

THE FLAG: GENDER AND THE PROJECTION OF NATIONAL PROGRESS
THROUGH GLOBAL AIR TRAVEL, 1920-1960

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By

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FLYING THE FLAG: GENDER AND THE PROJECTION OF NATIONAL
PROGRESS THROUGH GLOBAL AIR TRAVEL, 1920-1960

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

NASM	National Air and Space Museum, Washington, DC
IWASM	International Women's Air and Space Museum, Cleveland, OH
PSD	Passenger Services Department, Pan American Airways

SUMMARY

This dissertation uses a feminist analytical lens to study questions of power and difference in the gendered and racial dynamics of marketing strategies, public relations, and employment within the aviation industry from 1920-1960. Demonstrating that gendered and racial business strategies and views of technology did not develop separately from the aviation industry, this work argues that understanding modern meanings and patterns of commercial air travel requires an examination of how notions of gender, race, and international development determined the course of commercial aviation's development.

My dissertation is divided into two parts that correspond to two main periods in the history of aviation: the inter-war period formation of major commercial aviation firms and the WWII/immediate post-war period of global expansion and the "jet age." The first section argues that women occupied a unique role in commercial aviation's growth as a state project and symbol of national modernity during the inter-war period, while they also challenged the limits of those proscribed roles. This section examines women as symbols of domestication for the technology of flight in the United States, China, and Turkey.

The second section examines commercial aviation's growth and expansion during WWII and the postwar period. This section examines Pan American Airways and Air France as vectors of national political and economic power that worked to: build a brand for their airline based on providing exceptional service, articulate a particularly gendered

corporate vision of sales and service, and promote diplomacy and state interests in international and colonial contexts.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION: AVIATION, GLOBAL INTERCONNECTEDNESS, AND THE TENSIONS OF MODERNITY

“It is not in the flying alone, nor in the places alone, nor alone in the time; but in a peculiar blending of all three, which resulted in a quality of magic—a quality that belongs to fairy tales. It was not that we arrived... by plane, but that three hours of flying had brought us from the modern port...to a place where no white woman had ever been before.”¹

--Anne Morrow Lindbergh, *North to the Orient*

In 1930, Juan Trippe, president of Pan American Airways, enlisted the help of Charles Lindbergh in his airline’s search for a faster, more direct route from the United States to Japan. On July 30, 1931, Charles and his wife Anne Morrow (who served as navigator and radio operator) embarked on a survey flight for Pan Am from New York to Tokyo via the arctic—the fastest, most direct (yet uncharted) route to the “Orient.”² Their trip took them through Canada along the Hudson Bay and the edges of the Arctic Ocean to Alaska, then across the Bering Sea to Siberia and down to Japan then China. Anne Morrow Lindbergh recorded their journey in a book titled *North to the Orient*, which she published in 1935. Through striking prose, Anne Morrow Lindbergh intertwined a technical account of the survey flight to Japan with her own reflections on the experience and meaning of air travel. Throughout her journey, she grappled with

1 Anne Morrow Lindbergh, *North to the Orient*, (New York: Harcourt, Brace and
2 Lindbergh, 253.

changing conceptions of time and space and how her experience with flight shaped her understanding of modern life and her identity as a modern woman.

Marveling at her aircraft's ability to annihilate space through time, she pondered her place within the modern world. "Am I a modern woman? I flew a modern plane and used a modern radio but not as a modern woman's career, only as a wife of a modern man," she puzzled.³ Her travel reflections also centered on the jarring juxtaposition of her modern aircraft with the relatively isolated local cultures she encountered and the relative ease with which they were made accessible by air. Describing the wonder with which local peoples regarded their arrival by plane, Anne explained, "Our modern plane was just a few steps ahead of life at Baker Lake [Canada] and Barrow [Alaska] and Kunashiri [Japan]; and therefore it was marvelous to us as well as to them. One has only to see that chasm between accessibility and isolation—narrow, so one could reach across, but deep as time—to appreciate what can bridge it."⁴ That chasm, as Anne discovered, could be crossed by plane.

Anne's interest in flying developed along with her romantic interest in Lindbergh. The daughter of the US Ambassador to Mexico, Anne met Charles Lindbergh while he was on a goodwill flight to Mexico City in 1927. After graduating from Smith College in 1928, Anne began taking flying lessons at a nearby airport. While her interest in flying had likely been piqued by her meeting with Lindbergh just months after the completion of his famed 1927 trans-Atlantic flight, Anne was like many women of the 1920s with similar education and class backgrounds who were caught up in the frenzy over aviation.

³ Lindbergh, 135.

⁴ Lindbergh, 11.

After marrying Lindbergh in May of 1929, Anne earned her pilot's license and joined Lindbergh on several survey flights contracted by Pan Am, one of these was the 1931 flight to Japan.

Anne Morrow Lindbergh's record of her survey flight to Japan with Lindbergh serves an interesting window into two twentieth century developments: the expansion of commercial aviation, which facilitated the increasing interconnectedness of far flung regions of the globe, and the resulting changes in individuals' experience with modernity and their place within the world. In theorizing the place of technology in shaping cultures and experiences of modernity during the beginning of the twentieth century, Stephen Kern argued in *The Culture of Time and Space* "a series of sweeping changes in technology and culture created distinctive new modes of thinking about and experiencing time and space."⁵ This dissertation argues that analyzing commercial aviation as a technology that fostered such new modes of thinking about modernity reveals new perspectives on modern meanings of gender, the nation, and the corporation.

Thesis and Overview:

Heralded as a cure-all solution for everything from hunger, disease, geographical and political fragmentation, to individual and national isolation, the technology of flight has been steeped in triumphalist narratives of heroism and conquest throughout the twentieth century. In addition to the hagiographic accounts of famous pilots and industrious airline executives, many astute histories of aviation have traced the

⁵ Stephen Kern, *The Culture of Time and Space, 1880-1918*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 1.

development of aviation from a commercial perspective, charting the economic and political elements of aviation's history.⁶ Building on this work, my dissertation uses a feminist analytical lens to study questions of power and difference in the gendered and racial dynamics of marketing strategies, public relations, and employment within the aviation industry. My dissertation argues that gendered and racial business strategies and views of technology did not develop separately from the aviation industry. Rather, my work argues that understanding modern meanings and patterns of commercial air travel requires an examination of how notions of gender, race, and international development determined the course of commercial aviation's development from 1920-1960.

In contrast to histories rooted in a single-nation context, my dissertation examines geographically diverse case studies ranging from Interwar America, China, and Turkey, to the operation of two particularly significant airlines during WWII and the post-war period—Pan American Airways and Air France. My work also makes us reconsider the importance of national cultures of technology, modernity, gender, and business in the development of commercial aviation and its global expansion.

My dissertation is divided into two parts that correspond to two main periods in the history of aviation: the inter-war period formation of major commercial aviation firms and the WWII/immediate post-war period of global expansion and the “jet age.” The first

⁶ Histories of aviation include, but are not limited to: John B. Rae, *Climb to Greatness: The American Aircraft Industry, 1920-1960*, (Mass.: MIT Press, 1968); Tom Crouch, *Wings: A History of Aviation from Kites to the Space Age*, (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2003); Dominick, Pisano, ed., *The Airplane in American Culture*, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 2003); Robert Van der Linden, *The Boeing 247: The First Modern Airliner*, (University of Washington Press, 1991); John W. Ward, “The Meaning of Lindbergh's Flight,” *American Quarterly* 1 (Spring, 1958); Roger Bilstein, *The American Aerospace Industry: From Workshop to Global Enterprise*, (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1996).

section argues that women occupied a unique role in commercial aviation's growth as a state project and symbol of national modernity during the inter-war period, while they also challenged the limits of those proscribed roles. This section charts the coalescing interests of the state, aviation organizations, and firms to transform flight from a daring feat of masculine strength to a safe and reliable mode of mass transport. Chapters one and two emphasize the centrality of women to these efforts. They show how commercial organizations used women as symbols of domestication for the technology of flight in the United States, China, and Turkey. These chapters also trace women's visions of what commercial aviation had to offer for their expanding place in social, political, and economic life during the period. My examination of women pilots in China and Turkey reveals that nations working to establish self-determination in the face of imperialist threats enlisted women in the promotion of aviation in unique ways when compared to the established imperial powers of western Europe and America.

Commercial aviation's rapid global expansion propelled by WWII and the development of jet aircraft largely forms the backdrop for section two of my dissertation. For both the United States and France, commercial aviation served as a new technological and business solution to negotiate a particular moment in late-colonial geopolitical relations.⁷ Pan American Airways and Air France, in particular, represent important case studies because they functioned as national carriers (in both official and unofficial ways) and were vested with exclusive government contracts and financial

⁷ The political exigencies of WWII combined with the advent of more efficient jet aircraft meant that American and French citizens were venturing out into the world by air in ever-increasing numbers and for a variety of different reasons. Individuals traveled as political and diplomatic representatives, as businessmen, as colonial functionaries, as soldiers, and, by the 1950s, increasingly as families and tourists on vacation.

support. This section argues that Pan Am and Air France served as vectors of national political and economic power and worked to: build a brand for their airline based on providing exceptional service, articulate a particularly gendered corporate vision of sales and service, and promote diplomacy and state interests in international and colonial contexts. Just as women were central to domesticating the technology of flight during the inter-war period, commercial airlines turned to women as employees and ideological symbols in order to ease the racial and cultural tensions associated with foreign travel and the mixing of peoples. In advertisements, images of women associated with exotic locales did the ideological work of making destinations seem familiar and safe to prospective travelers.

Drawing on a diverse range of primary sources, including corporate documents, travel guides, employee newsletters, advertisements, and training manuals, this dissertation introduces a new perspective on the development of commercial air travel that emphasizes the gendered and racial dynamics of marketing strategies, public relations, and employment. Much of the primary source material for this study was collected at the corporate archives of Pan American Airways and Air France. While corporate archives generally present a challenge for the researcher, given business concerns with limiting access to particular materials for varying reasons, the archives of Pan Am and Air France were exceptional in their openness. Because Pan Am is not currently in operation (having dissolved in 1991), their archives are housed at the University of Miami's library and are completely open to researchers. Air France's historical archives are maintained separately from the company and are overseen by the Musée Air France in Paris, France. Although the archives do not contain much in the

way of high-level internal company communication, they contain a rich collection of material relating to Air France's history and are open to researchers with no restrictions.

The difficulty of mastering a variety of languages represents a clear challenge posed by writing such a global history of aviation. For the sources collected in France, I have performed the translation work myself. For the chapters that examine aviation in Turkey and China, I rely largely on English and French-language primary sources as well as secondary sources. As such, my primary contribution with these materials lies in my analysis and in the novel ways in which I bring the seemingly disparate stories into conversation with one another through my theoretical framing.

Formulating a Global Case-Study Approach:

My dissertation uses a case study approach to examine the gendered dimensions of the commercial aviation industry throughout the period of my study. This dissertation draws on a large body of scholarship that has traced the history of commercial aviation from the perspective of technological, legislative, and economic developments within the industry. This scholarship serves as a useful context within which to position my work. Rather than telling a history of commercial aviation through the lens of one company or a single group of actors, my dissertation's case study approach dives deeply into particular moments in time during which state interests, commercial interests, and individual women's interests coalesced at crucial junctures in commercial aviation's development. These moments reveal a set of historical questions that drive my dissertation: How has aviation functioned as a state modernization project during the twentieth century; In what ways have such national technological projects enlisted women as representatives and

participants; How have state interests influenced aviation's commercial development; How do women as employees of airlines represent national and corporate interests to its customers? My dissertation looks beyond the single-nation context to tell a history of gender and commercial aviation from a global perspective. My dissertation's global case study approach argues that examining seemingly disparate geographical contexts alongside of one another reveals novel perspectives on common themes or crucial differences.

Taking a global approach, however, does not imply that the nation is not an important unit of analysis in my study. Historians have leveled critiques against global approaches to historical inquiry, charging that such analyses largely dismiss the state as an important actor in the new globalized world.⁸ Introduced as a corrective to global history, transnational history has emerged as a useful analytical framework that emphasizes the nation as a category of analysis, while also stressing its international connectedness through tracing the movement of people, ideas, capital, etc. across national borders. The work of historians writing transnational history such as Emily Rosenberg's *Transnational Currents in a Shrinking World, 1870-1945*, provide useful analytical concepts for my study of commercial aviation and gender from a global perspective.⁹ Rosenberg's explanation of transnational networks is specifically useful for my

⁸ Partha, Chatterjee, "Beyond the Nation? Or Within?" *Economic and Political Weekly* 32, no. 1/2 (1997): 30-34; Geyer and Bright, "World History in a Global Age," *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 100, No. 4, (October 1995) pp. 1034-1060.

⁹ Emily Rosenberg, *Transnational Currents in a Shrinking World, 1870-1945* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2012).

understanding of aviation's place as a national project within broadening global networks.¹⁰

My dissertation is primarily concerned with examining the ways various nations interact with and participate in the construction of global concepts such as modernity and progress. Or put differently, my work argues that universalizing concepts such as modernity and feminism are rooted in specific national contexts, drawn into conversation by various political, economic, and technological systems. Rather than ignoring the nation, my global approach to the study of gender and aviation argues that aviation emerged as an important state project serving various national interests as it simultaneously fostered global and national connections.¹¹ This examination of commercial aviation's emergence as a global transportation network centers on the tension posed between national interests and global interconnectedness. Adding to histories that examine the importance of "the local" in the ideological production of "the global," my work argues that states and corporations developed specifically gendered

¹⁰ I find Rosenberg's explanation of transnational networks on page six of particular use: "Transnational networks developed not necessarily in opposition to the hardening of boundaries of nationalism or empire, or as a stage of progress beyond them, but sometimes as counterparts to state and empire building. At the same time, networks also beckoned beyond territoriality toward a newer world in which fast-moving technologies of representation, with multiple shifting codes of meaning, challenged the fixity of space and identity," 6.

