Women's insertion into the labor force in Mexico: silent, thunderous and unfinished revolutions

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Abstract

Based on Claudia Goldin's analysis of the incorporation of women into the labor market in the United States, this article will study the historical process of women's insertion into the labor market in Mexico. The comparison allows us to contrast Goldin's approach (1990, 2006 and 2021) –with its strong neoclassical components— with other perspectives that consider power relations, the intersectionality of class, ethnicity and gender, as well as structural and institutional factors. It shows that the quiet revolutions of women who decide to continue their studies and build careers are intertwined with thunderous revolutions that seek greater gender equality, although in some cases, such as Mexico, they remain unfinished.

Keywords: gender; labor market; human capital; feminist movements; labor economics.

1. INTRODUCTION

Claudia Goldin, winner of the 2023 Nobel Prize in Economics, used the expression "quiet revolution" to refer to the changes experienced by women in the United States in the 1970s: the rapid increase in their participation in paid work, the growing percentage of female university graduates, the new meanings of their careers and the postponement of the average age of marriage and motherhood (Goldin, 2004 and 2006).

In this article, the main question revolves around whether a similar quiet revolution has taken place in Mexico and what its distinctive characteristics would be. It also investigates the relationship between these stealthy transformations and other much more vocal and noisy ones, such as changes in legislation and feminist movements, which were thunderous revolutions that had an impact on women's rights, labor market dynamics and gender relations in the workplace. The entry of women into paid work in Mexico has a slightly different chronology to that of the United States and stagnated at a much lower level due to several circumstances, in particular greater inequality in the sex-based division of labor and the limitations of care systems. Is Mexico facing an unfinished revolution?

The next section of the text presents the process of women's incorporation into paid work in the United States. The third section analyzes the same process in Mexico, highlighting the differences between the two countries. The fourth section discusses the relationship between gradual increases in schooling and women's entry into the labor force (quiet revolutions) and the social movements that produce ruptures and transformations in legislation, gender

stereotypes and power relations between men and women in households, labor markets and workplaces (thunderous revolutions). This discussion allows us to revisit the criticisms made of Goldin for restricting her analysis to a very specific sector, that of white middle-class American women (Costa, 2000; Small, 2022; Abraham and Kesar, 2023) and, in general, to the human capital approach and neoclassical analyses of the labor market (Becker, 1964; Neffa, 2007; Goldin, 2021). The proposal is therefore to draw on other perspectives that take into consideration the institutional contexts and power relations that affect labor markets (Marx, 1973; North, 2014). We also aim to shift the perspective on women's decisions from mere individual responses to supply and demand to a view that considers them within their historical and social context. This context is embedded in power relations where gender, ethnicity, and social class intersect (Crenshaw, 1991; Collins, 2000). The conclusions outline some public policy challenges in light of the incomplete nature of women's incorporation into paid work in Mexico.

2. THE QUIET REVOLUTION ANALYSED BY CLAUDIA GOLDIN

To describe changes in women's labor force participation during the 20th century in the United States, Claudia Goldin takes as her central idea the quiet revolution (2006), a change in women's career paths that did not occur suddenly or dramatically, but was the result of small, gradual changes over several decades. These transformations occurred during four distinct phases, three of which were evolutionary and one revolutionary. Costa (2000), in addressing this historical perspective, points out that women factory workers paved the way for single office workers, who in turn facilitated the incorporation of married women into the economically active population (EAP), and this change led women to consider building a professional career with extensive training and real opportunities for upward mobility.

During the first stage, in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, most women in the labor market were young and single. They were hired by factories on a piecework basis and in the service sector as domestic and laundry workers. Most of the women employed during this period had only a basic education and came from low-income households. There was also a widespread social stigma against married women who worked, partly because of the nature of factory work, which was dirty, dangerous, repetitive and involved long hours. In contrast, professional women worked as teachers and office workers, jobs that were considered *nice*, i.e., more pleasant, neat, clean, with shorter workdays and, in general, commanding greater respect (Goldin, 1994). From the end of the 19th century, the number of married women in the labor market began to increase. While only 8% of employed women were married in 1890, this percentage rose to 25% in 1930 (Goldin, 2006).

The transition to the second stage was made possible by the increase in demand for administrative and office work, accompanied by the technological change that took place at the beginning of the 20th century and the increase in the number of people graduating from secondary education. These factors, explains Goldin (2006), influenced the decisions of some young women who, before marriage, opted for the pleasant jobs described above, which, however, did not offer them the option of pursuing a career, unlike their male counterparts (Goldin, 2006; Costa, 2000). During the third stage, from 1950 to 1970, the labor force participation of married women continued to increase. Among women aged 35 to 44, it rose from 25% to 46%. This change was accompanied by the creation of the part-time workday. While the percentage of women working less than 35 hours per week was 18% in 1940, by 1960 it had risen to 28%. Likewise, in the social sphere, it became increasingly accepted for married women to form part of the workforce and restrictions on marriage were almost completely eliminated.

