work on cannery women strikers, she documented Mexican women not standing on the sidelines, “They distributed food, formed picket lines, taunted scabs, and, when attacked by police, fought back.”¹⁰⁵ The Ladies’ Auxiliary members finally picketed against the company. Martinez recalled how *mujeres* maintained their spirits while on the picket line:

Talking, singing, dancing...It was nice, everybody cooperated beautifully. Everybody had something different to talk about. It was nice, I enjoyed it. We went around and around dancing, singing, and eating. [Until] one of the scabs [crossed the picket line]. I think it was a scab or a cop. I don’t remember? He wanted to pass by and break the line, and hit a lady and broke her leg...Consuelo Martínez was her name.¹⁰⁶

Children also participated on the picket lines. This was a tactic intended to gain sympathy from company owners and an agreement in negotiate a settlement.¹⁰⁷ Children acted as lookouts, decoys, messengers and distributors for *The Union Worker* newspaper in the neighboring communities. Chavez described the role of the “lookouts”:

¹⁰⁴ Ruiz, *Out of the Shadows*, p. 73.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 75.

¹⁰⁶ Martinez Interview.

¹⁰⁷ Ruiz, *Out of the Shadows*, p. 81.

The little boys are more adventurous, so they'd go up the hill and tell the picketers with if they saw anybody over there or wherever. And us girls – well, we were curious too."¹⁰⁸

Cano recalled that her brother, Alfred Morales, and other boys were used as decoys for the union:

He was actually a decoy when they were having union meetings, they would drive off in somebody's car and the police would chase them, and the men would go to my dad's house...It's through my brothers that I've learned a lot of thing that actually went on.¹⁰⁹

Unlike Maya, Chavez attended the picket line with parents. She remembered the conversations on the picket line. They spoke about family hardships, barely making ends meat. Although Mary Lou didn't understand the extent of other family's financial struggles, her perception was different as a child. She stated:

In a way, it wasn't too hard for my family. My grandpa had a couple of cows and milk, cause my mom use to milk the cows and [feed the] pigs...He grew corn, carrots, and beans. So, we always had plenty of food. I thought we had everything that we needed, but you know, I never thought about how they were paying utilities...All I knew, I had enough to eat and food on the table.¹¹⁰

Mujeres faced the same kind of police brutality that the men encountered and they resisted in the same fashion. "We would throw rocks at them or whatever. Some of the

¹⁰⁸ Martinez Interview.

¹⁰⁹ Cano Interview.

¹¹⁰ Chavez Interview.

ladies were ‘machas’.”¹¹¹ After several days on the picket line the women took over the picket line, Silver City magistrate judge Andrew Haugland ordered six arrest warrants charging *mujeres* with assault and battery of law enforcement agents, and resisting arrest.¹¹² The intent was to scare *mujeres* into leaving the picket line. Ironically, none of the officers were ordered arrest warrants for assault and battery against the *mujeres*’ picketers. Since the tactic was unsuccessful, the company initiated a public relations campaign that “condemned the union for exposing women and children to the dangers of the picket lines.”¹¹³ This move also failed. Meanwhile, the success of the *mujeres*’ picketers mollified the men who had opposed the women involvement.

Following the sixth arrests, forty-five *mujeres* and seventeen children were arrested. Martínez was among them. Today, she finds humor in her arrest,

“We were asking for [sanitary] pads, just to be mean... We were like sardines.”¹¹⁴ The women and children were jailed for a day, exceeding the jail and courthouse capacity. Outraged by their arrests, *mujeres* resisted their imprisonment by singing songs and yelling protests against the law officials.¹¹⁵ For most *mujeres*, the arrests were their first time in jail as Virginia Chacón recalled that,

I myself didn’t know what a jail was, I didn’t know what it looked like, and of course, we were all nervous in there, after we saw the rest of the women in there, and these paid gunmen registering us, and they said we have a choice of either staying in jail or going back home but just were not allowed to go back to the

¹¹¹ Martínez Interview.

¹¹² Cargill, 204.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 204-205.

