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The Manifestation of Total War in the Mexican Revolution.

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Abstract

This manuscript examines the manifestation of total war in the Mexican Revolution and analyzes why such an extreme form of warfare occurred. "Total war" refers to a mass armed conflict that is unrestricted in the weapons used, the territory or combatants involved, and the objectives pursued, as well as involving the complete mobilization of civilian and military resources for the war effort. In the Mexican Revolution, this was expressed in three main aspects: the implementation of excessive force by and against combatants, the perpetration of extreme violence, whether intentionally or unintentionally, against non-combatants, and the appropriation of civilian resources, which damaged civilian livelihood and threatened resource supplies. The essay cites specific examples of these aspects of total war, including the use of chemical warfare, the deliberate murder of civilians by combatants, and the pillaging of civilian property. In analyzing various incidents of the Mexican Revolution, the author determines that there are several reasons for the manifestation of total war. These include the use of heavy weaponry, brutal military tactics, the extended duration of the revolution, and the ideological differences between revolutionary factions.

Introduction

La Decena Trágica, or the "Ten Tragic Days," was a period of extreme violence and wanton destruction that occurred in México City between 9 February and 19 February 1913. This event occurred in the midst of the broader seven-year armed conflict of the Mexican Revolution, specifically during the military coup instigated by counterrevolutionary forces intending to overthrow the reformist-minded government of Francisco I. Madero, leader of the populist revolt in 1910, and then elected president in 1911. As described by a *New York Times* article from 12 February 1913, which covered the third day of violence, "Fleeing citizens cut down. For hours big guns and rapid fires sweep streets of the capital. Witness of the fighting says bodies cover streets where fighting occurred. Shells wreck big buildings […] The food supply in the capital is low. There is no milk or bread to be obtained, owing to the military activity in the city and the outskirts" ("Madero Spurns Offer" 1).

The events depicted in this article provide perfect examples of "total war" in the Mexican Revolution, a conflict not hitherto described in terms of total war proportions. "Total war" refers to a mass armed conflict that is "unrestricted in the weapons used, the territory or combatants involved, or the objectives pursued" ("Total War," *Oxford References*) as well as involving the "complete mobilization of civilian and military resources and manpower [*sic*] for the war effort" ("Total War," *Encyclopedia Britannica*). I describe the manifestation of total war in the Mexican Revolution through three main aspects: the utilization of extreme and unnecessary violence by and against combatants; the perpetration of violence—whether intentional or unintentional—against non-combatants; and the involvement or appropriation of the civilian resource supply for the war effort and the resulting toll it took on resources and civilians.

This analysis will show that the Mexican Revolution should be conceptualized of in terms of its use of total war practices, and therefore provoke larger debates on the historiography of total war and its relation to revolutionary conflicts. World War I has traditionally been conceived of as the first mass armed conflict(s) to constitute total war, largely due to the mobilization of multiple global civilian economies and means of production for the war effort; the extremely high number of casualties inflicted upon both military forces and civilian non-combatants; the use of weapons and strategies intended to exact as much damage as possible upon the opposing force; and the worldwide scale of the conflict of World War I. However, while the Mexican Revolution was not an armed conflict on the *scale* of World War I, I argue that it constitutes an early conflict of total war *proportions*. It shares similar elements of warfare with that war: especially the level of violence enacted on both combatants and non-combatants (between one and two million deaths have been attributed to the direct and indirect damage of the Mexican Revolution), and the appropriation of civilian resources by belligerent forces. I was prompted to ask why the historiography of World War

I has traditionally emphasized the implementation of total war, while that of the Mexican Revolution rarely, if ever, has done so. While this comparison exceeds the constraints of this paper, I hope to establish future opportunities of this kind.

Background

The Hague Convention

The international Hague Convention of 1907 meant to define "the laws and customs of war on land" and bind all signatory nations to adhere to its code of conduct (*Hague*; ch. 4, art. 1). The Hague Convention of 1907 revised the earlier 1899 First Hague Peace Conference, which itself had been used to amend the laws and customs of war established by the Conference of Brussels in 1874 (*International Committee of the Red Cross*). Given that the Mexican Revolution began only three years after the Convention was signed, it became one of the first conflicts in which articles were applied; but the war also exemplifies challenges to the Convention its rules on just warfare. As will be seen, The Hague Convention articles did very little to prevent unjust actions as intended.