¹¹ Historians such as Frederick Cooper have cautioned against global histories that do not adequately address asymmetrical power relations when considering the supposed global interconnectedness of the modern world. In an effort to avoid this potential misstep, my work aims to show that aviation did not operate as a universal globalizing technology that facilitated movement in an even way for everyone around the world. Rather, that companies and states acting in accordance with economic and political interests developed networks of air travel that facilitated exclusive access to particular regions. Frederick Cooper, "What is the Concept of Globalization Good for? An African Historian's Perspective," *African Affairs*, Vol. 100, No. 399 (April 2001) pp. 180-213.

strategies to negotiate the contradictions posed by a technology that both strengthened national sovereignty and facilitated global interconnectedness.¹²

Theorizations of modernity that examine the importance of nationalism as it relates to the rise of globalism are particularly useful for my exploration of aviation and its formation of a global transportation network. David Harvey's analysis of modernity, for example, examined the inherent strain between the global and local present in notions of modernity.¹³ In the *Condition of Postmodernity*, Harvey charted shifts in thinking about modernity through an examination of the economic, social, and political changes that undergirded the transition from modernity to postmodernity during the twentieth century. Harvey explained, "While modernism always ostensibly asserted the values of internationalism and universalism, it could never properly settle its account with parochialism and nationalism."¹⁴ Harvey's understanding of modernity, therefore, challenged the exclusivity of its assumed associations with universalism. "Unless we are prepared to see even its universal aspirations as the outcome of a perpetual dialogue with

¹² Jeremy Prestholdt's *Domesticating the World: African Consumerism and the Genealogies of Globalization* presents a good example of a history that positions local contexts as central to patterns of global interconnectivity. While my work focuses on aviation as global transportation system, Prestholdt examined consumer goods as a means by which to trace patterns of global connectivity. He demonstrated how local East African consumer demands impacted patterns of exchange and production around the world, while challenging established historical narratives of African economic power and agency. Jeremy Prestholdt, *Domesticating the World: African Consumerism and the Genealogies of Globalization*, (Berkeley: The University of California Press), 2008.

¹³ David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into Cultural Change*, (Malden: Blackwell Publishers, 1990), 275.

¹⁴ Harvey, 275.

localism and nationalism,” he explained, “I think we shall miss some of its more important features.”¹⁵

Similarly, Marshall Berman explained in his text on experiences with modernity that “modernity can be said to unite all mankind” as shared experiences of modern life cut across geographical, ethnic, and ideological borders. “Modern environments and experiences cut across all boundaries of geography and ethnicity, of class and nationality, of religion and ideology; in this sense, modernity can be said to unite all mankind. But it is a paradoxical unity, a unity of disunity...”¹⁶ The paradoxical nature of Harvey and Berman’s theorizations of modernity, help to frame the complex interactions between the nation, globalism, and modernity that my study of gender and commercial aviation explores.

In addition to useful theories of modernity, works such as *The Modern Girl Around the World* provide a methodological example for constructing a history of commercial aviation that engages with nationalism, modernity, and gender on a global scale.¹⁷ Charting the near simultaneous emergence of the “modern girl” in nations around the world during the interwar period, the book employs a global case study approach to demonstrate how ideas about gender and modernity were produced in local contexts. In order to show the interconnectedness of national versions of the modern girl, the authors

¹⁵ Harvey, 276.

¹⁶ Marshall Berman, *All that is Solid Melts into Air*, (New York: Penguin Books, 1982), 2.

¹⁷ This book is the product of a collaborative research group based at the University of Washington called the “Modern Girl Around the World Research Group. The group is comprised of scholars trained in history, literary criticism, political economy, and cultural and feminist studies. The Modern Girl Around the World Research Group, Weinbaum et al., *Modern Girl Around the World: Consumption Modernity and Globalization*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 3.

develop the notion of “connective comparison” as an analytical tool through which to demonstrate how the modern girl could be both locally and globally situated.

“Connective comparison,” they explain, “avoids recourse to abstract types and instead focuses on how specific local processes condition each other. It scrutinizes the idea of discrete temporal and geographical locations by positioning the specific local developments in conversation with those occurring elsewhere in the world.”¹⁸

Rather than assuming modernity as a pre-packaged, stable category in historical analysis, the nationally based case studies in the *Modern Girl Around the World* use “connective comparison” to “highlight the inchoate manner in which things previously understood to be global come into being through complex local dynamics.”¹⁹ My work uses the methodological innovations of this work such as “connective comparison” to show how a global study of commercial aviation reveals the interconnectedness of ideas about gender, modernity, and nationalism as they arose in particular national contexts and circulated beyond national borders.

Agency and Actors:

My dissertation uses the development of commercial aviation as a lens through which to examine women’s experience with modernity. Women furthered the development of commercial aviation during this period in a variety of ways and as a range of different actors all with varying degrees of agency. In the interwar period, women flew as pilots, promoting the spread of commercial aviation. Aircraft companies

¹⁸ Weinbaum *et al.*, 3.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

offered women jobs as demonstration pilots because they served as useful marketing tools—if a woman could fly their aircraft anyone could. Although many of the world’s major airlines got their start toward the end of the interwar period—Juan Trippe founded Pan Am in 1927 and the French government formed Air France in 1933—these companies largely did not employ women during the early years.

Of the women who did work for the airlines at this time, the vast majority worked as secretaries. In addition to serving as marketing tools, women used their roles as private pilots to demonstrate their own physical and social mobility. Women who were able to make a career out of flying (while largely the exception) gained a degree of financial stability and notoriety. Women, who flew recreationally, found in aviation a way to travel the world. These women organized as pilots and discussed the ways in which flying could be liberating and could potentially change the lives of all women.

With the outbreak of WWII, women in most countries found it increasingly difficult to find work as pilots (as women were largely barred from military flying).²⁰ As commercial aviation expanded during this period, women promoted aviation from very different positions—not as pilots, but as stewardesses and passenger services representatives for commercial airlines. The stewardess became the newest marketing tool by which to convince customers of flight’s safety and comfortability— replacing the woman pilot who served this role during the interwar period. In contrast to women pilots who possessed a degree of technological authority, stewardesses and passenger services representatives worked as service workers within the corporation. While women gained

²⁰ Germany and the Soviet Union are perhaps the most prominent examples of countries that allowed women to fly in military combat during WWII.

economic and geographic mobility by entering the workforce and gaining access to travel as airline employees, they were largely confined to comparatively low-paying service jobs that were undervalued despite their importance to airline marketing strategies.

The symbolic work as well as physical labor that women provided the commercial aviation industry from the interwar period through the immediate post-WWII period facilitated its development into a viable means of mass transportation. The first section largely focuses on women pilots and the state and the second section examines women as service workers and the corporation as a vector of national power. In both sections, my analysis highlights the fact that women pilots and stewardesses occupied both restrictive and liberatory positions. In both cases, women were valued within the industry for marketing purposes because of their association with familiarity, safety, and comfort. Forced to emphasize their femininity in order to fulfill this symbolic role, women also faced difficulty in emphasizing their skill and professional authority.

Historiography and Theory:

While interesting work has been done on the history of commercial aviation that deals with issues of gender, labor, and international development, these questions have largely been treated separately, emerging from a variety of different disciplines.²¹ My

²¹ They have been explored by a variety of disciplines including sociology, anthropology, and the histories of technology, business, and international relations. Much of the recent scholarly attention given to understanding the role of women's labor, notions of service, and technological change has occurred within the field of Sociology. My work aims to add a historical examination of the way these forces combined within the specific case of the commercialization of aviation. These works have shaped my understanding of the development of gendered notions of service and labor: Arlie Hochschild, *The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling*, (Berkeley: University of California Press,

work asserts that a synthesis of the history of gender, business, and technology must lie at the heart of a global study of commercial aviation. In order to sketch my historiographical positioning, I will address how my work is primarily in conversation with histories of gender and technology as well as histories of gender and business.

Several historians of technology have explored the history of aviation from the perspective of gender.²² Examining America's so-called "romance with aviation" during the first half of the twentieth century, Joe Corn's work, *The Winged Gospel*, uncovered female pilots' crucial involvement in the promotion of aviation.²³ Corn explained that women pilots were promoted during this period in order to make flying seem safe to the public. In addition, Deborah Douglas's careful and exhaustive study, *American Women and Flight since 1940*, chronicled the extensive role women played within the Aviation industry during the second half of the twentieth—working in jobs ranging from factory worker, to airport manager, to secretary. Ultimately, however, Douglas charted the ever-

1983); Elaine Hall, "Smiling, Defering, and Flirting: Doing Gender by Giving 'Good Service,'" *Work and Occupations* 20 (1993): 452-71; Stienberg and Figart, "Emotional Labor Since the Managed Heart," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 561 (1999): 8-26; Guy and Newman, "Women's Jobs, Men's Jobs: Sex Segregation and Emotional Labor," *Public Administration Review* 64 (2004): 289-298.

²² In addition to the two main works on aviation and gender that are discussed in the text, Kathleen Berry has examined the importance of flight attendants through a careful analysis of their labor organizing. See Kathleen Berry, *Femininity in Flight: A History of Flight Attendants*, (Duke University Press, 2007). Victoria Vantoch and Christine Yano's work on gender, sexuality and flight attendants have also been very useful to my work: Christine Yano, *Airborne Dreams: Nisei Stewardesses and Pan American World Airways*, (Durham: Duke University Press Books, 2011); Victoria Vantoch, *Jet Sex: Airline Stewardesses and the Making of an American Icon*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013).

²³ The work of Joe Corn served as an important introduction to developing my understanding of the roles women played in winning the public's perception of flight as a mode of transportation, see Joseph Corn, *The Winged Gospel*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 1983 (specifically Chapter IV: "Making Flying 'Thinkable'").

shrinking opportunities and social encouragement for women to become pilots following the glory days of the 20s and 30s. US military regulations during WWII barred women from flying in combat situations, Douglas explained, virtually ensuring that women pilots would never pilot commercial aircraft in large numbers.²⁴

More recently, histories of gender and aviation have focused specifically on masculinity as a key element in understanding commercial aviation's development. Alan Meyer's *Weekend Pilots* explored the male-dominated world of post-war private flying.²⁵ Building on Douglas's analysis of women's exclusion from private flying, Meyer demonstrated how pilots and aircraft companies constructed a male flying culture that worked alongside of military bans on female flying to discourage women from becoming pilots. In his work *Plane Queer*, Phil Tiemeyer examined a different kind of masculine culture of flight by looking at stewards who were employed by various commercial airlines during the twentieth century. Tiemeyer's analysis examined how changing conceptions of masculinity over time shaped expectations of stewards' work and identities.²⁶

Situated in the field of international history, Jenifer Van Vleck's recently published *Empire of the Air* serves as the best example of a history of aviation that takes

²⁴ My work builds on Deborah Douglas's impressive overview of women's involvement within the aviation industry after 1945, see Deborah, Douglas, *Women and Flight since 1940*, (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2004).

²⁵ Alan Meyer, *Weekend Pilots: Technology, Masculinity, and Private Aviation in Postwar America*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2015).

²⁶ Phil Tiemeyer, *Plane Queer: Labor, Sexuality, and Aids in the History of the Male Flight Attendant*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013).

seriously global connections and issues of international development.²⁷ Charting the role of Pan American Airways in the United States' WWII rise to global power, Van Vleck's work carefully demonstrated that commercial aviation served as a crucial vector of American power during the twentieth century and that it did not develop in an isolated, single-nation context. My dissertation extends and builds off of her analysis and argues that a history of commercial aviation's development must also specifically examine gendered and racial business strategies as well as views of technology.

Beyond histories of aviation, my work draws on a growing body of scholarship within the history of technology that explores the gendered implications and meanings of technological change and development.²⁸ The works of such pioneers of the field as Ruth Schwartz Cowan and Judith McGaw emphasize the importance of gender as a category of historical analysis when writing the history of technology. As one scholar summarizes McGaw's approach, "Gender, as a socially constructed system based on hierarchies of power, must be analyzed to reveal the ways in which *both* men and women are assigned

²⁷ Jenifer Van Vleck, *Empire of the Air: Aviation and the American Ascendancy*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013).

²⁸ The list of relevant books is too long to include in full, but the following have been especially useful for my work: Ruth Oldenziel, *Making Technology Masculine: Men, Women, and Modern Machines in America, 1870-1945*, (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1999); Carroll Pursell, "Feminism and the Rethinking of the History of Technology," in *Feminism In Twentieth-Century Science, Technology, and Medicine* ed. Angela Creager, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001); Nina Lerman, Arwen Palmer Mohun, Ruth Oldenziel, "The Shoulders We Stand on and the View from Here: Historiography and Directions for Research," *Technology and Culture* 38 (1997); Mary Frank Fox, ed., *Women, Gender, and Technology*, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006); Ruth Oldenziel, "Man the Maker, Woman the Consumer: The Consumption Junction Revisited," In A. Craeger, E. Lunbeck, & L. Schiebinger (Eds.), *Feminism in Twentieth-century Science, Technology, and Medicine*, (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2001); Carol A. Stabile, *Feminism and the Technological Fix*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994. Mary Frank Fox, ed., *Women, Gender, and Technology*, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006), 2-3.

what are considered appropriate roles in the process of technological change.”²⁹ My dissertation draws on this work in examining the interplay between gender and technology in the history of commercial aviation’s development.