Despite these changes, investments that women made in their lives continued to occur outside the workplace, which was still not considered a place for women to pursue a professional career. Many of them had held various jobs

intermittently and the informal education they continued to receive was for if they would ever (as if it were a remote possibility) have to support themselves.

The quiet revolution finally took off in the late 1970s. Goldin (2006) points to a series of indicators (such as age at marriage, university graduation rates, occupational choices and women's expectations regarding their future work and careers, among others), which reflect the three changes that mark this revolutionary shift: horizons, modified identities and decision-making. In relation to these expanded horizons, the author points out that women of this generation began to opt for a university education that provided them with the tools to position themselves in higher-level posts during their careers. Having different expectations from their mothers, they were able to prepare themselves better and invest in their formal education in order to start building a career rather than just thinking about a job. This change can be seen in three aspects: the increase in the number of women enrolled in university; the average age of marriage, which rose from 22 to 25; and the specialization courses they chose, due to the fact that the almost exclusive concentration in typically female occupations, such as those related to education, literature and the home, decreased.

With respect to modified identities, Goldin (2006) points out that this period marked a cultural break when women kept their own surnames (no longer those of their husbands). There were also changes in their appreciation of their work environment, which provided them with satisfaction and where they sought recognition from others, particularly that of their coworkers.

The combination of new horizons and modified identities resulted in changes in the third aspect, related to income and occupations. On the one hand, women entered the world of law, physics, health, academia and management positions; on the other hand, the wage gap narrowed due to changes in the labor market and progress in anti-discrimination laws.

Thus, as women increased their level of education and, therefore, their participation in the labor market, their participation became more valuable than the work they did at home, which led to a series of changes that were correlated with this quiet revolution: an increase in divorce rates linked to women's reduced dependence on their husbands' income and the use of birth control pills, which gave women more decision-making power, as extensively studied by Goldin (Goldin and Katz, 2002).

3. WAS THERE A QUIET REVOLUTION IN MEXICO?

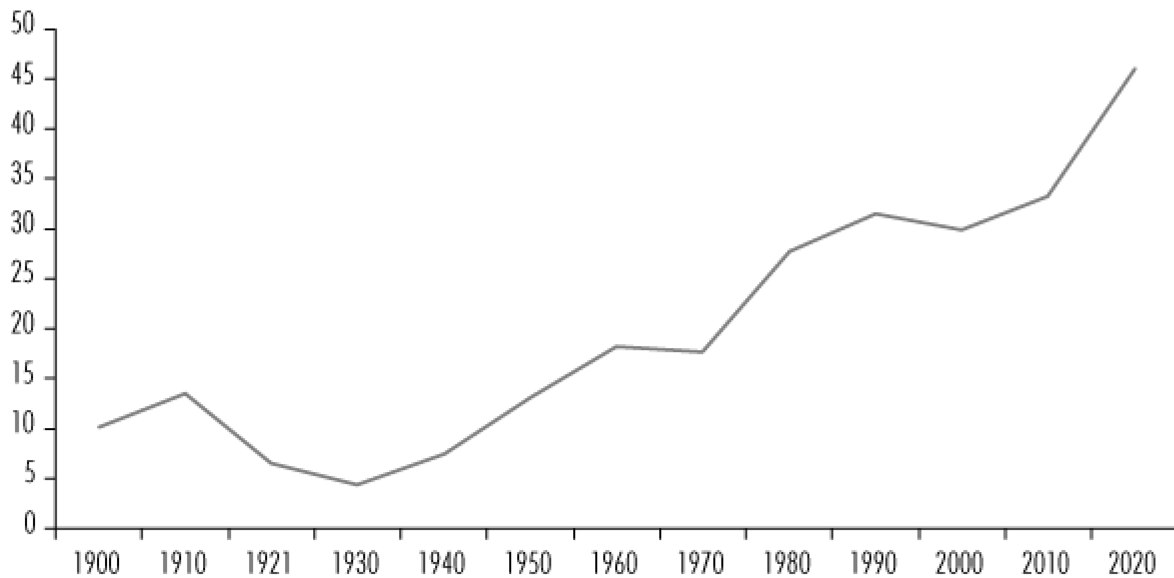
In the United States, women's participation in paid work increased steadily, with very few setbacks. While in 1900, 20% of women of working age were in paid employment, this figure rose to 25% in 1930, 42% in 1970 and 60% by the end of the 20th century (Costa, 2000; Goldin, 1990). But did something similar happen in Mexico?