Articles One and Two of the Convention define which persons could be considered combatants, stating that if either militia or volunteer corps constituted forces of an army, then they were defined as combatants (*Hague*; ch. 4, art. 1). Additionally, if inhabitants of a territory armed themselves to protect against an invading force, they were considered belligerents (*Hague*; ch. 4, art. 2). Many of the forces in the Mexican Revolution were more or less unofficial armies, and some were composed mainly of conscripted men with little or no official military training. However, both cases provided above by The Hague Convention determine these men to be combatants: either they were considered part of "volunteer" or militia forces and thereby part of official armies, or if they had joined the conflict to protect their homes and families, they were considered active combatants. Therefore, both the federal and the various revolutionary forces in the Mexican Revolution were considered combatants in all cases.

The Hague Convention also defined certain methods of warfare as illegal and unjust, and defined them as actions of total war. These methods included "treacherously" killing or wounding opposing combatants; killing or wounding combatants who have surrendered; using "arms, projectiles, or material calculated to cause unnecessary suffering"; and the "destruction or seizure of the enemy's property" (*Hague*; ch. 4, art. 23). Although what constitutes "treacherous wounding" or "unnecessary suffering" was not specifically defined, there were numerous instances in the Mexican Revolution in which one or more methods of excessive violence occurred. Articles 25, 28, and 46 state that "attacks and bombardments of towns, villages, dwellings, or buildings which are undefended are prohibited," that pillaging under any circumstance is prohibited, and that family rights, human lives, and private

property must be respected and are prohibited from confiscation (*Hague*, ch. 4, art. 25, 28, 46). These articles allude to the forced involvement of civilian life in a conflict; tellingly, they provide rules that were violated in the Mexican Revolution on multiple occasions.

Antecedents to the Mexican Revolution

The Mexican Revolution began on 5 October 1910, with the proclamation of the *Plan de San Luis Potosí* by Francisco I. Madero. Madero delivered the call for revolution with the intent of overthrowing the presidency of Porfirio Díaz, a former general in México's Federal Army who had ruled México almost without interruption for 35 years. Díaz, whose presidency and governmental regime was known as *El Porfiriato*, ruled México as a dictatorship; he instituted extensive economic and political policies that served to exploit the labor of the urban working classes and rural, Indigenous and Mestizo peasantry. These policies benefited México's economic elite and Western imperial interests in the manner typical of the neocolonialism that defined much of Latin American politics and economics at the time. The words of Encarnación Acosta, a *campesino* (peasant) from the northern state of Chihuahua who joined the revolution at the age of 13, embody how Díaz's policies disaffected working-class Mexicans:

> The landlord who oversaw our land would often taunt and debase my father. My father would only take so much of this abuse and tried to defend himself as a human with individual rights. The unfair landlord hit my father for being so outspoken. I ran to defend my father and this cold creature hit me down too. We took our complaint to the officials under Díaz, who, instead of being sympathetic, took our ranch along with the newborn harvest. (Kallas 247)

Cases like these, where wealthy landowners and political officials collaborated in the exploitation and brutalization of *campesinos*, were commonplace during the Porfirian era. Díaz was able to rule unopposed for so long largely because of his use of "carrot-and-stick" measures, negotiating political and economic benefits for political opponents who accepted bribes, while physically or legally coercing those who would not submit to his rule. In doing so, he constructed a highly centralized state designed by Díaz's *científico* (scientific) advisers, who advanced political and economic policies that worked to "modernize" México, establish a middle class, and create a coalition of industry and governmental elites under the banner of "*Porfirismo*," the ideological doctrine of Díaz (Knight 1: 21-22). In addition to heads of industry and government, military leaders also were party to this coalition and ideology, due to Díaz's fame as a general.

Throughout the reign of *El Porfiriato*, various rebellions surfaced, typically originating in northern and central-southern states, and from the rural, peasant, and (often) indigenous

peoples there who held grievances with Díaz's political and economic order. The northern states had a longstanding tradition of autonomy, or at least decentralization from government forces. This, together with histories of Indigenous resistance to Spanish and Mexican conquest (such as the Yaquis from the state of Sonora), as well as the desert and highland geography that favored concealment, all combined to foment rebellion (Knight 1: 115-116). In the south, *hacienda*-style agriculture and land distribution, which favored the wealthy landowning few over the poor and often Indigenous *campesino* masses, was the most significant drive of revolts against the governing forces (Knight 1: 79;82). In response, local and federal government officials called on the Federal Army to suppress these rebellions, frequently implementing brutal measures in doing so. For example, throughout the reign of *El Porfiriato*, the federal government engaged in a series of wars with the aforementioned Yaqui peoples, resulting in numerous recorded massacres of noncombatant Yaqui men, women, and children; this eventually culminated in the forced deportation of 8,000 – 15,000 Yaquis from their home territory in Sonora to southern Mexican states between 1902 and 1908 (Schmall).