My work also draws on scholarship within the history and philosophy of gender and technology that focuses on the process by which new technologies are integrated within society. In the *Sciences from Below*, Sandra Harding explained that the work of integrating new technologies within society often falls to women. Explaining the elite, masculine roots of definitions of scientific rationality and technological expertise throughout history, Harding argued that “Western” conceptions of science and technology privileged men as innovators and producers of technological advancement. While women and racial minorities were often left out of accounts of scientific and technological advancement, Harding explained that they occupied a central role in sociotechnological change, explaining, “These others must do the kind of reproductive and ‘craft’ labor necessary to raise acceptably human children of a particular culture, maintain community social bonds, and ‘suture’ the new—such as railroads or electric cars—to the familiar conceptually, materially, morally, and politically.”³⁰ My dissertation builds on Harding’s analysis and argues that women performed important “reproductive and ‘craft’ labor” to make commercial flight a viable means of mass transport.

²⁹ Pursell, Carroll, “Feminism and the Rethinking of the History of Technology,” in *Feminism In Twentieth-Century Science, Technology, and Medicine* ed. Angela Creager, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 116.

³⁰ Sandra Harding, *Sciences From Below: Feminisms, Postcolonialities, and Modernities*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 1.

Coming from the perspective of contemporary workplace equality, sociologist Arlie Hochschild also examined the role of gendered reproductive labor, but more specifically as women performed such work within the corporation. In *The Managed Heart*, Hochschild interviewed flight attendants regarding the nature of the service work provided for various airlines. Hochschild developed the concept of emotional labor to describe the often-gendered type of labor required and regulated within the growing service-oriented workplace. Hochschild explained that emotional labor describes “a form of emotion regulation that creates a publicly visible facial and bodily display within the workplace.”³¹ This concept guides my study of the creation of customer and passenger services departments within commercial airlines during WWII and the post-war period and the specific way that this work was imagined as “feminine.”

In examining the role of gender in airline marketing and organizational strategies, my work also draws on scholarship within the field of business history that examines the importance of gender and women within the corporation. Works such as Angel Kwolek-Folland’s *Engendering Business: Men and Women in the Corporate Office, 1870-1930* and Mary Yeager’s collection of essays *Women in Business*, provide a historical framework for understanding the role of gender in the development of modern corporate organizational structures and environments. In the introduction to *Women in Business*, historian Mary Yeager sketched an overview of scholarship addressing business history from the perspective of gender as well as the challenges such scholarship has faced within the field of business history. Yeager explained that historians writing business

³¹ Arlie Hochschild, *The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983).

history from a gendered perspective were forced to create new analytical frameworks within the field. She detailed, “The analytical frameworks of business history have been oriented more towards manufacturing than the service sector, where more women build and maintain their businesses....The visions of business historians have been pragmatic, oriented to the conduct and performance of business rather than towards the meaning and cultural significance of business.”³² My work situates itself within business histories focused on the service sector as a way to explore the role of gender in organizational strategy. Additionally, my work aims to answer Yeager’s implicit call to action within the field by focusing on the cultural significance of commercial airlines and the importance of gendered labor in the firm’s growth and success.

Angel Kwolek-Folland’s work provides a useful historical case study that engages in the themes outlined by Yeager. In *Engendering Business*, Kwolek-Folland charted the changing nature of work and business in the US from the late nineteenth century through the early twentieth century. In examining the rise of the financial industry, Kwolek-Folland demonstrated how the introduction of women into the office workplace and their growth as middle class consumers in the late nineteenth century “gave gender relations a heightened visibility and structural importance in corporate development.”³³ My work attempts a similar exploration of gender in corporate development, but focuses on a different industry. *Engendering Business* provides a useful model in shaping my

³² Mary Yeager, ed. *Women in Business (International Library of Critical Writings in Business History*, No. 17, (Edward Elgar Publishing, 1999), xv.

³³ Angel Kwolek-Folland, *Engendering Business: Men and Women in the Corporate Office, 1870-1930*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), 2.

examination of women in the commercial aviation industry during WWII and the post-war period.

Analyses of labor, technology, gender, business, and nationalism must be at the heart of a globalized study of commercial aviation's history. My dissertation argues that such a synthesis yields new perspectives on familiar topics. Whereas much attention has been devoted to stewardesses and the role of beauty and sex in airline marketing, my work asserts that such cultural histories of commercial aviation often give short shrift to the importance of materiality or "groundedness" in historical analysis. In an effort to avoid such pitfalls, my dissertation presents a cultural history of aviation that is deeply rooted in geo-political and economic relations, business organization and practices, and changes in the social, economic, and geographic mobility of women.

For example, the analysis of female employees in Pan Am's Passenger Services Department (PSD), which is presented in chapter four, encourages us to examine deeper meanings of gender in terms of corporate strategy and service work. In airports around the world, Pan Am designated these women as "Everyday Diplomats" and tasked them with speaking multiple languages and negotiating the complex landscape of racial hierarchies that varied from nation to nation, while also facilitating a comfortable travel experience for passengers.³⁴ The vital work of female employees in representing the human face of firms such as Pan Am as well as their role in easing tensions associated with international business and travel, serves as just one example of the type of discovery

³⁴ Passenger Services Department Bulletin, Vol. 2, No. 7 (July 1, 1944): 1, *Pan American World Airways, Inc. Records*, University of Miami, FL.

the analytical approach of my dissertation yields and serves as a main contribution of this work.

Chapter Overview:

My dissertation is comprised of six chapters, which are divided into two parts. Part one, “The beginnings of an industry—the Interwar Period,” contains chapters one through three; and, part two, “Global expansion—WWII to 1960,” contains chapter four through six.

Chapter two, “‘The Greatest Sales Argument:’ Inter-war Women Pilots and the Popularization of Commercial Aviation” examines how women, who were initially defined as antithetical to the modern technology of flight, became key actors in commercial aviation’s popularization and success as an industry during the interwar period. Additionally, this chapter explores how women took advantage of this opportunity to advocate for women’s professional equality in a realm that had been previously characterized as “man’s work.” Although many works have looked at women pilots in the inter-war period, my work differs from such analyses by arguing that women pilots as a professional group, as well as their accomplishments, rhetoric, and organizational efforts, can best be understood through the lens of commerce.

Chapter two begins with a summary of the important technological and legislative developments during the period that facilitated the emergence of the American aviation industry and the notion of flight as a potentially viable means of mass transportation. The chapter then situates women within these broader changes within the industry. This chapter asserts the importance of their work in popularizing commercial aviation and

argues that women faced pressures to delicately balance their expertise as pilots with social expectations of femininity. Despite the pressures, some women were able to use their expertise as a springboard from which to articulate feminist visions of gender equality. Finally, the chapter examines women pilots during the interwar period as a professional group working to advocate for women's employment concerns within the aviation industry through an analysis of the Ninety-Nines, the first all-women's pilot organization. I contextualize the Ninety-Nines within the post-suffrage women's movement of the period and examine the similarities and differences women pilots faced in their aims at professionalization when compared to contemporary women's professional efforts in the sciences.

Chapter three, "Modern Aviatrix Around the World: Aviation and Gendered Representations of National Modernity" argues that the simultaneous emergence of highly publicized women pilots in countries such as China, the United States, France, the Soviet Union, Germany, Turkey, and Brazil during the interwar period reveals a new perspective on understanding gender's influential role in the development of notions of globalism and modernity. This chapter examines two women pilots as case studies: Lee Ya-Ching of China and Sabiha Gökçen of Turkey. The "modern woman aviatrix" symbolized a moment specific to interwar geopolitics in which aviation, nationalism, and reformist concerns over women's place in society collided. Women pilots served as a particularly visible and potent symbol for aviation as a national modernization project that intersected with women's reform movements in distinctly local yet universal ways.

Examining the simultaneously local and universal nature of the emergence of women pilots in the interwar period around the world, as well as the simultaneously

restrictive and liberatory nature of their work, underscores the historically contingent nature of concepts such as “modernity” and “progress.” The experiences of women pilots in Turkey and China reveal how local ideas about gender have been historically bound up in conversations of national sovereignty and technological development.

Chapter four, “Pan American Airways Stretches its ‘Wings over the World:’ Gender, Service and Public Image during WWII,” examines the process by which Pan American Airways worked to establish its airline as a recognizable brand with a favorable public image during WWII. Analyzing corporate documents from the 1940s and 50s reveals that Pan Am’s massive wartime expansion forced the company to articulate a centralized vision and approach to providing excellent service—especially since it occupied an increasingly important role in serving national security interests and growing numbers of passengers. I argue that these documents also show that Pan Am defined corporate notions of service in highly gendered ways by tasking women employees with the job of representing the public face of the company. The central question of this chapter thus emerges: Why did Pan Am position women as the public face of the company during the height of what scholars have termed Pan Am’s ‘empire of the air?’

Through an analysis of documents related to the formation of the Passenger Services Department (to be staffed exclusively with women) as well as various marketing materials, this chapter examines the connections between gender and public relations during Pan Am’s vast WWII expansion, while considering what this case reveals about informal mechanisms of economic and political power. Additionally, it considers the

gendered aspects of Pan Am's notion of service work and its function within organizational strategy and brand construction.

With France coming out of WWII with a damaged national infrastructure and facing growing independence movements that threatened its empire, Air France became an important tool of the state to tighten its grip over the nation's overseas territories. In particular, French colonial Africa became a key strategic orientation for Air France, as France maintained colonial control over the region until the early 1960s. Chapter five, "'The World's Largest Airline:' Gender and the Marketing of Air France as a New Technology for Late-colonial Development in West Africa" examines Air France's role in the larger French post-war project of industrialization and economic development at home and in French colonial Africa during the period of the Fourth Republic. Through an examination of Air France travel guides, employee newsletters, and marketing material, this chapter examines Air France's efforts to encourage business and economic development in French colonial Africa.

Air transport emerged in this period as a new technology for negotiating a particular moment in French colonial rule and an analysis of its growth reveals the persistence of technology as a symbolic yardstick within imperial discourses of development, race, and nationalism. To overcome perceived fears of traveling to colonial Africa, Air France charged airhostesses with the task of domesticating foreign destinations and representing French culture and national prestige within the empire. This chapter examines the role of gender in Air France's marketing of travel to African colonies through an analysis of the creation of the "air hostess."

Finally, chapter six—the conclusion—provides additional comments on the extension of my analysis of commercial aviation into the post-war period. It considers how women’s experience with commercial aviation, as both employees and passengers, developed over the post-war period up to the time of deregulation. As my dissertation demonstrates, women pilots and employees of commercial airlines in the interwar and WWII periods considered aviation as a means to gain geographic mobility as well as varying degrees of social and economic liberation. In the post war period, women increasingly traveled as passengers on commercial airlines and openly discussed the ways in which the geographic mobility that commercial aviation offered could foster increased sexual liberation as well. While commercial air travel was never an explicitly a-sexual endeavor (references to stewardesses as sexual objects appeared almost as soon as they began working on aircraft), marketing and popular accounts of commercial air travel in the post-war period reveal a marked increase in sexual associations and imagery. The epilogue will briefly survey evidence of this shift while also commenting on the perils and promises that the sexual revolution in the sky held for women and its relations to broader changes in conceptions of the “modern woman” in the post-war period.

PART I: THE BEGINNINGS OF AN INDUSTRY—THE INTERWAR PERIOD

CHAPTER 2

“THE GREATEST SALES ARGUMENT:” INTER-WAR WOMEN PILOTS AND THE POPULARIZATION OF COMMERCIAL AVIATION

“If the feminine is considered the weaker sex and this weaker sex accomplishes the art of flying, it is positive proof of the simplicity and universal practicality of individual flying. It is the greatest sales argument that can be presented to the public...”³⁵

Late one summer night in 1936, well-known pilot Louise Thaden received an unexpected call from Olive Ann Beech who had co-founded Beech Aircraft Corporation with her husband Walter in 1931. “Would you like to fly in the Bendix Trophy Race this year?” Beech pressed Thaden. In her autobiography, Thaden recalled the initial confusion with which she met Beech’s proposal since she knew that women were barred from entering the Bendix Air Race (which had been created in 1931 by industrialist Walter Bendix to publicize and promote aircraft development). “Well they are [allowed] this year!” Beech reportedly replied after being gently reminded by Thaden of the race’s restriction against women. “Furthermore,” Beech added, “Mr. Bendix has posted a special award of \$2,500 for the female pilot who finishes first regardless of her position in the race itself. I think we might as well have that money, don’t you?”³⁶ Thaden couldn’t have agreed more and accepted the invitation to represent her friend’s company

³⁵ Frank T. Copeland, “The Women’s Air Derby and Why,” *Aeronautics* May 1930: 386.

³⁶ Louise Thaden, *High, Wide, and Frightened*, (Harrisburg, PA: Telegraph Press, 1938), 167.

by flying a Beech-manufactured plane in the 1936 Bendix race as the first woman competitor.

Touted by *Newsweek* and *The New York Times* respectively as a “topflight executive” and “one of the twelve most distinguished women in America,” Olive Ann Beech occupied an unprecedented position of power as a woman in the aircraft industry specifically and American business more generally.³⁷ As co-founder and acting Secretary, Treasurer, and head of Beechcraft’s Women’s Division, Beech played an active role in influencing the company’s business strategy and direction. With air races captivating cheering crowds and eager manufacturers alike during the interwar period, Beech recognized the potential publicity value that sponsoring a woman competitor could add to Beechcraft’s public notoriety. After garnering Walter’s approval and Thaden’s agreement to fly, Beech arranged for Louise Thaden and fellow pilot Blanche Noyes to enter the 1936 Bendix Air Race jointly, flying Beechcraft’s new C17 Staggerwing.