As can be seen in Figure 1, the proportion of women of working age who were in paid employment rose from 10.1% in 1900 to 46% in 2020. At first glance, it would appear that Mexico experienced a quiet evolution and revolution similar to those studied by Goldin (2006). However, a closer look reveals important differences between the two countries (see Figure 2).

Firstly, Mexico started from a much lower position: while in 1900, 20% of women in the United States had entered the labor market, in Mexico the figure was only 10.1%. At that time, Mexico was a rural and agricultural country with a limited industrial and service economy, while the United States had already undergone a major Industrial Revolution

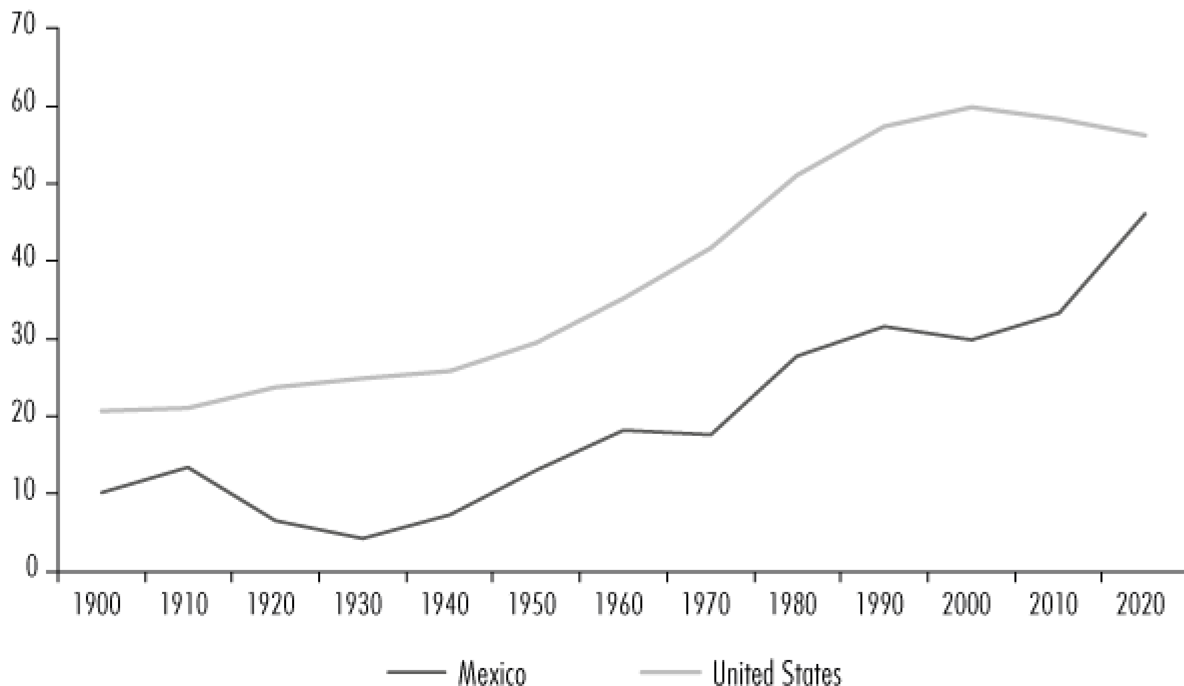
and urbanization process. In 1900, the United States had an urban population of 39.6%, while in Mexico it was only 28.6%.

Figure 1. Percentage of women in the workforce in Mexico (1900–2020)



Source: ENOE (2005-2020), INEGI (1994 and 2014) and Galván (2016).

Figure 2. Percentage of women in the workforce in Mexico and the United States (1900–2020)



Source: Mexico, INEGI (1994 and 2014), Population censuses; United States, United States Census Bureau, "1900 Census Special Reports: Statistics of Women at Work," www.census.gov/library/publications/1907/dec/women-at-work.html. Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development [OECD]: Data Explorer, employment and unemployment by five-year age groups and sex-indicators,

https://bitly.cx/Jkk3 and Federal Reserve Economic Data, Labor force participation rate: women, https://fred.stlouisfed.org/series/LNS11300002.