This history of political and economic oppression, popular revolt, and harsh military suppression influenced the development of the Mexican Revolution and the emergence of total war through its duration. In the words of Acosta, "I joined [the revolution] more by impulse, outrage, and revenge than patriotism […] While fighting the government soldiers I felt I was fighting against all injustices of all the landowners for their greediness and abuses of the poor" (Kallas 247; 250). Many of those who fought in the revolution did so to end oppressive rule. To accomplish this goal, they would often use any means necessary to ensure that the reign of injustice would end. By this reasoning, one can begin to understand why total war would come to define the Mexican Revolution.

The First Phase of the Mexican Revolution: Popular Uprising

Madero achieved a popular revolution upon the pronouncement and promulgation of his *Plan de San Luis Potosí* in late 1910, primarily gaining his support from *serrano* (mountain-dweller) movements in northern México, like those of Pancho Villa and Pascual Orozco in Chihuahua, which followed the traditions of past rebellions by focusing on enhancing local autonomy, advancing agrarian and economic reform, and combatting the centralization of government propagated under *El Porfiriato*. Madero gained additional support amongst *agrarista* (agrarian reform) movements in the south, like that of Emiliano Zapata, which, while following previous trends, were focused almost exclusively on land reform and achieving greater land repatriation for peasants Knight 1: 169). Madero and those who answered his call succeeded in overthrowing Porfirio Díaz in May 1911, with Madero elected as president of México in the following November election.

The Second Phase of the Revolution: Revolutionaries in Power

Although the second full year of revolution in México saw the advancement of free elections and restoration of constitutional rule that Madero promised in his *Plan de San Luis Potosí*, this progress was marred by growing discontent with his lack of substantial economic and social reform; his inability to commit to either the conservatives or the radicals vying for his support; and his decision to disband the revolutionary groups that helped him achieve power, instead relying on the military leaders and Federal Army that had fought against them during the uprising against Díaz. Thus, numerous rebellions emerged with the intent of overthrowing Madero and assuming control of the Mexican government. One was led by Emiliano Zapata, who turned on Madero in order to continue to fight for expanded agrarian reform. Another was headed by Pascual Orozco, who was discontented with Madero's failure to advance radical policies, and felt that he had received insufficient recognition in helping overthrow Porfirio Díaz. Other, reactionary, revolts were led by various conservative leaders, such as Bernardo Reyes (a former general in Porfirio Díaz's army and one-time political ally of Díaz), and Félix Díaz, Porfirio Díaz's nephew, who desired a return to the "traditional" political and economic order that flourished under *El Porfiriato* (Knight 1: 289-333).

First Aspect of Total War: Loss of Civilian Life

La Decena Trágica and the End of the Revolutionary Government

Widespread civil discontent turned to terrible violence in February 1913 with *La Decena Trágica*. Following failed rebellions in both August and October 1912, respectively, both Reyes and Félix Díaz were aprehended by Federal forces and incarcerated in México City (Knight 1: 481). Due to the continued influence of *Porfirismo* amongst the military and police command, Reyes and Díaz planned and instigated a coup from within prison with the assistance of many of the military forces stationed within the city, primarily those of Generals Manuel Mondragón and Gregorio Ruiz, career military men who served throughout *El Porfiriato* (Knight 1: 481). The coup began on the morning of 9 February, with an attack on the National Palace by a force of rebel Federal soldiers led by Díaz and Reyes. The attack was ultimately a failure, resulting in the death of Reyes and the forced retreat of the remaining rebel Federal forces to La Ciudadela, an old arsenal a mile and a half away from the National Palace (Knight 1: 482). Over the next ten days, much of the fighting would occur in this area. This first battle and the subsequent fighting in *la Decena Trágica* provides instances in which non-combatants were either intentionally or accidentally targeted by the warring factions, as well as supplementary examples of both excessive violence perpetrated by combatants and the destruction of civilian property.