Thaden recalled lying “wide-eyed” in bed the night before the race was to commence in New York. “For the first time excitement gripped me,” she explained, “as I lay, racing over mountains, plains, and desert in imagination, while I carefully planned a course of action should this or that happen to plane or engine.”³⁸ Thaden’s anxiety mounted as she pondered the pressure to deliver a solid flying performance in order to affirm the race’s decision to include women. Not only had a woman never won the race; neither had a plane built primarily for commercial use. The Beechcraft C17 Staggerwing had been designed for commercial business use, while all previous race-winning planes

³⁷ Dennis, Farney. *The Barnstormer and the Lady: Aviation Legends Walter and Olive Ann Beech*, (Kansas City: Rockhill Books, 2010), 78.

³⁸ Thaden, 172.

had been designed specifically for racing. The Beeches were taking a bold risk for the sake of publicity, but, luckily it paid off. Thaden and Noyes successfully completed the 2,600 mile flight from New York to Los Angeles in a record-breaking 14 hours, 54 minutes, and 46 seconds, becoming the first women to ever win a national air race in direct competition with men.³⁹

Telegrams flooded in from around the world congratulating Thaden, Noyes—and Beech Aircraft Corporation. A company-issued publicity pamphlet bearing the title “An effortless casual sky ride that brought everlasting fame to Beechcraft” celebrated the women’s victory and trumpeted the Staggerwing’s design. Emphasizing the broad marketability of the C17, the pamphlet explained “Only Beechcraft’s inherent stability, ease of handling and high speed performance made such records possible—and Beechcraft is the only airplane that offers *low flying cost, ease of handling, high cruising speed* and an *extra margin of stability* in its regular production stock models.”⁴⁰ In a personal note included in the pamphlet, Walter Beech exclaimed “you bet we’re proud!” and summed up the importance of their collective achievements: “Louise Thaden and Blanche Noyes—plus the rugged efficiency of a stock model Beechcraft—carried off the 1936 Bendix honors. It was a spectacular victory for the ladies—and for Beechcraft.”⁴¹

Beech Aircraft’s sponsorship of Thaden and Noyes in the 1936 Bendix Trophy race serves as a window into a moment when women occupied important promotional roles within a commercial aviation industry increasingly working to demonstrate flight’s

³⁹ The pair broke the cross-country flight time record for both men and women.

⁴⁰ “An effortless casual sky ride...” Beech Aircraft Corporation, Wichita, Kansas 1936, Walter and Olive Anne Beech Collection, MS 97-02, Box 26, FF-1. Emphasis in original.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

viability as a form of mass transport. As technological innovations improved both the safety and efficiency of flight during the inter-war period, industry leaders began to recognize the potential commercial applications of aviation. In response to industry growth, the number of women pilots rapidly more than quadrupled—increasing from 34 in 1929 to more than 300 in 1930. In 1931 the Aeronautical Chamber of Commerce, a group organized to promote civil aviation, investigated the status of women and aviation. “The hand that rocked the cradle flies the family’s plane today,” the report declared, “No more content with a place as backseat-pilot than they were with backseat motoring women are turning to aviation in increasing numbers.”⁴² This chapter examines how women, who were initially defined as antithetical to the modern technology of flight, became key actors in commercial aviation’s popularization and success as an industry during the interwar period. It explores how women took advantage of this opportunity by advocating for women’s professional equality in a realm that had been previously characterized as “man’s work.”

To date, historical surveys of women pilots in the interwar period have largely focused on the exceptional nature of the achievements of individual women. Following the model of early generations of women’s history, these studies are “recuperative” in the sense that their primary aim is to bring to light women who had previously been left out of the historical record. Although these histories do not primarily focus on interpretation and analysis, they are invaluable nonetheless. In most cases, surveys of women pilots in the interwar period provide careful documentation that points the way for future

⁴²“Wings for Women,” *Aircraft Year Book*, Aeronautical Chamber of Commerce of America, Inc., ed., (New York: D. Van Nostrand Company, 1931), 225.

researchers. Works such as *Ladybirds II* and *Before Amelia* sacrifice depth in favor of breadth, as they chronicle numbers of women who set a multitude of altitude and speed records and won various air races. Both works provide bibliographies that have been extremely useful.⁴³ Claudia Oakes's *United States Women in Aviation 1930-1939* and Dean Jaros's *Heroes without Legacy*, however, move beyond the "biographical collection" format to synthesize and evaluate the collective role of women pilots on the development of aviation during the period.⁴⁴

By treating women pilots as a professional group that built its identity around a new modern technology, this chapter also moves beyond the genre of women's history that focuses on the achievements of single outstanding individuals. In her biography of Amelia Earhart, Susan Ware examines the life of Earhart as a vehicle for a top-down assessment of the waning feminist movement in the post-suffrage era. In examining Earhart's connection to the feminist movement, Ware offers an astute assessment of the contributions as well as pit-falls of liberal feminism as it emerged during the period. Ware explains that Earhart represents the brand of liberal feminism that was dominant in the 1920s and 1930s, which emphasized individualism over collective action.⁴⁵ Ware's study, however, does not systematically engage with women pilots as an organized professional group.

⁴³ Holden and Griffith, *Ladybirds II: The Continuing Story of American Women in Aviation*, (Mt. Freedom, NJ: Black Hawk Publishing, 1993); Eileen F. Lebow, *Before Amelia: Women Pilots in the Early Days of Aviation*, (Dulles, VA: Brassey's Inc., 2002).

⁴⁴ Claudia M. Oakes, *United States Women in Aviation, 1930-1939*, (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991); Dean Jaros, *Heroes Without Legacy: American Airwomen, 1912-1944*, (Niwot: University Press of Colorado, 1993).

⁴⁵ Susan Ware, *Amelia Earhart and the Search for Modern Feminism* (New York: W.W. Norton Company, 1993), 139.

In contrast, this chapter argues that the organizational and promotional activities of women pilots in the interwar period are best understood through the lens of commerce.⁴⁶ Participating in the groundswell of enthusiasm for aviation during the period, which historian Joe Corn described as “America’s romance with aviation,” women pilots championed the benefits aviation could bring society and, more specifically, women. Additionally, examining women pilots in the interwar period through the lens of commerce underscores the importance of gender in the process of sociotechnological change more broadly. Historians of technology and business have already examined the role of women in the social adoption of various transportation technologies, ranging from the telephone to automobiles and trains. This chapter adds aviation to that list, arguing that women pilots in the interwar period occupied a crucial role in the development of commercial aviation as an industry.⁴⁷

From Spectacle to Mode of Transportation: Overhauling Aviation’s Public Image

Experimentation and stunt flying largely characterized the early years of aviation. Whether they flew mail routes or WWI combat missions, the public largely viewed pilots as ruggedly heroic individuals who risked their lives in the pursuit of conquering flight. A 1908 *Collier’s* article titled “The Bird-Men” highlighted the degree to which popular perceptions of aviation reinforced the daring, masculine image of flight. The article

⁴⁶ The previously cited works have largely studied interwar women pilots as individuals whose only commonality was their shared interest in flight and characterized their flying activities as “sport.”

⁴⁷ In her analysis of Jacqueline Cochran, Margaret Weitekamp pointed to the role women played in demonstrating aircraft for various companies during the interwar period. *Right Stuff, Wrong Sex: America’s First Women in Space Program*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), 15.

described the “inhuman specters with wings and blades, which race in wind and cloud.”⁴⁸ Clearly showing a penchant for the dramatic, in describing a record-breaking pilot the article proclaimed: “the daredevil of them all! He rode the storm. In that...epoch-making flight... through wind and rain, amid lightening flashes and muttering thunder.”⁴⁹ Popular perceptions depicted flight as a superhuman feat of strength and pilots as singularly extraordinary individuals. As Joseph Corn explains in his essay “Making Flying Thinkable,” one medical doctor even cited Darwin’s theory of evolution to make a case for the genetic superiority of pilots, explaining that pilots “descended from birds whereas the vast majority of humankind descended from fish and would never be able to fly.”⁵⁰ As technological innovations improved both the safety and efficiency of airplanes, however, aviation began to be recognized for its commercial applications. In order to convince the public that aviation could serve as a viable means of mass transportation, aviation companies needed to distance their product from the danger and risk that pervaded depictions of pilots and flying during the first decades of the twentieth century.

Public spectacles such as Charles Lindbergh’s harrowing, but successful, 33-½ hour trans-Atlantic flight on May 20, 1927 from Roosevelt Field in New York to Le Bourget in Paris drew attention to aviation’s developments and increasing reliability.⁵¹ Lindbergh’s flight was carefully orchestrated to improve flight’s image. In an effort to stimulate interest in commercial aviation as well as travel between the US and France, Raymond Orteig, a wealthy hotel owner in New York, offered \$25,000 to the first Allied

⁴⁸ Thompson Shaw, “The Bird-Men,” *Collier’s* 44 (Sep., 1909), 20.

⁴⁹ Shaw, 21.

⁵⁰ Joseph Corn, “Making Flying Thinkable,” *American Quarterly* 31 (1979), 559.

⁵¹ John W. Ward, “The Meaning of Lindbergh’s Flight,” *American Quarterly*, Vol.10, No. 1, (Spring, 1958), 3.

pilot to fly across the Atlantic. The publicity stunt hatched by Orteig and supported by the Aero Club of America couldn't have been more successful. After becoming the first person to fly solo over the Atlantic, Lindbergh was immediately lionized, propelling him to the level of American hero. As a result of his celebrity status, the eye of the public became fixed securely on the burgeoning field of aviation. In the midst of the massive public response to Lindbergh's flight, Lindbergh himself persistently emphasized the aeronautical development and technological accomplishment demonstrated by his flight. As a result, Lindbergh became the symbol of American technological progress that highlighted much of the decade.⁵² As John Ward argues, "Modern America was the creation of modern industry," and nothing represented the success of American industry and technological ingenuity more than Lindbergh's hop over the Atlantic.

While not completely disabusing flight of its heroic, male-dominated image, Lindbergh's flight nonetheless cast a public spotlight on the essential developments within aviation that had been steadily taking shape during the Twenties. As is the case with many American technological innovations, after being bolstered and financed within the military, aviation too made its journey into the civilian realm. Since its conception, aviation had been largely controlled by the military. During the 1920s, however, fueled by a post-war surplus of airplanes, aviation experienced a major growth in the private sector. The relatively small production of civilian aircraft in 1920—a mere 75 planes—

⁵² Ward, 13.

grew to 342 planes by 1925.⁵³ As a result, the industry as a whole boomed, with the number of aircraft, civilian and military, more than doubling from 1920 to 1925.⁵⁴

A series of legislative policies lent to the growing stability of the aviation industry.⁵⁵ In his book *Climb to Greatness*, historian John Rae explained that the “first step in the development of a comprehensive national policy for aviation” came in 1925 with the Kelly Air Mail Act (KAMA). The act transferred the operation of airmail lines from the US Postal Office to the private sector.⁵⁶ The KAMA greatly stimulated the aviation market by opening up the potential for competition within the private sphere. As private businesses began to compete for airmail contracts, new technologies were developed that lowered costs. In response to the growth of the industry under the KAMA, the government faced the challenge of regulating the emerging field. In 1926, the government responded with the Air Commerce Act, which established the Bureau of Air Commerce as a branch of the Department of Commerce. The newly formed bureau had the authority to “establish safety regulations, provide for airways and navigational aids, encourage the building of airports, and regulate civilian aviation generally.”⁵⁷

The federal government also increased expenditures on aviation from \$6 million in 1922 to \$12 million in 1926 in an effort to strengthen the competitiveness of the

⁵³ John B. Rae, *Climb to Greatness: The American Aircraft Industry, 1920-1960*, (Mass.: MIT Press, 1968), 18.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ In his work, Bob van der Linden gives a nice summary of the developments that took place within the aviation industry that made flight a viable means of commercial transportation. See Bob van der Linden, *The Boeing 247: The First Modern Airliner*, (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2002), especially chapter three through seven.

⁵⁶ Rae, 22.

⁵⁷ Rae, 23.

American aviation industry.⁵⁸ The large funding increase coupled with a newly formed coherent aviation policy set the foundation for growth and, as a result, civilian aviation flourished during the latter half of the decade. In 1926, civil aircraft production surpassed military production for the first time and began to rapidly increase, climbing from 654 planes produced in 1926 to an impressive 5,516 planes produced in 1929.⁵⁹ Technological advancements increased aeronautical efficiency and safety and lowered production costs, which resulted in a jump in production. A combination of several changes gave birth to the modern plane design of the Twenties. By the mid-1920s, the radial air-cooled engine became more widely used and offered an increase in the power-to-weight ratio creating greater efficiency and reliability. Externally, the use of all-metal monocoque airframes built of aluminum alloy and smooth-stressed skins created an exoskeleton capable of providing more structural support. In addition, aerodynamic enhancements including the introduction of the controllable-pitch propeller as well as retractable landing gear resulted in airplanes with greater lift and less drag—overall making planes safer, more efficient, and cheaper.⁶⁰

As flight emerged from these formative years an increasingly reliable and efficient means of transportation, prospects for a commercial aviation industry flourished. Eager commercial aviation proponents soon discovered, however, that assurances of radial air-cooled engines and controllable-pitch propellers served as cool comforts to nervous passengers imagining the dangerous stunt flying of early “barnstormers.” Just as danger and heroics pervaded early characterizations of flight and pilots, so building a

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ Rae, 18.