At the beginning of the 20th century, the distribution of the working population in Mexico was predominantly in agriculture. Almost 70% of the working population was employed in this sector, compared to 18% in industry and 5% in commerce (see Table 1). An economy of this type excluded women: only 10.1% were in paid employment (443,041 out of a total of 4,383,352 women of working age). In many sectors, the workforce was almost exclusively male, accounting for 99.1% of workers in agriculture, 99.5% in mining, 98.7% in transportation and 98.9% in public administration.

Table 1. Distribution of the employed population in Mexico by sector of activity and sex (1900)

Sector of activity	*Men*		*Women*		*Total*
	Absolute	*% of the sector*	*Absolute*	*% of the sector*	
Agriculture	3 148 944	99.1	27 627	0.9	3 176 571
Mining	91 687	99.5	489	0.5	92 176
Industry	492 167	58.5	349 701	41.5	841 868
Transport	62 548	98.7	797	1.3	63 345
Trade	186 117	79.1	49 221	20.9	235 338
Public administration	63 304	98.9	700	1.1	64 004
Liberal professions	26 842	69.2	11 922	30.8	38 764
Not specified	56 014	95.6	2 584	4.4	58 598
Total	4 127 623	90.3	443 041	9.7	4 570 664

Source: INEGI (1900).

In contrast, during the first decades of the 20th century in the United States, there was slow but steady growth in the participation of women in the labor market, while in Mexico their participation in paid work declined between 1910 and 1930 (Cordourier and Gómez, 2004). Zamudio-Sánchez *et al.* (2015) identify three key events that influenced the country's social structure during those years: the Mexican Revolution (1910-1921), an influenza outbreak (1918-1919) and the Cristero War (1926-1929). The impact of these events was reflected in low population growth, high illiteracy rates and low labor force participation among women, which stood at 13.5% in 1910 during the final years of the Porfirio Diaz regime, falling to 6.5% in 1921 and 4.3% in 1930. The crisis of 1929 also drove many women out of the labor market. Thus, the continuous growth of female participation in paid work, which, in the United States, had begun at the end of the 19th century, did not begin in Mexico until the late 1930s: it reached 7.4% in 1940 and 13.1% in 1950, but in that year it barely reached its previous level of 1910.

A central aspect of the quiet revolution described by Goldin (2004) points to the progress in the education of American women, which was very early compared to that of Mexico. In the 19th century, the United States had a high

literacy rate, even higher than that of Europe at the time. By 1920, in some regions, the literacy rate exceeded 70%. In contrast, throughout the 20th century, women in Mexico had lower literacy rates than men (see Table 2).

Table 2. Literacy rates in Mexico by gender, 1890–2020

	% literacy rate of men	*% literacy rate of women*	*Gender gap*
1890	21.4	14.5	6.9
1900	26.5	18.2	8.3
1910	31.8	23.8	8.0
1921	37.0	30.9	6.1
1930	43.3	34.0	9.3
1940	50.0	42.2	7.8
1950	60.4	53.4	7.0
1960	70.5	62.7	7.8
1970	78.2	70.4	7.8
1980	86.2	79.9	6.3
1990	90.4	85.0	5.4
2000	92.6	88.7	3.9
2010	94.4	91.9	2.5
2020	96.1	94.5	1.6

Source: INEGI (1994, 2000, 2010 y 2020).

Between 1895 and 1980, a significant gender gap persisted in terms of literacy: the percentage of literate women was between 6.1% and 9.3% lower than that of men, seriously limiting their possibilities of finding jobs that required reading and writing skills.

By the mid-20th century, a significant proportion of women in the United States had already completed upper secondary or higher education (Goldin, 1998), which meant they were well placed to plan and develop careers in better circumstances. In contrast, during the same period in Mexico, few women had attained these levels of education (see Table 3). In 1940, only a small proportion of the population had access to upper secondary education and, in terms of gender, more men than women did so. In 1950, there were 106,272 people aged 25 and over in Mexico who had completed and passed 13 to 29 years of schooling, of whom 83,487 were men (78.5%) and 22,785 were women (21.4%). This disadvantage in access to upper secondary and higher education was a major constraint on women's entry into well-paid jobs.

Table 3. Enrolment by educational level in Mexico; percentages by gender, selected years

Level of education	1950		2014		2023-2024	
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
Primary	52	48	51	49	51	49
Secondary	56	44	50	50	50	50
High School	58	42	50	50	46	54
Undergraduate	60	40	52	48	46	54
Postgraduate	--	---	47	53	43	57

Source: Lechuga et al. (2017); ANUIES (2015) and Mexican Republic educational statistics, school year 2023-2024 https://planeacion.sep.gob.mx/Doc/estadisticaeindicadores/EstIndEntFed2023/33REPMEX.pdf.