Articles from three different news outlets, as well as historian Alan Knight's *The Mexican Revolution*, are helpful in analyzing the events of *la Decena Trágica*. The first periodical source is the Mexican-based *Regeneración*, created by "los Hermanos Flores Magón," three reporters during the period of *El Porfiriato* who were well known for their their socialist and anarchist beliefs, for their opposition to Porfirian politics, and for their resistance to censorship of the press. The second periodical source is the Mexican-American *La Prensa*, published in San Antonio, Texas which shows a more favorable bias towards the reactionary forces in its coverage of the events. The third periodical is the US-based *New York Times*, which doesn't reveal a clear bias for either side in the conflict (but could potentially hold a more conservative bias, given the US government's support for Porfirio Díaz and the economic interests of American investors and businessmen in México at the time). A *New York Times* article published on 10 February 1913 describes the outbreak of fighting in front of the National Palace on the first day of *la Decena Trágica*, stating that "[i]n this engagement, more than 300 persons were killed. Most of them were non-combatants. A large crowd had gathered around the palace, and into the assemblage both sides fired" ("Army Revolts" 1-2). This version of the events is supported in the article from *La Prensa*, which reported that, "The assaulting troops gave several charges over the crowd that witnessed the fight, resulting in various deaths and injuries […] In the battle that the belligerents sustained in front of the Palace, it is calculated that there were around 200 deaths" ("El epilogo de la gran tragedia revolucionaria parece estar muy cercano" 1). Despite the differences in overall death toll, both accounts are further confirmed in Knight's analysis: "For some ten minutes the Zócalo became a battlefield: Reyes was shot dead along with 400 others, many of them civilian bystanders" (1: 483). These accounts ultimately conclude that both the military rebels under Díaz's command and the Federal soldiers under Madero committed violence against a non-combatant populace, a trend in the warfare that would be repeated in the coming days.

The third day of fighting in *la Decena Trágica* saw combatants continuing to commit acts of violence against non-combatants, this time additionally destroying civilian property. A *New York Times* article covering the fighting noted that during the attack on La Ciudadela, "[h]eavy artillery were used on both sides, and the firing was directed without regard to the non-combatants in the streets or to the property of foreigners. The government losses are heavy. One estimate is over 1,000 killed and wounded [soldiers]. This is probably conservative. The loss among non-combatants is also heavy" ("Madero Spurns Offer" 1). Articles from both *Regeneración* and *La Prensa* further affirm this form of close-quarters combat within the city and the destructive effect it had on civilian life. *Regeneración* states that, "[t]ransformed into crazy [persons], into brutes, the men of the [Federal] army have divided into two bands and, spewing thousands of grenades and cannonballs, have left México City in ruins and murdered thousands of men, women, and children" ("El Gobierno Maderista ha Muerto" 1). Meanwhile,

La Prensa expresses that "[w]ith the bombardment of La Ciudadela, many private residences have been destroyed, causing the deaths of countless persons" ("El Epilogo de la Gran Tragedia Revolucionaria Parece estar Muy Cercano" 1).

These articles could be seen as embellishing their narratives in order to serve either their own biases or the interests of their leadership. However, Knight's description confirms the authenticity of these accounts, noting that "[o]n the morning of 11 February, government forces opened the attack on La Ciudadela with a massive artillery barrage (to which the rebels replied in kind) followed by waves of infantry; there were over 500 casualties, including many civilians" (1: 483). The evidence gleaned from all four accounts indicates that these weren't mere accidental killings of a few non-combatant bystanders, but rather that both the Federal Army and the military rebels under Díaz's command showed explicit disregard for the safety of nearby non-combatants, resulting in the deaths of many innocent people. The deaths of civilians caught in the crossfire provide insight into how the Mexican Revolution would eventually reach conditions of total war, and foreshadowed much of the escalation in violence and brutality that would be seen in the following years.

Due to political dealings between Felix Díaz and General Victoriano Huerta (a high-ranking general during *El Porfiriato* and a known associate of Reyes who had been appointed by Madero to lead the Federal defense during *La Decena Trágica*), as well as continued hostility from the reactionary elements of the Federal Army, Madero's aspirational government was doomed to fail. On 19 February 1913, the 29th Battalion under command of *Porfirista* General Blanquet marched into the National Palace and arrested President Madero and Vice President José María Pino Suárez, ending Madero's term as president and effectively establishing Huerta in his place (Knight 1: 487). Three days later, Madero and Pino Suárez were shot and killed while being transported to the Federal District penitentiary. Although the official report from Huerta's government claimed that rebels attempting to liberate the two attacked the convoy transporting them, and that Madero and Pino Suárez were gunned down while attempting to escape, it is widely believed that Huerta simply had the two executed for posing future threat if left alive ("Huerta Promises" 1). Ultimately though, the revolution did not die with Madero's murder: in the words of Renato Leduc, a Mexican journalist who worked as a telegraphist during the revolution, "[Madero's] death started the real revolution" (Reed ix).