⁶⁰ Rae, 58.

successful aviation industry first required an image overhaul in the mind of the public. In order to dissociate flight from its initial image of danger and risk, industry proponents recognized the need to popularize aviation, yet faced a crucial challenge: How could aviation, which had previously been presented as a daring feat of masculine strength, be sold as a safe and reliable mode of transportation to the general public? Women, as both pilots and passengers, became important marketing tools for the nascent industry seeking to establish public credibility. As one aviation industry proponent, Frank T. Copeland, put it, “If the feminine is considered the weaker sex and this weaker sex accomplishes the art of flying, it is positive proof of the simplicity and universal practicality of individual flying. It is the greatest sales argument that can be presented to the public...”⁶¹

Women Popularizing Flight:

Seeking increased publicity and motivated by a concern for their prospective careers that were linked to the success of the aviation industry, women pilots answered calls to promote commercial aviation. 1936 Bendix Trophy-winning pilot Louise Thaden explained,

“It has often been said by members of the industry that women as a class are doing more to retard aviation than any other one thing...I contend too, that woman holds in her hand the future of commercial aviation. Is it not the woman who urges her husband and brothers to patronize the airlines? It is the same woman who rides them herself putting men to shame; it is the woman who sends her boy and her girl to flying school...”⁶²

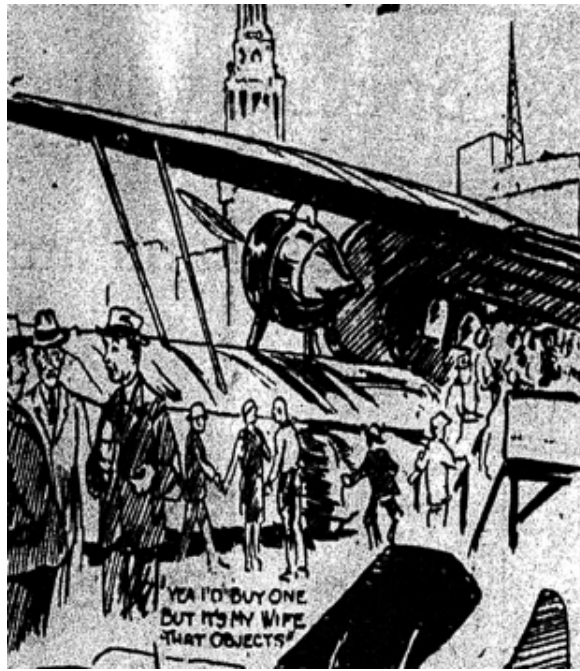
⁶¹ Frank T. Copeland, “The Women’s Air Derby and Why,” *Aeronautics* May 1930: 386.

⁶² Louise Thaden, “Pittsburgh School Bulletin,” Pittsburgh Teachers Association, Inc. May 1930, *Thaden Collection*, Bx. 4 F. 1 National Air and Space Museum, Washington, D.C.

As Thaden related, women did not need to become professional pilots to advance the cause of commercial aviation. Rather, by becoming familiar with the industry and consuming aviation by way of taking commercial flights, women could allay irrational fears concerning the danger of flight and then serve as a source of encouragement for aviation within their homes.

One contemporary cartoon published in the *Cleveland Plain Dealer* vividly encapsulates the potential for women to serve as such a barrier to commercial aviation's success. The cartoon features a crowd of people admiring a plane in the background; while in the foreground, several distinguished looking men are huddled together in conversation. One man remarks to the other, "Yeah, I'd buy one, but it's my wife that objects."⁶³ Although imagined, this conversation nonetheless reminded readers of the real possibility of such an occurrence—further highlighting the need for women to abandon their prejudices against flight.

⁶³ What Visitors to Public Hall Display..." *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, August 25, 1929. [Figure 2.1]



"It's my wife that objects"
Figure 2.1

Women also used their positions as mothers to promote commercial flight by educating their children about flight. Documenting a new generation of airline passengers and further confirming the need for mothers to teach their children about aviation, a 1928 National Education Association report, which asked 1,028 junior high students from across the country about the kind of science they desired, found an overwhelming interest in aviation. When asked to list "The Things in Science That Interest Me Most," the majority of boys listed aviation as their top choice, while the majority of girls listed astronomy as their first choice with aviation coming in a close second.⁶⁴ Not only did the survey highlight the need for aviation education in schools and at home, the student responses also revealed the fact that interest in aviation transcended gender lines.

⁶⁴ Honor Webb, "The Science Young Folks Want," In the *National Education Association: Addresses and Proceedings, July 1-6, 1928*. Vol. 66. Washington D.C.: National Education Association, 1928.

Concerned with the safety of these eager young pilots, Earhart argued that the burden specifically fell upon women to mediate between unsafe and technologically sound flying to safeguard their children. Comparing unsafe flying to unsafe automobile driving, Earhart explains, “It seems to me it is the responsibility of parents (mothers in particular) to oversee their children’s welfare by acquiring first hand flying experience...”⁶⁵ According to Earhart, mothers should combine technological expertise with their authority as mothers to effectively communicate knowledge of flight to their children. In addition to the threat of physical harm posed by misinformation, in a radio address specifically directed at women, pilot Opal Kunz warned of the negative impact women could have on their children’s spirits. Kunz explained, “While aviation stands ready to give marvelous benefits to mankind...we are faced with a most serious barrier to the progress of aviation in the opposition of families and relatives, unfortunately most of them women, who oppose their dear ones in their desire to fly.”⁶⁶ Kunz harshly criticized mothers who de-legitimize flight as a potential career, charging that they “break the spirit of their children so that they will never amount to anything in any field, or they will force them into paths of deceit.”⁶⁷ As promoters of flight, women argued that mothers occupied a particularly crucial role in producing a new generation of air-minded citizens.⁶⁸

⁶⁵ Amelia Earhart, “Women’s Influence on Aviation” *The Sportsman Pilot* 3 (Apr., 1930).

⁶⁶ “Mrs. Kunz Deplores Lack of Girl Fliers,” *New York Times* August 2, 1929.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ Arguments for the special responsibility women hold as mothers in educating the next generation of air-minded citizens bear remarkable similarity to earlier periods in history when women were tasked with reproducing national values. See Linda Kerber on “Republican Motherhood,” in Kerber, Linda K. “The Republican Mother: Women and the Enlightenment—An American Perspective,” *American Quarterly*, Vol. 28, No. 2, (Summer, 1976), pp. 187–205.

Considering Kunz's castigations, it does not come as a surprise that Evangeline Lindbergh—Charles Lindbergh's mother—served as the epitome of the type of “air-minded” motherhood that mothers everywhere should emulate. Evangeline Lindbergh's ability to combine her role as a science teacher with her position as a mother allowed her to be instrumental in furthering the commercial prospects of aviation. Just a year after Lindbergh's famed transatlantic flight, the National Education Association awarded Evangeline Lindbergh honorary lifetime membership to their organization. William MacCracken (the Assistant Secretary for the Aeronautics Department of Commerce) declared in a speech given in Evangeline's honor, “I say without fear of contradiction that the greatest contribution that has been made to the cause of aeronautics has been made by her whom you honor and her son.”⁶⁹

In addition to emphasizing the safety of flight, women were also tasked with improving the comfort of commercial flight. Looking to the model of sociotechnological change presented by the automobile, the 1931 Aeronautical Chamber of Commerce report claimed, “Just as women were an important force in hastening the motor car out of the linen-duster stage, so they have influenced the building of luxury and comfort into the 1931 model planes.”⁷⁰ Thus, the association of women and flight was emphasized in order to transform the “great birds of metal and canvas,” (as one 1908 report described

⁶⁹William P. MacCracken, “Education in the Development of Aeronautics,” In the *National Education Association: Addresses and Proceedings, July 1-6, 1928*. Vol. 66. Washington D.C.: National Education Association, 1928.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

airplanes) into a comfortable mode of modern transportation.⁷¹ As a result, women and their planes were described variously as “Ladybirds” with their “Flying Boudoirs.”⁷²

Recognizing the profitability of associating women and aviation with comfort, commercial airlines recognized the need to rely on women’s supposed innate sense of comfort and design in the creation of “well-furnished transport liners.”⁷³ The Aeronautical Chamber of Commerce’s report detailed that “airlines have learned that when they use a woman’s judgment as the yardstick for decorating and furnishing their planes and passenger terminals, they not only attract other women passengers but overcome wives’ and sisters’ objections to husbands’ and brothers’ flying.”⁷⁴ Echoing the report’s position, Amelia Earhart underscored the important feminine stamp placed on aviation by women in pointing to the recent advent of attractive dining rooms at airports. Earhart declared, “I am sure many of the amenities one meets on the best airlines are the result of women’s demands. The same thing is true of airports.”⁷⁵ Women often drew on these arguments to justify their importance within the commercial aviation industry in an effort to secure more jobs.

Confirming the importance of catering to women in building the commercial airline industry, the report cited a survey of air transport lines, which claimed: “A large percent of the passengers flying the regular air lines are women.” The survey indicated that in 1930, women constituted 43 percent of Pan American Airways passengers, 35

⁷¹ Shaw, 20.

⁷² “Ladybirds Down with Powdered Noses and a Brand-New Record,” *Literary Digest* 114 (Sept., 1932).

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ *Ibid.* 225-226.

⁷⁵ Amelia Earhart, “Women’s Influence on Aviation,” *The Sportsman Pilot* 3 (Apr., 1930), 4.

percent of Boeing passengers, 30 percent of Colonial Air Transport passengers, and 20 percent of Transcontinental and Western Air's passengers.⁷⁶ In the eyes of industry executives, the relatively high numbers of women traveling on commercial airlines represented a substantial consumer block whose wants and desires should not be ignored. In addition to envisioning women themselves as potential paying customers, air transport companies also viewed them as key to securing male customers. After all, as the report argued, women who remained unconvinced of the safety and comfort of commercial flight represented a potential obstacle to attracting husbands and brothers to lend their patronage to airline transport. Commercial airline companies and women pilots alike emphasized the changes women necessitated within the burgeoning aviation industry. In changing the appearance and construction of both airplanes and airports, women made a widely acknowledged mark on the development of commercial aviation.

Balancing Technological Expertise with Femininity:

In locating their expertise as popularizers of aviation in their roles as wives and mothers, women pilots framed their authority in the field of aviation primarily in terms of their femininity. By upholding the framework of commonly held biological distinctions, women were expected to transform the airplane from a dangerous machine to a comfortable technology, which could be more easily integrated into society. While these women became inextricably tied to the success of commercial aviation, the scope of their

⁷⁶ "New Wings for Women," 1931 Aircraft, Aeronautical Chamber of Commerce, (New York City: D. Van Nostrand Company, Inc.), 226. The survey specifically examines the Pan American Airways line between Miami, Havana, and Nassau; the Boeing "special night plane" from San Francisco to Salt Lake; and, the Colonial Air Transport's line from New York to Boston.

technological authority as pilots was limited in that it hinged on traditional notions of femininity. As a result, women were forced to carefully balance their technological expertise as pilots with traditional expectations of femininity or risk jeopardizing their value to the aviation industry.

As ambassadors of the modern convenience of flying, female pilots were under pressure to appear thoroughly modern and feminine in the eye of the public and were often forced to endure demeaning titles that highlighted their femininity and delegitimized their accomplishments as pilots. Amelia Earhart later recalled with bitterness how women pilots had to struggle simply to be referred to as pilots. “Taking their cue from [newspaper humorist Will Rogers],” she wrote, “newspaper men coined descriptive names for the [1929 Women’s Transcontinental Air Race] such as the ‘Powder Puff Derby’ ... and those who flew in it variously as ‘Ladybirds’, ‘Angels’, or ‘Sweethearts of the Air’.”⁷⁷ Referring to a dictionary entry for the word “Ladybird,” Louise Thaden likewise mocked the nicknames female pilots were given. “A Lady-bird,” Thaden lampooned, “is ‘a small black beetle, spotted with red, yellow, or black spots.’ Although I’ve never quite considered myself a beetle, I have at one time or other been [accused of being] ‘spotted with red, yellow or black.’”⁷⁸

⁷⁷ Amelia Earhart, “We Take to the Air,” in *The Fun of It, Random Records of My Own Flying and of Women in Aviation*, (New York: Reprint Services Corp., 1932).

⁷⁸ Louise Thaden, “The Ninety-Nines and the Future of Women in Aviation” National Aviation Forum, May 27 (c. 1937-1939), NASM Bx.4 F. 3. The year on the document found in the NASM archives was missing. The address, however, was given to the Ninety-Nines meeting and mentions the establishment of a memorial fund for Earhart, which places it between the date when she was missing and, more likely, closer to 1939 when she was officially assumed dead.

In addition to crafting ridiculous monikers, media accounts also repeatedly stressed the appearance of female pilots. Instead of attributing women's success as pilots to their flying skills, a *New Yorker* article titled "Profiles: The New Woman," stated, "If you are looking for fame as a flier, blue eyes and blonde bobbed hair help, so do a cheerful smile and a good camera face."⁷⁹ The concept of "the new woman" emerged in the 1920s as a symbol of progressive political, economic, and social changes in the lives of women during the period. In addition to her newfound suffrage, the "new woman" of the 1920s was marked by her provocative fashion and modern consumer choices. With women pilots becoming popular representatives of the "new woman" as symbolized by the flapper, they were frequently judged more on the basis of their appearance than their flight records or awards.