Some studies indicate that the increased participation of women in the workforce in the last decades of the 20th century was related to the decline in real wages beginning in 1977 and the economic recession from 1982 to 1986. Many women decided to enter the workforce not so much (or not only) because of a change in their life prospects, but largely because of the decline in household income (De Oliveira and García, 1990; García and de Oliveira, 1994). The fact that men's incomes were insufficient prompted many Mexican women to enter and remain in the labor market.

Perhaps a sector of these women belonging to the middle and upper-middle classes followed educational and career paths in Mexico similar to those of the US middle classes; in other lower-income sectors, the deterioration of household income may have weighed more heavily. In Mexico, the incorporation of women from lower-income sectors into the labor market was both an act of emancipation and a response to economic pressures resulting from the crises. This is reminiscent of the situation of non-white women (most of them black) in the United States: their labor force participation was very high from the late 19th century (in fact, it remained around 40% between 1890 and 1960) in contrast to that of white women, which was 15% in 1890 and did not exceed 40% until 1970 (Costa, 2000).

But where do women currently stand in terms of labor market participation in Mexico? Despite the progress made in recent decades, women's participation in paid work still faces significant constraints (see Table 4).

Table 4. Employment status of men and women in Mexico (December 2023)

Indicator	*Men*		*Women*	
	Absolute	*Relative*	*Absolute*	*Relative*
A. Labor market participation of people over 15 years of age				
Population aged 15 years and older	47 604 905	100.00	53 843 311	100.00
Economically active population (PEA)	35 815 748	75.2	24 918 104	46.3
Non-economically active population	11 789 157	24.8	28 925 207	53.7
B. Income				
No income received	1 438 413	4.1	1 261 784	5.2
Up to one minimum wage	9 454 092	27.1	9 783 070	40.3
C. Duration of the working day				
Less than 35 hours	5 831 336	16.7	7 703 912	46.5

Source: ENOE (2005-2025), population aged 15 years and older.

In Mexico, only 46.3% of women over the age of 15 form part of the economically active population (PEA), compared to 75.2% of men in the same age group. This figure is nowhere near the labor participation rate for women in developed countries: in 2002, it was 70% in the European Union, 66% in the countries of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), 75% in Australia, 75% in Japan and 77% in Canada.[1] However, this figure is very low even for Latin America and the Caribbean, where the regional average was 57% and some countries were well above that percentage: Jamaica (74%), Peru (70%), Uruguay (70%), Paraguay (63%), Brazil (61%), Argentina (59%) and Chile (58%).[2]

In addition, many women working in Mexico earn very low incomes and work only a few hours. Of these, 5.2% have no income and 40.3% earn up to the minimum wage, which means that almost half of working women (45.5%) do not earn enough to survive. In contrast, only 31.2% of men are in this situation.[3] Furthermore, 34.9% of women work less than 35 hours per week, compared to 19.2% of men. All this data indicates the persistence of a gender gap in terms of the quality of employment in Mexico (Maisterrena, 2024).

In conclusion, compared to what happened in the United States, the incorporation of women into paid work in Mexico began at a lower level (in 1900, only 10.1% of women of working age had entered the labor market, compared to 20% in the United States), was later, suffered a significant setback between 1910 and 1940 and has not even reached half of the female population over the age of 15. It is still 20 or 30 percentage points below that of countries with the highest female labor participation rates.[4] Everything indicates that this is an unfinished revolution.

Previous studies highlight various factors that inhibit or stimulate women's participation in the labor force in Mexico, including the predominantly rural nature of the Mexican economy during the first half of the 20th century (Aguayo and Lamelas, 2011; García and de Oliveira, 1994), low school attendance rates among women (García and de Oliveira,

1994), high marriage rates and the high number of children per woman (García and de Oliveira, 1994; Rendón, 2003). Factors that have contributed to an increase in paid work for women include the rise in rural-urban migration since the middle of the last century and the concomitant expansion of the tertiary sector (Elu, 1977; Pagán and Sánchez, 2000), the increase in years of education in the second half of the 20th century (García and de Oliveira, 1994; López-Acevedo *et al.*, 2021) and the opening up of job opportunities in the export maquiladora assembly industries (García, 2001; Dell, 2005). Another important factor has been the significant decline in the number of children per woman: in 1960, women aged 40 had an average of 4.9 children, a figure that fell to 2.3 in 2020 (Orraca *et al.*, 2023). In addition, there is a qualitative phenomenon of the utmost importance: the persistence of traditional gender roles in families; domestic work is a barrier to entry that partly explains the slow incorporation of women into the labor market (Orraca *et al.*, 2023).