The Third Phase of the Revolution: Civil War

The period of the Mexican Revolution lasting from March 1913 to July 1914 involved a civil war between Huerta's counterrevolutionary Federal Army and the newly emergent Constitutionalist Army, led by a coalition of Venustiano Carranza, Francisco "Pancho" Villa, and Álvaro Obregón. Carranza was the governor of the state of Coahuila, and following the assassination of Madero, he issued his *Plan de Guadalupe* in March 1913, which called for the

deposition of Huerta and the re-establishment of a democratic, constitutionalist government. Carranza was joined by Villa's Division of the North and Obregón, a former rancher who had fought in the rebellions of 1912 and would become arguably the most celebrated military strategist and general in both the Constitutionalist Army and the Mexican Revolution as a whole. Most of the fighting between the Constitutionalists and the Federal Army in this period was concentrated in northern and central México, especially in the states of Chihuahua (Villa's home state), Coahuila, Durango, Aguascalientes, Jalisco, San Luis Potosí, and Guanajuato. This period of the Mexican Revolution is typically characterized as one of the bloodiest phases of the revolution, and for that reason, much of my analysis will be drawn from the events of this period. Specifically, the battles of Gómez Palacio and Zacatecas provide prime examples of how the acceleration toward a year-long civil war led to escalations in the methods and brutality of the combat.

Second Aspect of Total War: Superfluous Violence Between Combatants

The Battles of Gómez Palacio and Zacatecas

Analysis of the Battle of Gómez Palacio, which occurred 22 –26 March 1914 draws from first-hand accounts of the battle. At Gómez Palacio, the Federal forces were able to wield around 10,000 soldiers, while the Constitutionalist forces, commanded by Villa, were likely able to employ between 7,500 and 10,000 soldiers (Knight 2: 143-145). Throughout Reed's account of the battle, two known instances emerge in which Federal forces used poison as an attempt to wound or kill their opponents. The first is described in a conversation between Reed and a general:

> "You see the water from these ditches comes from the river inside the town, so I thought it might be a Federal paper." I took it from his hand. It was a little folded white piece of wet paper, like the corner and front of a package. In large black letters was printed on the front, "*ARSENICO*," and in smaller type, "*Cuidado! Veneno!*" "Arsenic. Beware! Poison!" […] "A good many of the men have had bad cramps in the stomach, and I don't feel altogether well. Just before you came a mule suddenly keeled over and died in that next field, and a horse across the ditch"[…] I explained to him that the Federals had poisoned the ditch. (Reed 234)

Later, Reed notes that "[o]n the very edge of this road, under a bush, was an earthen jar full of milk. 'Poisoned,' [a Constitutionalist soldier] said briefly. 'The first company stationed over

here drank some of that stuff. Four died'"(Reed 238). Article 23 of The Hague Convention expressly states that the employment of poison or poisoned weapons is forbidden, and given that the Federal soldiers, being representatives of the federal government and being thereby bound to its signing of the Convention, committed poisoning, this case represents a clear violation of the Hague Convention and its prohibition of certain types of weapons and agents of warfare (Hague; ch. 4, art. 23). Given that at least four men were killed and many more wounded due to the use of this poison, the intent to grievously wound or kill the opposing belligerents is treated as though it were an acceptable aspect of warfare. Furthermore, given that the soldier in the account states that the water they found poisoned originated from a river inside the town, it can be surmised that a significant portion of the river was poisoned; this suggests the very possible danger of non-combatants consuming the water and suffering harmful effects or even death from its contamination.

The Battle of Gómez Palacio culminated in prolonged attacks for the final two days of the battle on principal locations in the town of Gómez Palacio, known variously as the Lerdo, the Cerro, the Corral, and the cuartel. Reed describes a scene in which Constitutionalist forces advancing on the town were fired on with heavy artillery:

> They were opening upon the little line of climbing men with artillery! The ring of flame was broken now in many places, but it never faltered. Then all at once it seemed to wither completely, and little single fireflies kept dropping down the slope—all that were left […] That night they attacked the Cerro seven times on foot, and at every attack seven-eighths of them were killed." (252)

This condition of warfare violates two of the components of Article 23 of The Hague Convention: the prohibition of murder and treacherous wounding of belligerent forces and the employment of arms, projectiles, or materials intended to cause unnecessary suffering (Hague; ch.4, art. 23). The effective use of artillery by the Federal forces against unshielded combatants represents employment of arms intended to cause superfluous injury and suffering. The added weight of each attacking force suffering the deaths of almost 90% of their men evidences the Federal forces' flagrant attempt to massacre the Constitutionalist opposition. All in all, the Constitutionalists were able to emerge victorious at the Battle of Gomez Palacio, but suffered casualties in the figures of 1,000 men killed and around 2,000 men wounded; this further exemplifies the high stakes and brutality of this phase of the revolution (Reed 254).