Because nothing screamed masculine quite as loudly as bulky flight suits, women pilots carefully strove to avoid such moral condemnations by maintaining a stylish appearance—a fact the media emphasized. In most cases they avoided heavy flight jackets and boots, yet even when worn, the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* noted, "Coveralls and white helmets were removed [after landing] by most of the flyers, revealing a variety of sport dresses, knickies and riding costumes." As one reporter noticed, even Amelia Earhart, one of the most ardent voices for equality, often didn't bother to "cover her sport dress and small felt hat while flying."⁸⁰ The media also imposed the centrality of such superficial matters, with one article on the 1929 Derby sub-headed, "What to Wear Is

⁷⁹ Helena Huntington Smith, "Profiles: The New Woman," *The New Yorker* May 10, 1930, 28.

⁸⁰ "15 Women Flyers Land at East Side Airport on Seventh Day of Race," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, August 25, 1929, 4.

Question.” The article reported Ruth Elder’s description of her own ritualistic “flying” regime: “I put on rouge and lipstick at each stop.” Although pilots like Elder reinforced the “Powder Puff” aspect of the race, some did not concern themselves with such frivolities. With apparent astonishment the article noted such deviation in their description of competitor Marvel Crosson: “Miss Crosson isn’t even going to send any clothes ahead of her. ‘I’ll wear a dress under my aviator’s coat,’ she said, ‘and carry a toothbrush. That’s all.’”⁸¹ Competitor Gladys O’Donnell expressed a similar approach to race wear. O’Donnell commented to a journalist that she would be donning coveralls and “nothing else” as “Flying fast will be hard work.” In contrast to the majority of competitors who were seen wearing dresses and skirts, O’Donnell emphasized the work involved in flying and the need for functionality in dress, adding “[flying] is no tea party.”⁸² Both Crosson and O’Donnell represent pilots who, above all pressure, challenged popular conceptions of female appearance.

While some pilots chose not to conform to pressures to appear feminine, most pilots recognized that their shared interest in promoting aviation among women was best served by always remaining appealing to the masses of women watching the race. Both Thaden and Earhart were conscious of not letting the ugly pilot’s garb detract potential fliers.⁸³ One cartoon depicting a scene from an air show to be displayed in Cleveland presented the possibility of such an occurrence. The drawing featured two elegantly dressed women evaluating a female pilot near her plane. Referring to the pilot’s suit one

⁸¹ J.D Spiro, “Women Pilots to Hop Today At Shot Here,” *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, August 18, 1929.

⁸² “Women Flyers Speed to City” *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, August 19, 1929, 6.

⁸³ Corn, “Making Flying ‘Thinkable’: Women Pilots and the Selling of Aviation, 1927-1940”, 566.

woman mockingly comments to the other, “And just think of the ducky clothes you could wear...”⁸⁴



“And just think of the ducky clothes you could wear”

Figure 2.2

The fashion industry, as well, seized the marketing opportunity that the style craze surrounding aviation provided, with one article headline reading, “Paris Creates Women’s Flying Travel Costume.” The article describes fashionable outfits composed of tweed coats with embellished flowers layering over lacy blouses.⁸⁵ As appearance and fashion began to take center stage, the need to always be conscious of one’s public image detracted from women’s actual achievements as fliers as well as increasingly encouraged superficiality over functionality in women pilots’ dress.

⁸⁴ “What Visitors to Public Hall Display...” *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, August 25, 1929. [Figure 2.2]

⁸⁵ “Paris Creates Women’s Flying Costume,” *Columbus Evening Dispatch*, August 22, 1929.

Women who did not fulfill such prescribed duties were looked upon suspiciously and female pilots who engaged more in stereotypically masculine than feminine activities were viewed as threats to the traditional gender order. For example, articles in popular magazines sought to explain Louise Thaden's famous success in flight as a product of her "boyish" character. In an article titled "Louise Liked Toy Engines Better Than Dolls, Says Dad," Thaden's father explained that his daughter always shunned "girl" toys as a child, preferring to play with "boyish" mechanical toys. McPhetridge confessed that Louise spent more time "with small motors."⁸⁶ Thaden's father claimed that she even learned to drive the family car at age 12 and, as she grew older, learned to perform mechanical work on the auto as well.⁸⁷ Another article traced Thaden's decision to "invade one of man's most dangerous fields" to her regret that "she is of the gentler sex."⁸⁸

Thaden's mother similarly attempted to explain the roots of her "masculine" activities stating, "Louise always made a 'pal' for her father. As a girl she was a tree-climber, a follower of boyish pursuits, and anything but an indifferent baseball player...her father and I came to know years ago that when she chose a life-work that it would be in competition with men."⁸⁹ Instead of recognizing the possibility that a woman could be interested in something mechanical such as flying without being deemed

⁸⁶ R.F. McPhetridge "Louise Liked Toy Engines Better Than Dolls, Says Dad" *The Wichita Evening Eagle*, August 26, 1929. The Louise Thaden Collection, National Air and Space Museum. Washington, DC.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸ "Beautiful Wichita Girl Flies! And How! Sells Travel Airs," *The Wichita Evening Eagle*, December 31, 1927. The Louise Thaden Collection, National Air and Space Museum. Washington, DC.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 7.

“masculine,” Thaden’s parents sought an explanation for her penchant for flight through painting Thaden as innately “boyish.” Recognizing the implications of likening Thaden to men to such a degree, the author quickly backpedaled to preempt any questions about Thaden’s sexual identity: “But let us not draw any wrong conclusions. Miss McPhetridge is charmingly feminine, musical and a girl’s girl.”⁹⁰ Concerns over the potential for lesbianism provided yet another motivation for female pilots to carefully balance their technological roles with notions of appropriate expressions of femininity.

Feminist Articulations:

Despite working to strike a delicate balance between technological authority and traditional notions of femininity, many women pilots positioned participation in aviation as a means by which to expand the general public’s limited understandings of womanhood. These progressive feminists refuted the idea of women’s innate unsuitability for technology and argued that the act of flying itself could serve as uniting force for all women. Responding to charges that women’s biological make-up kept them from successfully participating in technological and scientific pursuits, women pilots sought to blur the lines of traditional gender distinctions.

Voicing societal anxieties about women and technology, one critic declared, “Women don’t like to mess around machinery and won’t give the motors and controls the meticulous attention these vital parts of an airplane demand.”⁹¹ Rather, as he explained, “women are by nature impulsive and scatter brained. Therefore, they won’t watch the

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹¹ Bruce Gould, “Milady Takes the Air,” *The North American Review* 228 (Dec., 1929).

instrument board, which tells the pilots the condition of his motor and the relative position of his airplane... [And] they don't watch the wind as it shifts around the compass..."⁹² While critics questioned women's ability to successfully master the technology of flight, others argued that women would also fail to understand the science behind flight. Observing a lesson during an aeronautical ground course for women held at Cornell Medical College, one reporter for *The New Yorker* illustrated common prejudices against women in science. Poking fun at women pilots attempting to understand the complexities of meteorological patterns, the reporter cited an "attractive member of the class" as asking, "It's all pretty theoretical isn't it?"⁹³ While implying the woman's lack of ability to understand scientific theories, his emphasis on the pilot's appearance clearly marked his reluctance to take her seriously as a pilot rather than sexual object. The article closed by deeming women's shaky science comprehension as leaving the "future of women in aviation pretty much up in the air."⁹⁴

Responding to such critics, pilot Margery Brown argued, "The mental qualities demanded of women fliers are precisely the qualities demanded of men fliers."⁹⁵ As women routinely flew successfully, she argued, they disproved the notion that women at large possess a technological handicap. Pilot Helen Schunck similarly attacked ideas about women's lack of expertise and highlighted "the fact that there are numerous men who are lacking in mechanical bent" as well.⁹⁶ If just as many men lacked technological

⁹² *Ibid.*

⁹³ "Ground Course," *The New Yorker* October 26, 1940.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁹⁵ Margery Brown, "Flying is Changing Women," *Pictorial Review* (Jun., 1930).

⁹⁶ Helen Schunck, "Is There a Place for Women in Aviation?" *Aeronautical Review* (Dec., 1929), 39.

expertise, it could not be argued that women were biologically predisposed to perform domestic duties.

Ruth Nichols, another prominent female pilot, launched the most incisive refutation of women's biological inferiority in pointing to institutional biases as the culprit for women's underdeveloped technological skills. Nichols explained, "From the mechanical angle a girl has seldom the same opportunities as a man. For instance, let's consider a brother and sister who grow up in the same family with the same advantages."⁹⁷ Nichols goes on to trace the boy and girl as they go through school, the boy absorbing more knowledge of mechanics as he is pushed toward such classes. As a result, "when he and his sister elect to learn to fly and jointly enter ground school, sister finds brother years ahead of her in his understanding of rudiments of aeronautics."⁹⁸ In highlighting the systematic routing of women away from the fields of technology and science, Nichols implicitly provided a model for change—the need to overcome preconceived notions of women's biological limitations to improve education opportunities for women in those disciplines.

Progressive pilot Margery Brown offered the most vivid example of the way in which aviation was envisioned as a liberating technology for women. In an article provocatively titled "Flying is Changing Women," Brown declared, "Women are seeking freedom. Freedom in the skies!"⁹⁹ Brown along with fellow pilot Helen Schunk articulated a hopeful—and somewhat utopian—vision of what the newly accessible region of the air would afford women. Brown argued that "flying is a symbol of freedom

⁹⁷ Ruth Nichols, "You Must Fly," *Pictorial Review* 34 (Aug., 1933), 23.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹⁹ Brown, 30.

from limitation,” and “every woman who overcomes a limitation has gained a measure of freedom, not alone for herself but for her sex.”¹⁰⁰ Women carved out a very specific vision of aviation’s possibilities within the broader air-minded fervor that engulfed the country. Women could not only annihilate space through time like the average flyer, but in the eyes of the enthused female pilots, women could also gain liberation from the subjugated position of their sex on the ground. In addition to erasing gender distinctions, Schunck argued that class divides also disappeared when in the air. Schunck explained, “When immense estates dwindle to less than doll house proportions when viewed from the air, why be concerned if one’s own castle happens to be a combination living-bed room... a Rolls-Royce and Ford are indistinguishable from the air!”¹⁰¹

Brown argued that there could be “no sex distinction in the region of the air,” and bluntly stated that women’s use of the technology of flight would change their characters. As a result of the broadening of traditional gender ideologies, Brown argued that the nature of gender relations between men and women would inevitably change. “No longer will it be natural for [women] to take orders,” Brown claimed, “On the ground they will come to act precisely the same way in which they act in the air.”¹⁰² Brown explained that the new sense of womanhood cultivated in the air would then transfer to the ground. After landing and shedding their flying coats and goggles, Brown cautioned, “Men will want them simultaneously to shed their freedom and independence, and women won’t be able to do it.”¹⁰³ In addition to providing a means to equalize their relations with men,

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁰¹ Schunck, 52.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

¹⁰³ Brown, 108.

Brown claimed that piloting a plane would allow women to improve their relationship with other women. Pointing to aviation's ability to forge physical connections between individuals in new ways, flying especially fostered a "bond among women, knitting womankind into a better understanding of their common problems—first on the field, then in business world, and in the home," creating a "sympathy and sex-consciousness (a consciousness of one's own sex)."¹⁰⁴ Brown argued that the gains made by individual women in the air lent to the greater uplift of all women:

"The woman at the wash-tub, the sewing-machine, the office-desk, and the type writer can glance up from the window when she hears the rhythmic hum of a motor overhead and say, 'If it's a woman she is helping free me, too!'"¹⁰⁵

Because of their roles as popularizers of commercial aviation, women found an opportunity to wield scientific and technological expertise in ways that had been largely denied them according to the dictates of conventional gender ideologies. While feminist organizations of the 1920s and 30s generally experienced a move toward individualism, at least a few progressive women pilots articulated a vision of liberation and union between women premised on the new technology of flight.

The Ninety-Nines and Women's Employment in the Aviation Industry:

In addition to discussing the potentially liberating aspects of flight, women pilots also organized in a formal manner to support one another in their pursuit of careers within the field of aviation. Facing questions about their abilities as pilots, such as those

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁵ Brown, 30.

raised by Frank Copeland in his emphasis on women as “the weaker sex,” women pilots sought to build a network of professional support. On October 9, 1929 an official letter calling for the formation of an organization of women pilots was sent to licensed pilots throughout the country. Addressed to “Dear Licensed Pilot,” the letter pointed to a commonly felt sentiment amongst female pilots: that “women pilots in this country should have some sort of an association of our own.”¹⁰⁶ Looking to the model presented by men’s national aviation associations, women pilots sought to construct an organization tailored to their own specific needs within the industry. Within a month, on November 7, 1929, a group of women met to form the first professional association of women pilots—The Ninety Nines (taking its name from the number of charter members). The Ninety-Nines facilitated personal connections between pilots, provided a forum for sharing job opportunities in aviation, publicized records set by female pilots, and collected invaluable statistical profiles of early licensed women pilots. Often marginalized within the male dominated national aviation organizations, women pilots not only gained crucial support through the Ninety-Nines, but also achieved new positions of national leadership within their profession. From their first efforts at organization, the group’s creators began to self-consciously explore the potential place the Ninety-Nines should occupy within the aviation industry.