The persistence of traditional gender roles suggests that a gradual increase in urbanization, the service economy, schooling and other similar factors is not enough to significantly increase female labor participation. It is necessary to overcome certain obstacles in the mindsets and power dynamics of gender relations. That is why, in addition to the quiet revolutions pointed out by Goldin (2004), we must consider the thunderous revolutions that can change these patterns.

4. QUIET AND THUNDEROUS REVOLUTIONS: WHAT IS THE CONNECTION BETWEEN THEM?

How can we explain the differences in women's labor market participation in different countries? Why do some quiet revolutions stall? Conventional economics explains differences and stagnation through the behavior of traditional variables: the evolution of supply and demand, economic cycles, the degree of expansion of the tertiary sector and investment in human capital. While these variables are important, a complementary interpretation is proposed. The quiet revolutions in women's work show significant differences when social class, ethnicity and country are taken into account. The theories regarding the labor market and human capital that Goldin uses throughout her work must be complemented by other approaches that take these variables into account, such as for example, intersectionality theories, which show the intertwining of various systems of social differentiation and, in general, the gender perspective, which focuses on power relations both within domestic groups and in the workplace (Crenshaw, 1991; Collins, 2000; Federici, 2013). The behavior of labor markets is conditioned by power relations, institutional dynamics and structural factors that can limit or enhance women's participation in paid work (Marx, 1973; North, 2014). For example, strong stigmas toward women's work, the unequal distribution of work in households and weak national care systems significantly restrict women's career paths. Conversely, their labor participation will increase if sexist prejudices are eroded, if there is greater gender equality in household relationships, if barriers to the hiring and promotion of women are removed in the workplace and if national care systems are strengthened. This is why thunderous revolutions, i.e., social movements, legislative changes and profound institutional transformations that remove obstacles preventing women from entering the non-domestic workforce, are so important. This cannot be achieved solely through the individual actions of women who decide to increase their years of education, delay marriage and childbearing, and pursue long-term careers. Collective action is also needed to transform institutional contexts.

Since the 19th century, significant movements in defense of women's rights have emerged in the United States. Notably, African American women participated in the struggle against slavery in the early part of the century. Around 1848, the Women's Suffrage Movement emerged. In addition to demanding women's right to vote, the movement demanded women's right to education and property. It is impossible to understand the early educational advances

made by women in the United States without considering these social protests. The approval of women's voting rights in 1919 was an important milestone that broke down barriers not only in terms of elections but also in women's participation in public life in general. However, some limitations on the participation of African American women persisted, particularly in some Southern states. The quiet revolution of the 1970s in the United States followed the thunderous emergence of the civil rights and feminist movements of the 1960s. The passage of the Equal Pay Act of 1963 and the Civil Rights Act of 1964 was crucial in opening the door to more job opportunities for women, as were some constitutional amendments related to abortion. Significant changes in the balance of power between men and women in the home also began at that time. Cultural, political and legal barriers that prevented women from entering the workforce and pursuing careers under better conditions were removed. The confluence of the quiet and thunderous revolutions profoundly changed the landscape of women's participation in the U.S. workforce in the second half of the 20th century.

In the case of Mexico, at the end of the 19th century, when some women were able to access education and enter the teaching profession, the first attempts to bring the issue of remuneration for domestic work to the table also emerged, along with the first political unrest in unions such as those of cigarette workers (Teitelbaum and Gutiérrez, 2009). Women played an important role in the Mexican Revolution (1910-1917) and in many other processes of social transformation during the first half of the 20th century. In 1916, the First Feminist Congress was held in Yucatán, demanding the right to vote and equal pay. Feminist expressions emerged in the 1930s in trade unions and the artistic community. During the presidency of General Lázaro Cárdenas (1934-1940), the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate approved a reform of Article 34 of the Constitution to guarantee women's rights to vote and hold elected office, although this reform was never enacted. Rather than a strong women's rights movement, there seemed to be isolated protests, feminist islands in a patriarchal and macho sea. In many cases, women's specific demands were subservient to general political processes. In this context, it is not surprising that gender bias and stigma limited women's entry into paid work (Cordourier and Gómez, 2004).

In 1953, women's suffrage was approved in Mexico, the last country in Latin America to do so. At the time, it was not the result of a strong women's movement, but rather the fulfillment of a campaign promise made by then-President Adolfo Ruiz Cortines, in a context in which many countries had already guaranteed this right. The absence, until that moment, of a truly thunderous women's revolution in Mexico helps to understand the limitations that existed in terms of their incorporation into the education system and the labor market, even in comparison with other Latin American countries.