¹¹⁴ Martínez Interview.

picket lines. We all responded at the same time we would not go home, we would go back to the picket lines and help our strikers, help our union members. We stayed there all day. We had a very good time. We sang, we played cards, we read, we made all kinds of noise...¹¹⁶

While *mujeres* were in jail, women who were not arrested organized other *mujeres* around Grant County to attend to the picket line in their places. Maintaining the picket line, according to Ruiz (1998) represented “[O]ne way Mexican women claimed a collective public space.”¹¹⁷ The *mujeres* reclaimed their places on the picket line after their release from jail. Reclaiming their public space sent a strong message to Empire Zinc and law enforcement agents that their picket line could not be broke or moved. Ruiz (1998) notes successful union organization claiming public space depends, “In large measure, on a sense of solidarity and community among workers. Effective political and community action requires the intertwining of individual subjectivities within collective goals.”¹¹⁸ *Mujeres* continued to direct their tactics against the *Silver City Daily Press* newspaper to print more statements from the union, and continued to pressure Empire Zinc and law enforcement agents to negotiate. But, Empire Zinc refused to negotiate. As time wore on, tensions began to increase on both sides as well as the violence.

On the third week in August 1951, tragically known as “Bloody 23rd” Grant County witnessed the worst violence. According to Cargill, shortly before 7:00 A.M. on August 23rd law enforcement agents, deputies, and strikebreakers awaited the arrival of

¹¹⁵ Cargill, 208.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 208. Chacón’s statement in *Report of Proceedings – 47th Convention of IUMMSW*, p. 63, *Enterprise*, June 21, 1951.

¹¹⁷ Ruiz, *Out of the Shadows*, 86.

approximately seventy-five women, men, and children to attend the picket line.¹¹⁹ Once they arrived the picketers were met by an entourage of strikebreakers. Words were exchanged on between both sides before the sheriff announced that he would not be able to control the crowd, which abrupt into chaos and violence.¹²⁰ The strikebreakers ran two of their vehicles to a crowd of picketers who formed a human wall, and struck down three women. *Mujeres* continued to fight back, while someone in a truck according to Cargill, “[P]ulled out a .45 pistol and fired five times, the bullets hitting a few feet in front of the approaching crowd,” injuring one person in the leg.¹²¹ News of the violence circulated around Grant County quickly. Hundreds miners and women picketers arrived in Bayard later that day to join the picket line. The union continued to attempt to negotiate with Empire Zinc for the following five months, and in turn were handed contempt charges for each day the picket line blocked the roadway into mine-mill smelter. According to Cargill (1983), without any certain explanation, Empire Zinc suddenly made the decision to negotiate with Local 890.¹²² Unfortunately, The Ladies’ Auxiliary and the women strikers had no role in negotiating the final contract, which *mujeres* fought so hard to become a part of the decision-making process. The final contract was not considered a victory “on paper,” according to Clinton Jencks, but he emphasized the recognition was

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 128.

¹¹⁹ Cargill, 227.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Ibid., 229.

¹²² Ibid., 240-242. According to Cargill, the settlement of the final contract included: “increased hourly pay from forty-eight cents to ninety-eight cents, granted rate readjustments and cost-of-living, the right to negotiate wage rates on new job, a sickness and accident insurance program, a pension plan, a company-paid \$2,500 life insurance policy for each worker, a three week vacation after twenty-five years of service, and the right to use grievance procedures for new workers.”

won by the women and their emergence as new leaders.¹²³ My grandfather Cipriano would agree with Mr. Jencks, he applauded the women's efforts for ending the strike:

In the respect with the women that had it not been for their tenacity, had it not been for their dedication, had it not been for their struggle that we would not had been able to win the struggle of the Empire Zinc strike. I'd like to think that the winning of that strike was done not by the man, but by the women. It was their key role that was the turning point of a new type of unionism within the struggle of the workers.¹²⁴

The *mujeres'* efforts in the Empire Zinc strike illustrate a powerful case of collective identity as activists in a new form of unionism and solidarity. The *mujeres'* resilience and courage exemplified their dedication to seek betterment of their families and community social equality. The *mujeres'* narratives reveal feminist ideals in their process of being politicized, while developing their own strategies and tactics as Chicana feminists and grassroots activists.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴Cipriano R. Montoya. Interviewer and publication/source unknown. Tapes inherited by The Montoya family, 1970s-Early 1980s.