The death blow to the Federal army and the end of this phase of the Mexican Revolution came on 23 June 1914, with the bloodiest battle yet: The Battle of Zacatecas. The

battle, which began on 17 June and ended on 23 June, involved over 20,000 Constitutionalist soldiers from Villa's Division of the North and 12,000 Federal soldiers. As Knight describes it,

> at Zacatecas the rebels stoppered every outlet and subjected the fleeing Federals to withering enfilade fire. The defeat became a rout and the rout became a massacre. Maybe 6,000 Federals died: some killed when the public buildings and arsenal were dynamited; some—the officers—who could not escape summary execution […] All told, only a few hundred of the Federal garrison of 12,000 reached Aguascalientes; of the rest, maybe half were killed and half taken prisoner. (2: 168-169)

Knight's description of the Battle of Zacatecas provides several examples of how extreme and unnecessary violence inhered in this phase of the Mexican Revolution. The Constitutionalists' attempt to stop all Federals from escaping and instead to murder them shows that they did not abide by the rule to solely incapacitate the enemy; rather, they attempted to exterminate the Federal army entirely. The casualty statistics for the Federals further support this, as at least 6,000 Federal soldiers were killed in combat, and a further 3,000 were wounded, representing casualties of at least three quarters of the Federal forces stationed at Zacatecas (Knight 2: 168).

Furthermore, the execution of captured Federal officers provides an example of how Constitutionalists violated The Hague Convention's mandate prohibiting the mistreatment of prisoners. Instances exist throughout the revolution where armies, regardless of faction, mistreated and executed prisoners. During the attack on the National Palace in *La Decena Trágica*, fifteen military cadets and General Ruiz were captured and summarily executed by Huerta (Knight 1: 483). Though captured foot soldiers were executed during the first phase of popular revolt, the execution of a high-ranking officer like General Ruiz marked an escalation in the brutality of the treatment of prisoners. This escalation would be seen in the following period of civil war, especially amongst Villa's Division of the North, who were well-known for murdering captured Federal officers in every battle fought against them (Reed 143). The case of Zacatecas, therefore, reflects the rule rather than the exception, and shows how a brand of unjust warfare that emphasized massacring one's enemies and violating the rules of war had become the norm by the end of the first civil war.

The Fourth Phase of the Revolution: A Second Period of Civil War

The Battle of Zacatecas led to the resignation of Huerta as president on 15 July 1914, the arrival of Carranza's and Obregón's Constitutionalist forces in México City in early August (Villa's Division of the North had retired to Chihuahua to protect its home territory), and the signing of the Treaty of Teoloyucán on 13 August, which required the dissolution of the Federal army and transferred the position of national government to the hands of

the Constitutionalists (Knight 2: 169-171). The Convention of Aguascalientes was called to reintroduce constitutional government, involving delegations from Carranza, Obregón, Villa, and Zapata, but quickly broke down due to politicking and differing plans for social and economic reform between the alliances of Carranza and Obregón, and Villa and Zapata. Civil war broke out for a second time in the Mexican Revolution, this time between Zapata's and Villa's Conventionalists and Carranza's and Obregón's Constitutionalists. This phase of civil war lasted from 1915 to 1917, and is characterized as one of the most brutal phases, largely due to the style of the warfare developed between the Constitutionalists and Huerta's regime. By the end of 1916, the Constitutionalists would emerge as the new regime in power, having defeated the Conventionalists, forced Villa and Zapata to convert their forces into smaller guerrilla bands, and ended the period of mass armed conflict.

Third Aspect of Total War: Exploitation of Civilian Resources

The third and final aspect of total war in the Mexican Revolution is the often-coerced involvement of the civilian sphere by different military forces, especially in relation to resources, supplies, and labor force. One of the first large-scale instances in which civilian resources were adversely affected by the fighting in the revolution occurred during the events of *La Decena Trágica*. The article from *La Prensa* covering the events of the third day observed that, after the artillery barrage on La Ciudadela, "[t]he city is found without lighting and a panicked terror overcomes the inhabitants. The electric streetcars don't circulate, and only the ambulances working to collect the dead and injured pass through the streets" ("El epilogo de la gran tragedia revolucionaria parece estar muy cercano" 1). Instances like these are further corroborated by the *New York Times* article from the third day, which noted severe food supply shortages throughout the capital, and Knight's account which stated that "[s]hells were lobbed across the city centre, machine-gun fire raked chic residential and commercial streets. The lamp-posts leaned, and festoons of telegraph wire draped themselves across deserted plazas. Rubble and corpses strewed the streets, and between them dodged 'Buen Tono' vans, acting as makeshift ambulances […] Fresh food became scarce, prices shot up, and some people—it was later said—dined on dog and cat" (1: 484). The failure of the city's electricity, the dwindling food supply, and the loss of other civil services reveal how the strain on civilian resources became a central theme during *la Decena Trágica*, a theme which would be repeated and amplified as time went on and the revolution intensified.