In the 1960s and 1970s, there were significant and intense social and political movements in Mexico, particularly the student movement of 1968, but also the medical movement of 1966, the formation of guerrilla groups in various parts of the country, struggles for union democracy and peasant and urban-popular movements. During this same period, countercultural youth movements emerged, as in many other parts of the world. Women played a key role in all of these movements, but their participation was often unrecognized and unappreciated. The 1970s saw the beginning of what could be called neo-feminism (Bartra, 2002) or the well-known second wave of feminism in Mexico (Lamas, 2006), which went beyond the struggle for political rights and questioned gender relations in intimate spaces, with a strong critique of macho ideology and practices. These new forms of feminism were crucially important, but in many cases, they were confined to middle-class sectors, despite the enormous popular participation in the movements of the time (Ortiz San Juan, 2019).

The United Nations (UN) declared 1975 as International Women's Year and the First World Conference on Women was held in Mexico. Thus, the issue of gender relations became more prominent on the country's public agenda. This

thunderous revolution opened up new opportunities for women in education, the economy and politics, but the fact that feminist debates did not engage the majority of the population meant that the number of women who chose to pursue long-term careers at that time was small. As already noted, it was in the face of the severe economic crisis of the first half of the 1980s that a higher percentage of women entered paid work, in a context where men's incomes were not sufficient to cover household expenses.

The quiet revolution of the 1970s and 1980s was more profound and permeated a broader sector of the female population in the United States than in Mexico. However, this transformation had similar limits in both countries: at first, it benefited middle- and upper-middle-class women and did very little to integrate working-class women, especially those belonging to marginalized ethnic groups (primarily Black women, but also Latinas and Asian women in the United States and indigenous and mestizo women in Mexico). The intersectionality of class, gender and ethnic inequalities meant that the labor market entry of many women from disadvantaged sectors was very precarious, with low wages, little job stability and adverse working conditions. Many of them had jobs and not careers (in Goldin's terminology), i.e., women's participation in the labor force had not yet shifted toward considering work a fundamental feature of their lives.

The stagnation in women's labor participation in both countries in this century deserves special attention. In the United States, it has remained around 60% in the first quarter of the 21st century. In Mexico, although it increased to 30% in 2000 and 46.3% in 2023, it has not exceeded the 50% barrier. What does this mean? On the one hand, we must take into account the effects of economic crises, which particularly affect women. Various authors also point to another significant factor: inequality in the distribution of domestic and care work, which prevents more women from working, working longer hours or staying in their jobs longer. In Mexico, this imbalance is huge, with women spending more than twice as much time as men on domestic and care work. In 2022, men spent an average of 17.9 hours per week on these activities (6.5 on care work and 11.4 on household chores), while women spent 40.4 hours per week (20 on care work and 20.4 on household chores).[5]

In the United States, the distribution is also quite asymmetrical: in 2018, men spent 25.2 hours per week on domestic and care work, while women worked 39.9 hours per week on these activities, almost 60% more time than men (Hess *et al.*, 2020). The disparity was much greater in Latino, Asian and African American households than in white households (Hess *et al.*, 2020). Women report 5 to 8 times more than men that their employment has been affected by their caregiving responsibilities (Almeida and Salas-Betsch, 2023).

The quiet revolution of women, understood as small molecular actions and individual decisions to devote more years to education, have fewer children, increase labor force participation and build long-range careers, has continued in recent decades in both the United States and Mexico. However, eliminating the obstacles to the dignified integration of women from all social classes into paid work requires something more, probably new collective actions and thunderous revolutions that bring about structural changes and institutional processes that erode both the intersectionality of class, ethnicity and gender inequalities and the gender inequality in the distribution of domestic and care work.

Feminist struggles and mobilizations can influence women's work behaviors in different ways, two of which stand out. On the one hand, social movements change social imaginaries (Cancino, 2011; Castoriadis, 1997). In this case, they can contribute to the removal of symbolic barriers to women's work. On the other hand, social protests can trigger institutional changes that facilitate entry into paid work. What happened in this respect in Mexico? First, during the first seven decades of the 20th century, women participated actively in various social struggles, but specifically

female demands were not at the center of the mobilizations, so stereotypes and cultural barriers that blocked women's job prospects persisted. It was not until the 1970s that feminist movements specifically gained strength, although at first they had little influence on broad sectors of the population: resistance persisted in families to women studying and pursuing long-term careers. It was not until well into the 20th century that the number of women in secondary and higher education increased significantly; before that, most women had little chance of accessing non-precarious jobs that would allow them to have a successful career. To this we must add (and this is probably the main limitation) that the impact of the thunderous revolutions on the Mexican institutional framework has been slower and less profound. Although legal obstacles to women's work have been removed, public care systems are still very weak, making it difficult for many women to enter full-time paid work for long periods. There has been a gap between the intensity of feminist protests and the limited institutional response in terms of creating a care network that includes education, health and care services for children, the elderly, the sick and people with disabilities. This has contributed to the incomplete process of incorporating most women into paid work in Mexico.