As Cott explained in the *Grounding of Modern Feminism*, such a shift toward gaining access to various professions was characteristic of trends within the women’s movement after winning the vote. Women fighting for professional equality, however, faced several challenges. Without the uniting force of fighting for suffrage, women faced

¹⁰⁶ “Letter to 117 Women Pilots,” The Ninety-Nines Org., October 9, 1929, IWASM.

the task of balancing personal professional aims with advancing the “woman cause” more generally. Cott explained that from the very beginning of the movement the tension between the individual and collective was inescapable: “Feminists offered no sure definition of who woman was; rather, they sought to end the classification woman. They posited a paradoxical group ideal of individuality. Insofar as they opposed specialization by sex they gave free rein to individualism; but Feminism relied on a solidarity deeded down from the woman movement and reinforced by suffragists’ emphasis on women’s common disenfranchisement.”¹⁰⁷ In addition, Cott revealed that professional women faced the additional challenge of balancing feminist aims with their new-found professional identities: “The tension between feminism and professional identity was not new in the 1920s. Although the first women to enter male professions saw their attempts as part of ‘the cause of woman,’ by the latter part of the nineteenth century professional ideology itself was increasingly magnetic. There was lively debate among the few women lawyers in the 1880s whether woman should pursue her profession because of her sex (to vindicate woman’s capacities or to help her sisters) or must forget her sex in order to pursue her profession.”¹⁰⁸

The early organizers of the Ninety-Nines expressed this tension, recognizing that as popularizers of commercial aviation women often received special consideration within the aviation industry due to their publicity value. As a result, acting president Opal Kunz argued that women should develop their careers in aviation with “the

¹⁰⁷ Nancy Cott, *The Grounding of Modern Feminism*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 239.

¹⁰⁸ Cott, 232.

determination not to accept any special consideration because of her sex.”¹⁰⁹ Kunz understood that such consideration would not always be offered and, as a result, women must gain the experience and qualification necessary to succeed and compete on the same grounds with men for careers in aviation. Understanding the organization of the Ninety-Nines within this context helps to explain the ways in which members articulated varying visions of professional and personal equality. In addition, members of the Ninety-Nines worked carefully to balance the expectations of their gender with their competence as pilots. While all women fighting for professional recognition during the period certainly had to emphasize their seriousness, women pilots faced the unique challenge of countering assumptions of women’s incompetence as technological experts.

The organizational impetus of the Ninety-Nines was part of a shared movement in the 1920s and 30s amongst women working in the increasingly professionalized realms of science and technology. As Margaret Rossiter demonstrated in her critical examination of women scientists in America, many women involved in scientific or technological work, “either withdrew from the [field] or created their own separate groups and prizes to supplement their otherwise unacknowledged existence in science.”¹¹⁰ Rossiter explained that this network of women’s organizations and awards had wide-ranging effects, playing an important role in the professional lives of thousands of women in science during the period. In addition to providing career information, women’s scientific societies also gave women “a certain sense of belonging and

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁰ Margaret Rossiter, *Women Scientists in America*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982), 297.

acceptance, encouragement and psychological support, and a chance to be active in some role, including the leadership positions denied them in male-dominated societies.”¹¹¹

Women pilots faced similar challenges as those described by Rossiter, and also organized in an effort to combat professional barriers they faced in fields traditionally deemed masculine. Despite common experiences, however, a crucial difference emerges between the women’s scientific societies highlighted by Rossiter and the Ninety-Nines organization of women pilots. Although Rossiter explained that women scientists in the 1920s and 30s organized primarily to gain attention within a field in which they were otherwise largely ignored, women pilots during the same period experienced a vastly different public reception. Because of their unique positions as popularizers of aviation—their commercial value—women were celebrated rather than ignored as pilots. That is not to say, however, that women pilots did not face challenges as professionals in aviation—as the warm reception of women pilots was primarily a reflection of the viable sales solution women presented for commercial aviation, rather than a genuine affirmation of women’s capabilities as scientific and technological actors. The different public responses to women pilots and women scientists played a decisive factor in determining the shape their organizations would take. Rossiter explained that the general marginalization of women scientists led their societies to develop “conservative and non-confrontational” aims. As she put it, “Rather than attacking the status quo or the male establishment that had excluded them, the members of these clubs accepted the separate spheres and worked to make the best of the segregation.”¹¹² In contrast, the Ninety-Nines

¹¹¹ Rossiter, 297.

¹¹² Rossiter, 297.

did not primarily aim to increase awareness and recognition of women pilots; rather, they sought to emphasize the “seriousness” of their technological capabilities and career ambitions.

But who were the members of the Ninety-Nines? What do we know about these women? In the early 1930s the Ninety-Nines circulated a survey to current holders of Department of Commerce licenses in order to, as the questionnaire reports, “compile some authoritative information concerning the activities of women pilots today.”¹¹³ From the information contained in these surveys emerges the most detailed picture of the average woman pilot during the period that has yet to be uncovered. Despite literature devoted to pilots such as Amelia Earhart, who were in the business of making a name for themselves, relatively little has been written with the aim of understanding the lives of average women pilots who contributed much to the popularization of commercial aviation. The relative dearth of information recorded about women who did not seek to gain fame or fly competitively has proven the most significant barrier to understanding the aims and backgrounds of the majority of women pilots in the 1920s and 30s. The Ninety-Nines’ organizational commitment to collecting information on all women pilots, not just group members, affords a detailed examination of women pilots during the period.

According to Department of Commerce records, 450 women held pilots licenses in 1932.¹¹⁴ Assuming that (as purported) the Ninety-Nines circulated questionnaires to

¹¹³ “Women Pilot’s Questionnaire,” IWASM. While it is not clear the exact date that the surveys were circulated, dates written on completed surveys range from 1932 to 1933.

¹¹⁴ The total number of private licenses in 1932 was 8,757 according to Aeronautical Chamber of Commerce of America, Inc., *The Aircraft Yearbook for 1932*, New York

all women holding a license, they received responses from a little over a quarter of all women pilots in 1932—collecting 132 surveys in all. While this statistical sketch of female pilots provides remarkable detail regarding women who flew during the period, the picture admittedly remains a bit blurry as it is still based on a relatively narrow pool of selection. However, despite this limitation, responses reveal a rather geographically diverse survey— coming from 34 different states across the country, with the greatest concentration of women pilots residing in California. The ages of the majority of women who responded fell between 20 and 30 years old. In addition, and perhaps somewhat not surprisingly, most women were single, had no children, and were not able to make a living primarily from flying. The importance of these surveys, however, goes beyond providing a basic biographical sketch of the average female pilot in 1932. While popular media gave much attention to women pilots in the name of “selling” commercial aviation to the public, this focus largely served to reinforce the popular caricature of a vivacious flying beauty seeking fame. The organizational dialogue that occurred between these members, however, works to refute this caricature by revealing the real concerns, motivations, and barriers faced by women and by consistently championing the equality of men and women pilots.

On December 31, 1929, the acting president of the Ninety- Nines, Opal Kunz sent a letter to members opening a dialogue within the organization about the place of women in aviation. Kunz began her letter by proclaiming, “The impression seems to have gone

City: D. Van Nostrand Company, Inc., 1932, 155. Number of women’s licenses for 1932 found in Amelia Earhart, “We Take to the Air,” *The Fun of It, Random Records of My Own Flying and of Women in Aviation*, New York: Reprint Services Corp., 1932.

out that we girl pilots have some sort of conflict with the men pilots.”¹¹⁵ Emphatically denying that this sentiment exists among women fliers, Kunz instead argued, “As a matter of fact we are trying to bring about a different attitude toward the girl in aviation, whereby, she is accepted as an equal rather than spoiled as something rare and very precious.”¹¹⁶ Reacting to the level of public attention garnered by women pilots, Kunz explained that, in her opinion, women have actually received more gratitude than they deserve in relation to their achievements within the profession. Kunz warned, “At present our strong point seems to be that because there are so few of us doing this work, we receive more attention from the public.” As a result, she explained, “many girls receive high salaries and fine positions because it is thought they are more valuable from a publicity angle than a man would be in the same position...[yet] this will not always be true.” According to Kunz, as the public increasingly begins to expect women to fly, they will no longer be given special privileges. With this problem in mind she announced that the aim of the Ninety-Nines should be to encourage women to enroll in flying schools with “the determination not to accept any special consideration because of her sex.”¹¹⁷

Despite Kunz’s fears, many members responded to her letter by voicing their concern with finding a position within the field of aviation. Pilot Margaret Willis emphasized her own financial situation explaining, “I have found it necessary to drop my own flying temporarily due to the fact that I am trying to finish college and also due to lack of funds.” Expressing her interest in finding a position in aviation, Willis proposed that the club be used informally as a job network, whereby word of positions would be

¹¹⁵ Opal Kunz letter to the Ninety-Nines Org., 31 Dec. 1929, IWASM.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*

passed around to group members.¹¹⁸ As a result, the Ninety-Nines responded by dedicating organizational dialogue to highlighting the career opportunities for women in aviation.

Acknowledging the difficulties many women faced in finding work as pilots, the Ninety-Nines encouraged women's participation in all facets of aviation. One organizational memo with the heading "Women As Aviation Editors of Daily Newspapers" explored the success women had enjoyed in aviation from a journalistic standpoint. The memo triumphantly declared, "If you have ever been in one of those cities in which a woman is holding down an aviation editorship of a newspaper, you have seen one or more men swell out their chests and heard them say proudly, 'We have a woman aviation editor on one of our papers.'"¹¹⁹ Rather remarkably, the memo details seven cities across the country that employed female aviation editors. While a seemingly peripheral position in the context of the industry as a whole, the memo highlights the unique level of technological authority these women occupied. "When the inhabitants of at least seven cities in this country pick up their morning papers to see what is going on in the field of aviation," it explained, "they are turning to a woman for information on that subject..."¹²⁰ These women also had to wield a "thorough understanding of aeronautical terms" and concepts. As aviation editors for newspapers, women were not only charged with developing a working technical knowledge of aviation, but also with the task of successfully communicating aviation developments to masses of eager readers.

¹¹⁸ Margaret Willis letter to Opal Kunz, (Undated), IWASM.

¹¹⁹ "Women and Aviation," December 15, 1929, IWASM.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*

To best service the large numbers of women in aviation, Ninety-Nines members struggled over determining the contours of an organization dedicated to the average female pilot. Organizers faced the particular challenge of striking a delicate balance between making use of the valuable experience and publicity of famous pilots, such as Amelia Earhart, while also remaining sensitive to the needs of the less notable majority of fliers—a task which frequently elicited considerable discord within the group. Tellingly, the creation of a multilateral organizational structure that did not preference the group’s more famous pilots sparked tensions and became the subject of a major organizational debate.

In an effort to shed light on the less notable pilots whose names often remained obscured by the shadow of a few stars, Ninety-Nine’s organization memos publicized encouraging stories about women pilots whose accomplishments would otherwise go unnoticed. One organizational communication documented the stories of average pilots Ethel Lovelace and Dorothy Stocker. Representing the paragon of air-minded motherhood, Lovelace gains notice because her two sons reportedly “tease her to take them airplane riding instead of to buy them candy.”¹²¹ On a slightly more theatrical note, Stocker’s mention comes at the cost of daringly stowing away on a plane in order to “watch a [mid-flight] refueling at close range.” To further emphasize the heroism involved, the memo remarks that during the flight, “sometimes the ships were only ten feet apart, and if the gasoline had exploded, she would not have been here to tell the

¹²¹ “Texas Women Organize for Flying,” December 8, 1929, IWASM. These Ninety-Nines Newsletters are un-authored.

tale.”¹²² While neither of these women would ever reach the same levels of notoriety as famous female pilots such as Amelia Earhart, the Ninety-Nines nonetheless provided a forum for their involvement in aviation to be recognized.

In addition to informal recognition of women fliers’ accomplishments, the Ninety-Nines also publicized official competitive records set by women pilots. Because the male dominated associations in most cases refused to recognize the records and accomplishments made by women, the practice of establishing separate women’s records was a task familiar to many women’s scientific and technological societies.¹²³ Through organization, women pilots were able to put pressure on the governing body of competitive aviation records, the Fédération Aéronautique Internationale, to officially recognize women’s records in 1929.¹²⁴ The Ninety-Nines championed, “If a woman can fly faster, farther, higher, or stay up longer than other women...that fact deserves official recognition.”¹²⁵ Rather than including women’s records within the larger body, however, the FAI established a separate category for women’s accomplishments. Perceiving this move as a possible devaluation of their work, the Ninety-Nines explained, “There is no reason why women’s records will not some day stand neck and neck with those of men. In the meantime their own notches in their own log of records are deserving of the official recognition that will henceforth be accorded to them.”¹²⁶ Even though they were not necessarily pleased that their records would be counted as separate from men’s,

¹²² *Ibid.*

¹²³ Rossiter, 305.

¹²⁴ “Ladybirds Down With Powdered Noses and a Brand- New Record.” *Literary Digest* 114 (Sept., 1932).

¹²⁵ “Records by Women Pilots,” December 24, 1929, IWASM.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*

women recognized that the change represented a step up from having no official recognition. In addition, addressing the problem of what to do with records established before FAI recognition, one memo detailed that all records would stand even though they were previously set. The group avoided erasing the work already accomplished by pilots in refusing to give ultimate primacy to the official record. As a result, the Ninety-Nines remained committed to publicizing records set by women in both official and non-official capacities. Accordingly, a permanent section in Ninety-Nines periodicals focused specifically on recounting the newest records set by women, as well as recent licensing certifications.

The Ninety-Nines played an important role in the lives of women struggling to make a career out of aviation and devoted organizational attention to the financial barriers women faced in learning to fly. Many women expressed concern for the financial logistics of both attaining and maintaining a pilots license. The most serious financial barrier faced by women was the expense of logging enough hours to, first, obtain a license and, second, to keep a license current by flying a minimum number of hours. Several pilots' responses illustrated the potentially dire affects of this particular financial burden. Clara Kutschinski who worked as a secretary of a flying club in Michigan reported that she would have to "give up" her private license in the coming months until she could "afford to get in some more hours." Kutschinski also confessed that she was even unable to join the Ninety-Nines because she could not afford the dues.¹²⁷ Pilot Leah Zergler related that she too faced a similar fate: "I am losing my license because there are no planes here in Columbia to get time on, to [get] one from out

¹²⁷ Clara Kutschinski, Survey, IWASM

of town would cost more than I could afford...”¹²⁸ Zergler detailed that her status of physics major at a nearby university hampered her financial abilities, but assured that after finishing college she planned to go “out for flying in a big way.”¹²⁹ While pilots like Kutschinski and Zergler fought to maintain their licenses, others such as Mary Ault did not fair so well. In her survey response, Ault, a single woman under 30 who worked as a secretary for her county attorney, indicated that her license had recently expired due to financial constraints.