A case from *My Village During the Revolution* describes specific instances in which the factioned armies came into villages and expropriated food supplies: "[t]he Constitutionalists arrived with their almost yellow uniforms, in search of wheat, and they unfortunately found it, put it in sacks, then took it away […] Then came the crude, hated *Zapatistas* in search of corn,

and they unfortunately found it, then carried it away" (Batalla 96). From the beginning of the revolution, it was common practice for armies to seek sustenance as well as lodging from the people whose territory they occupied. This style of accommodation might be coerced through the threat of violence, or might be requested but inadequately compensated with currencies whose use and value depended on the time, place, and person. The appropriation of housing and food supplies occurred throughout the entire period of armed conflict, for various reasons: as a way for an army to impose power and control over those they occupied; as the cost of the army's "protection" of the people against other armed forces; and as the standard material consumption exacted by a large body of transient soldiers. Ultimately, whether Federal or independent, revolutionary or reactionary, all factions of the revolution engaged in the practice of confiscating or inadequately paying for the resources of the regions they occupied.

In addition to food and lodging, transportation, communication, and real estate were also appropriated by Federal and revolutionary forces. By the civil war of 1913-1914, it had become common practice for retreating armies to destroy or impair railroads, telegraph lines, and other methods of transportation. These actions further damaged the ability of the vast majority of the Mexican population to utilize these essential resources, and given the lack of consistent administration and supplies to fix the damages, preventing many citizens from using such resources for months. Reed describes an instance preceding the Battle of Gómez Palacio:

> After an hour of riding we came to a piece of broken track […] It was an old destruction, probably a year old, made when these same Constitutionalists were retreating north in the face of Mercado's Federal army, and we had it all fixed in an hour. Then on again. Sometimes it was a bridge burned out, sometimes a hundred yards of track twisted into grape vines by a chain and a backing engine. (Reed 193)

Cases of intentional destruction like this are noted by Knight and Reed, indicating that these weren't isolated instances, but a standard practice of war that became more and more entrenched as the revolution dragged on.

Examples of more "forceful" forms of expropriation can be seen in the acts of pillaging towns and the theft of personal property, both of which had been expressly prohibited by Articles 28 and 46 of The Hague Convention. Such an instance of pillaging and confiscation of property is exhibited in Edith Henry's memoir *The Death of Frank Henry*. The author recalls the invasion of the town of Zacualpan on the border of the states of Guerrero and Mexico in 1916 by *Zapatistas*. During the invasion, the *Zapatistas* ransacked Henry's house and pillaged both it and the rest of the town. Henry noted that "[t]hey tore off my wedding ring […] They demanded money and our weapons, and with the muzzle of a gun at my head I showed where

the other two guns were, and where my silver teapot and a few other things were hidden" (Henry 99).

Looting occurred throughout the different phases of revolution: at a time when large groups of armed individuals challenged government authority, it is clear how cases like large and small-scale larceny could occur. The pillage of Zacualpan took place in 1916, well into the second civil war between the Constitutionalists and the Conventionalists: by this time, the country had been in armed conflict for six years, and civilians were experiencing more acutely the effects of extended periods of warfare.

Villa's implementation of conscription into his forces in 1916 was one manifestation of this escalation. During the first phase of popular revolt and the period of civil war between Huerta and the Constitutionalists, the revolutionary forces were largely made up of volunteers. During the civil war between the Conventionalists and the Constitutionalists, particularly in the latter days of Villa's continued insurgency following his defeat at Celaya, troops began to be amassed forcibly. The account of Jesús Avila from *Aquellos Años de la Revolución* describes his forced service: "Villa issued a decree in the State of Chihuahua [in 1916]. Every male member of a family was to serve in his troops. I was barely fifteen years old" (qtd. in Kallas 265-266). Additionally, Maria Villasaña Lopez was abducted from her home at the age of 14 in 1916 by *Villista* forces, and her account demonstrates how conscription was experienced by a young woman during the revolution:

> Before they left the area, General Bonilla kidnapped me and another officer took my younger sister from our home. My mother wept and pleaded for them to leave us with her, but not our tears, our panic, or our screams helped at all. I was given a rifle just like the other women […] I did help in washing the wounds of the soldiers and in caring for the sick. Many times we were half naked from making bandages with our clothes. (Kallas 367)

Both Avila's and López's accounts makes it apparent that conscription became a hated condition of the warfare in the Mexican Revolution as it dragged on and as it drained resources, even in terms of human lives and labor.