A crucial element of this gap between movements and institutions is that, for a long time, government policies did not seek to change traditional gender relations. Tepichin (2012) notes that, prior to the 1970s, public policy actions in Mexico focused on women solely in their reproductive and family roles. Thus, some social programs of the time focused on supporting women's activities as mothers and housewives through the creation of creches, breakfast programs for children, courses in sewing and dressmaking, cooking, childcare and home economics, among others. These actions normalized women's place as mothers and wives, reproducing the traditional gender hierarchy:

> Directing public action toward the incorporation of women into the labor market is not enough to transform the gender hierarchy, which operates with a sex-based division of labor where there is a logic of subordination, in which the characteristics attributed to the sexes determine the sectors and tasks appropriate for men and women. Thus, women transfer their subordinate status in the home and in society to the labor market (Tepichin, 2012, p. 34).

The meticulous historical review carried out by Goldin throughout her work to account for the incorporation of women into paid work in the United States has prompted numerous further studies on the subject in different parts of the world. However, her essentially neoclassical view of the labor market, with its emphasis on the concept of human capital and the individual decisions of actors, may be limited. As the analysis of the Mexican case shows, other perspectives are also needed that take into account structural and institutional factors, as well as class, gender and ethnic inequalities, women's struggles and power relations in the home and workplace. The convergence of quiet and thunderous revolutions is essential if they are not to remain unfinished.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Although there are some similarities with the quiet revolution described by Goldin (2004) for the United States, in Mexico the incorporation of women into the labor market has been a long, rocky process that remains unfinished to this day. Several historical factors have influenced this process: industrialization and urbanization came later, the upheavals caused by the Mexican Revolution slowed the increase in female employment and substantial educational advances for Mexican women did not occur until the second half of the 20th century. Added to this is the disconnect between the demands of feminist movements and government policies, whose programs reproduced traditional gender roles almost until the final decades of the 20th century. Many political and symbolic barriers to the full incorporation of women into the world of work remain, particularly the disadvantages represented by the unequal distribution of domestic and care work.

The fact that Mexico is one of the Latin American countries with the lowest female labor participation rate represents an enormous challenge to meeting the UN's 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), in particular recognizing and valuing unpaid care and domestic work through public services, infrastructure and social protection policies, and ensuring the full and effective participation of women and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life.

The government of President Claudia Sheinbaum has committed to meeting these objectives and has proposed the creation of a National Care System, which is an absolute necessity. One factor that may contribute to its success is that Mexican women have reversed significant disparities in access to education, with gender parity now achieved at the basic education levels and a higher proportion of women than men at the upper secondary, undergraduate and postgraduate levels (see Tables 2 and 3). However, in order to achieve a substantial increase in the participation of Mexican women in paid work, decisive progress must be made in at least three areas.

First, substantial resources must be allocated to the National Care System so that it can move from being a good intention to an efficient network of services that enables women to engage in paid work under better conditions. Second, it is essential that the country undergo a period of growth in which opportunities for decent, well-paid jobs increase for both men and women. Finally, it is necessary to leave behind the timid and conventional gender policies that characterized previous governments, placing women's demands center stage and promoting transformations that contribute to changing gender power relations in families, businesses, labor markets, and government agencies. It will be crucial for women's social movements to make their voices heard loud and clear so that progress in these three areas leads to a quiet revolution comparable to the one Goldin described.

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[1] World Bank, "Tasa de participación laboral, mujeres (% de la población femenina entre 15 y 64 años)", https://datos.bancomundial.org/indicator/SL.TLF.ACTi.FE.ZS.

[2] Idem.

[3] Although the minimum wage in Mexico has increased in recent years, it remains low: MXN$278 per day in 2025, equivalent to USD$14.

[4] Countries with the highest female labor participation rates include Sweden (81%), New Zealand (79%), Finland (79%), Denmark (78%) and Norway (78%).

[5] Information group on Chosen Reproduction (gire), "Horas semanales dedicadas al trabajo no remunerado," https://gire.org.mx/plataforma/trabajo-no-remunerado-mexico/.