Chapter 4

The Present

In this historical account I have attempted to reconstruct the historical production of The Ladies' Auxiliary in the Empire Zinc's Strike from a feminist perspective. Today, the surviving *mujeres* of the Empire Zinc Strike remember proudly their efforts in a widely celebrated labor movement against the Empire Zinc Corporation, and Grant County government. Speaking up and participating in the strike increased tensions in the homes with their husbands. The Ladies' Auxiliary sought solutions for the betterment of their families and communities in Grant while attending to their household obligations, which was not a simple task due to their second-class treatment. Ruiz notes women strikers' treatment in labor unions:

Mexican women have not fared well in their affiliation with mainstream labor union even though they have contributed much of the people power, perseverance, and activism necessary for successful organization...they typically been denied any meaningful voice in the affairs of the local they had labored so valiantly to build.¹²⁵

On the contrary, The Ladies' Auxiliary refused to be denied a voice due to their gender. *Mujeres* exhibited their ability to form a delegation with Anglo and Mexican women in solidarity, providing a space and events to discuss issues affecting their families, their community, and their role(s) as women in the public and private spheres.

¹²⁵ Ruiz, *Out of the Shadows*, 132.

Mujeres understood fusing the private and public spheres for collective goals to achieve liberation of social equality.¹²⁶

Here I have shared my family connection in the Empire Zinc Strike, which both my grandparents played leadership roles. My grandparents' involvement in the strike initially peaked my interest, in addition, to their voices being silenced in the historical production of the strike due to their tragic deaths. As I began to explore deeper into my family's past, I began to discover how rich and meaningful oral narratives contribute in the retelling of historical events. As I began exploring answers to my questions among family members. I discovered other voices that had been silenced, the voices of *mujeres*. The Ladies' Auxiliary who consisted of Mexican-origin women, the wives and daughters of miners in the Empire Zinc Strike who was once heard was silenced in the retelling of the strike. For *mujeres*, their rise of feminist consciousness and feminist ideals were left undocumented. While the men's narratives have dominated the retelling of the history in a struggle of workers. In addition, this chapter also included the historical background of the mining industry of Grant County and The Ladies' Auxiliary during the 1940s-1950s.

A Chicana feminist lens is necessary to understand the women's voices; such a perspective assists in locating their oppression within the household. In addition, Chicana feminism also contributes to my methodological framework to acquire my findings embedded in *mujeres'* narratives. Women use different forms of communication to convey their experiences and emotions. Therefore, feminist scholars must be aware of the experiences of women, including the social conflicts they face in the public and private spheres during a period of time. Chicana feminist literature identified *mujeres* faced with

¹²⁶ Ibid., 136.

a “double standard” as male privilege and female submission, which The Ladies’ Auxiliary struggled against the union and law officials throughout the strike. Their resilience against the “double standard,” along the triple oppression they faced as well empowered *mujeres* to emerge from their oppression. As mentioned in Chapter 2, examining *mujeres*’ life histories within the context of the Empire Zinc Strike provide different analysis of the gender positions within Mexican American/Chicano/a culture. And deepens our understanding of their desire to challenge hegemonic narratives which set them apart from the Anglo women’s movement.

The women’s voices recall the private consequences of speaking out and challenging the patriarchal hierarchy within Mexican-origin families. In telling the four women’s stories, I explored my own connection to the strike. The *mujeres*’ life stories surfaced three themes: gender solidarity, cultural identity, and the rise of a Chicana feminist consciousness and discourse. In each theme emerged their voices as powerful *mujeres*, I attempted to document that provided a new meaning to unionization. The Ladies’ Auxiliary displayed their abilities with little education training, developing their own strategies toward a common union cause.

The future steps for my research agenda will encompass additional oral history interviews, archival work, and a continued review of historical literature, feminist theory and scholarly accounts of the mining industry and unionization in the Southwest during the 1940s-1950s. In addition, I will continue to present my research at future academic and non-academic conferences for further feedback in a diverse communities. Secondly, I will continue to visit or will live within a mining community of Grant County for an

extended period of time developing relationships among the Mexican American community who are connected to the Empire Zinc Strike. In what follows above, will continue to reconnect me to my family's roots and the Mexican American people in Grant County, with the hopes of formally documenting all of their stories within Grant County and beyond for future Chicana/o generations to be empowered by a legacy of min-mill workers who struggled in one of New Mexico's longest strike in history!

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