All in all, the appropriation of civilian resources by the different armies of the revolution occurred in a variety of ways. Certain aspects were present throughout the conflict, while others developed as the tactics used by revolutionaries to achieve order in government became harsher. However, one constant was the effect that this exploitation had on civilians themselves. Although life under *El Porfiriatio* certainly negatively impacted a large percentage of the Mexican population, the years of protracted warfare, increased consumption of resources, and the fear produced by living under constant threat of occupation during the

Mexican Revolution had an increasingly debilitating effect on México's people. By the end of the period of mass armed conflict in 1917, a significant portion of the hundreds of thousands of deaths seen in the revolution could likely be attributed to the increased material, physical, and psychological strain on civilians and civilian resources caused by the developments in war.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the Mexican Revolution exemplifies the concept of total war manifested on multiple levels. Through the examination of the degree of violence used by combatants, the failure to protect non-combatants from harm, and the complete absorption of civilian resources and other areas of life, it becomes apparent that this was an armed conflict unrestricted in its methods of war. Furthermore, as the revolution dragged on, the various factions involved became more and more willing to engage in practices of total war.

There are various reasons as to why the revolution escalated to a conflict of total war proportions, including, as I have demonstrated, the greater implementation of heavier weaponry, more brutal military tactics, and the extended duration of the revolution. However, examining various sources reveals that one of the biggest factors in producing total war in the Revolution was ideological difference: those existing both between revolutionaries and the counterrevolutionary ideology of the federal governments, and between the various revolutionary forces themselves. Once the call for popular rebellion was put forth in 1910, many of the revolutionary forces that answered it did so with the shared belief in their need to overthrow *El Porfiriato*, return the nation to a state of democracy, and end the exploitation of México's *campesinos* and working-class peoples. The first two goals were achieved within the first year of the revolution, but the goal of extensive social and economic reform slipped out of reach once the country saw the return to the *Porfirismo*-style of government following Huerta's overthrow of Madero. Thus, upon entering into civil war with Huerta, the revolutionaries committed themselves to deposing his regime by any means necessary, so as to cancel Madero's mistakes that prevented reform at the national level. On the other side, Huerta viewed the revolutionaries' movement for social and political change as being wholly unfounded, he himself desiring a return to the *Porfirismo* that he believed to be the correct governance and social order for the country. To bring this about, he attempted to crush the revolutionary movement as swiftly and absolutely as possible in order to return civil order to the country. Both parties therefore escalated their methods and measures of warfare to that of total war proportions.

The later civil war between the Constitutionalists and the Conventionalists followed similar lines. The Convention of Aguascalientes in 1914 attempted to unify the various political, social, and economic desires proposed by the numerous revolutionary forces that

composed the Constitutionalists and their allies. The failure of the convention exposed the irreconcilable differences within the revolutionary movement, and prompted a return to warfare that would essentially rehash the conflict played out between Huerta and the Constitutionalists for control of the country (Knight 2: 261-264). Exacerbated further by the increasing popular sense that the revolution was turning into a perpetual war, the revolutionaries reengaged in methods invoking total war in an attempt to seize power as quickly as possible. The escalation in warfare between Villa's Conventionalists and Obregon's Constitutionalists, as well as the rapid revision of the constitution in 1917, demonstrates the Constitutionalists' desire to expedite their version of governmental order and stability (Knight 2: 470). Therefore, ideological differences between the various sides of the revolution largely motivated their engagement in total war methods, with the view that doing so would allow them to prevent the triumph of the opposition's control of Mexican affairs. That being said, other factors certainly contributed to the development of total war, which is a subject that should be further explored in the future.

This essay demonstrates the need for more research devoted to the Mexican Revolution, its military history, and how this conflict affected and was experienced by those who lived through it. Furthermore, greater consideration should be given to the Mexican Revolution and its place in the historiography of the concept of total war. The case of the Mexican Revolution provides an example in which, through contemporary definitions of total warfare, we are able to examine a revolution through the lens of a concept typically only associated with Western wars. Therefore, this concept's scope could be widened to describe other global revolutions or mass armed conflicts, both in the past, and in more contemporary contexts.

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