Even relatively well-established pilots within the aviation industry faced similar financial challenges, as pilot Melba Gorby revealed in her survey response. A charter member of the “99’s,” Gorby possessed an impressive record in aviation—as a pilot and also from a business angle. Gorby explained that she managed an entire “airplane business,” assuming charge of “the mechanical work... [the] cleaning, adjusting, [as well as]...the financial” work.¹³⁰ What would seem a comparatively stable professional life, Gorby revealed, in reality, there was “very little money” in airport management. Citing a statistic confirmed by the Ninety-Nines survey data relating to the particular concentration of women pilots in California, Gorby explained: “With a goodly supply of women pilots in California, a woman pilot is almost as ordinary as a man, and being of the ‘inferior sex’, thus receives less than a man, instead of more wages.”¹³¹ Despite commanding a wealth of piloting, mechanical, and business management skills, Gorby confronted an all too familiar phenomenon: the wage gap between men and women—a

¹²⁸ Leah Zergler, Survey, IWASM

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*

¹³⁰ Melba Gorby, Survey, IWASM.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*

professional and financial reality that served to severely handicap women's opportunities and resources, especially within the field of aviation. In 1930, women reportedly earned around fifty-six cents on the dollar when compared to male salaries.¹³²

Facing such financial barriers forced women to forge unconventional paths to obtain their licenses. When women were unable to "manage and save" their salary in order to afford flight instructions, as pilot Lucretia Hubbard reports doing, women chose to barter whatever un-paid labor skills they possessed.¹³³ Confessing a lack of aeronautical expertise, which excluded her from employment in the aviation industry, Emma Krienke represents women's occasional use of a more informal bartering system in obtaining flying credentials. A 23-year-old pilot from Wisconsin, Krienke reported that in lieu of her limited technical skills, she was nonetheless "a good cook, housekeeper, and [has] taken care of children." Krienke offers to put these often un-paid services to use by working "in a home at a small salary in return for flying time..."¹³⁴ While benefiting from a slightly less equitable trade, Corinne Conde also indicated that she had maintained her license in a rather non-traditional way. Conde explained that she found herself in a financial bind the year after earning her pilots license: "The next year I had practically no money, but through the generosity of the boys at the field was able to get in my required ten hours—no more, no less."¹³⁵

¹³² Claudia Goldin. "Gender Gap." *The Concise Encyclopedia of Economics*. David R. Henderson, ed. Originally published as *The Fortune Encyclopedia of Economics*, Warner Books. 1993. Library of Economics and Liberty [Online] available from <http://www.econlib.org/library/Enc1/GenderGap.html>; accessed 15 November 2016; Internet.

¹³³ Lucretia Hubbard, Survey, IWASM.

¹³⁴ Emma Krienke Survey, IWASM.

¹³⁵ Corinne Conde, Survey, IWASM.

Conde's success in uniquely funding her license touches on a common theme present in the stories of how most women managed their flying careers. Women commonly turned to those who more typically had access to the resources they needed—the men in their lives. Of the women surveyed, a slim majority (58%) reported to be single. Yet, of the remaining women who were married, a clear majority reported that their husbands worked in the aviation industry. Perhaps even more intriguing, a common experience shared by a number of women surveyed was a tendency to forge a romantic relationship with their flight instructors. Suzanne Williams, who learned to fly in Texas, reported that after obtaining her license she married her instructor and since has “done much flying about the country-singly and together.” She also included, “We’ve two sport monoplanes and one is all mine...”¹³⁶ In addition, despite having “only a 9th grade education,” Evelyn Burleson learned to fly in Nebraska and reported that she too married her instructor. Burleson indicated that since her marriage she would soon be “trying for a transport license,” an additional flying credential beyond a private license, which would allow her to carry paying passengers. While it would certainly be shaky historical analysis at best to infer the intimate circumstances around which a number of women, like Williams and Burleson, chose to marry their flight instructors, this common occurrence nonetheless emerges from survey responses as a trend. Despite their motivations in marrying their instructors, however, it is clear from their descriptions that these relationships positively influenced the direction of their careers and hobbies—sometimes offering plane ownerships and new licenses.

¹³⁶ Suzanne Williams Survey, IWASM.

In forging alternative paths to success within the aviation industry, women pilots of the Ninety-Nines Organization grouped together to renegotiate traditional expectations of their gender as well as commonly held ideas about technological use. Women pilots redefined the ideological underpinnings of their experience within the industry: by first, refuting the view of women as antithetical to technology, and second, countering the notion of flight as accessible to only a select few. The Ninety-Nines self-consciously organized itself around these central principles by keeping in close touch with the needs of the average woman pilot. As a result, the group responded to the needs expressed by its members through creating organizational discussions about work that woman performed within the aviation industry as well as by publicizing available positions within the field. In addition to providing a career network, the Ninety-Nines also successfully created social networks among women, publicized their accomplishments, and obtained important information about women pilots—making it a vital organization in the lives of women pilots in the 1920s and 30s.

Conclusion:

Reporting on “The Ninety-Nines and the Future of Women in Aviation,” record-breaking pilot Louise Thaden addressed an eager crowd at the National Aviation Forum sometime in the late 1930s. During her lengthy piloting career, Thaden worked in nearly every facet of the aviation industry—from mechanics and sales to test piloting. A seasoned veteran, she was especially equipped to remark on what the future of aviation would hold for women—as she knew firsthand the rocky road that lay behind many average women trying to establish themselves professionally within the field. Despite

such challenges, Thaden confidently declared: “[Women’s possibilities in aviation] are infinite. To me,” Thaden predicted, “it seems reasonable to expect that as aviation grows, so will women’s opportunities to have a place and increasingly a part in it. Women’s importance and worth to aviation will increase in direct ratio to their increased capabilities due to proper training along their particular field of endeavor, plus experience.”¹³⁷ While the aviation industry boomed in the years following Thaden’s address, despite her prediction, women’s careers within the industry did not expand accordingly. As this chapter has shown, women played an important role in wide-spread social acceptance of flight as a means of transportation. Even though organizations such as the Ninety-Nines aided many women in developing varying types of careers in the industry, interwar women pilots never fully overcame cultural biases against women and technological expertise—as the first female commercial pilot was not hired in the U.S. until the late 1970s.

¹³⁷ Louise Thaden, “The Ninety-Nines and the Future of Women in Aviation” National Aviation Forum, May 27 (c. 1937-1939) NASM Bx.4 F. 3.

CHAPTER 3

MODERN AVIATRIX AROUND THE WORLD: AVIATION AND GENDERED REPRESENTATIONS OF NATIONAL MODERNITY

Milling about at a grand reception in the Turkish presidential palace in Ankara, a French journalist spotted a young Turkish woman clad in a “dazzling” Parisian dress. Recounting the story in a 1939 newspaper article, he recalled his astonishment at the ease with which the woman glided through the party and conversed with English and French diplomats, switching effortlessly between the two languages. As he studied her movements with great intrigue, the journalist later recalled, Kemal Atatürk suddenly made a grand entrance to the gathering, which ostensibly had been made in his honor. The grave face of the dictator reportedly melted into a broad smile as he too laid eyes on the remarkable woman the journalist had been admiring just moments before. Taking her by the arm, Atatürk approached a group of Turkish politicians who were well known for questioning the recent modernization efforts made with the establishment of the Turkish Republic. “Here!” Atatürk proclaimed with a smile gesturing toward the young woman he had in tow, “the living proof of which I speak so often! This girl is the symbol of the new Turkey that I envision! We shall see who is right!” The woman was his adopted daughter, Sabiha Gökçen—Turkey’s first woman pilot and symbol of modern Turkey.¹³⁸

That the President of Turkey would point to a woman pilot as the symbol of the modern Turkish Republic at first glance might seem extremely exceptional. During the interwar period, however, women pilots made headlines in the United States, France,

¹³⁸ “La première aviatrice militaire en Europe...” *Le Journal*, July 1939. Musée Air France, Paris, France.

Germany, the Soviet Union, Brazil, China, and Egypt. The simultaneous emergence of the “modern woman aviatrix” in countries around the world symbolized a moment specific to interwar geopolitics in which aviation, nationalism, and reformist concerns over women’s place in society merged. This chapter argues that women pilots serve as a particularly visible and potent symbol through which to explore the gendered dimensions of two intersecting interwar developments: 1. The emergence of nationalist movements against colonial control in an increasingly international world; and, 2. The growing acknowledgement that aviation could serve as an important technology in state development projects.

By examining the interwar female aviator as a global phenomenon, this chapter demonstrates how aviation as a national modernization project intersected with women’s reform movements on a global scale in distinctly local yet universal ways. To date, scholarship focusing on aviation in the interwar period, and specifically women and aviation, has focused on individual nations as case studies. By contrast, an examination of aviation beyond national borders offers a new perspective on the role of the technology of flight in global histories of gender, feminism, and national development. Examining the simultaneously local and universal nature of the emergence of women pilots in the interwar period around the world, as well as the simultaneously restrictive and liberatory nature of their work, underscores the historically contingent nature of concepts such as “modernity” and “progress.” Examining the woman pilot in Turkey and China reveals the way in which local ideas about gender have been historically bound up in conversations of national sovereignty and technological development.

Nationalism, Technological Modernity, and Women's Reform Movements:

A wave of nationalist movements aiming to dislodge colonial rule swept the globe in the years following WWI. In the *Wilsonian Moment: Self Determination and the International Origins of Anticolonial Nationalism*, Erez Manela examined how the rhetoric of US President Woodrow Wilson encapsulated post-WWI hopes of internationalism and national self-determination. As the contours of the 1919 Paris Peace Treaty emerged, however, it became clear that the “imperial logic of international relations, which abridged or entirely obliterated the sovereignty of most non-European peoples, would remain largely in place” at the close of the war.¹³⁹ Yet nationalist movements persisted. Taking seriously self-determination as a new governing principle within international relations, national movements petitioned for the “right to national independence and sovereignty” through various claims to social, economic, and technological modernity.

At the same time, aviation emerged in the interwar period as the latest technology by which nations expressed national and global economic and military might. Nothing symbolized this more than the 1924 US Army's around-the world-flight.¹⁴⁰ Echoing the show of naval power demonstrated by Roosevelt's 1907 tour of the “Great White Fleet,” the US Army's global aerial tour confirmed aviation's importance as a tool for both defending national sovereignty at home and extending it abroad through global conquest. While the Army organized its unprecedented, fifty-two-stop, global circumnavigation by

¹³⁹ Erez Manela, *Wilsonian Moment: Self Determination and the International Origins of Anticolonial Nationalism*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

¹⁴⁰ Jenifer Van Vleck, *Empire of the Air: Aviation and the American Ascendancy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013), 32.

air under the guise of promoting commercial aviation, there was no doubting the exercise would have great implications for the application of aviation in future military conflicts. While the United States might have been first to pull off such a grand display of aviation's global reach, they were far from the only state to recognize the importance of aviation in establishing national sovereignty and progress. Scholars have documented the emergence of national cultures of aviation during the interwar period in countries ranging from Germany and the Soviet Union, to Brazil and Peru.¹⁴¹

Just as technological modernization projects such as aviation figured prominently in efforts to establish and demonstrate national sovereignty, so too did discourses on the place of women in inter-war society. National movements to throw off colonial control strove to demonstrate social progress as a means by which to justify their claims to national self-determination. As scholars such as Kumari Jayawardena have shown, movements for women's emancipation during the period were acted out around the globe "against a background of nationalist struggles aimed at achieving political independence, asserting a national identity, and modernizing society."¹⁴² Since women were taken to be "popular barometers of 'civilization'," as Jayawardena put it, many nationalist movements concentrated on women's reforms to improve the social, economic, and legal status of women. As Laura Bier argued in her examination of "the woman question"

¹⁴¹ Scott Palmer, *Dictatorship of the Air: Aviation Culture and the Fate of Modern Russia*; Peter Fritzsche, *A Nation of Fliers: German Aviation and the Popular Imagination*; Cruz, Felipe Fernandes. "Flight of the Toucans: Aeronautics and Nation-Building in Brazil's Frontiers." PhD dissertation, The University of Texas at Austin, 2016.; Willie Hiatt, "The Rarefied Air of the Modern: Aviation and Peruvian Participation in World History, 1910-1930," PhD Dissertation.

¹⁴² Kumari Jayawardena, *Feminism and Nationalism in the Third World*, (New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1986), 3.

within Egyptian nationalist movements, the state took a particular interest in women's emancipation as a means through which to produce a new, modern, national culture.¹⁴³

In an effort to explore the place of women in national and technological development projects, this chapter is divided into two parts and examines two cases of prominent women pilots: Lee Ya-Ching in China and Sabiha Gökçen in Turkey.

Part 3.1: Lee Ya-Ching and the "Spirit of New China"

Lee Ya Ching was born in 1912, the same year as the founding of the Republic of China, to a family who had occupied various positions of leadership within the revolutionary forces who fought to eradicate dynastic rule. Having overturned the dynastic rule of the Qing, the Xinhai Revolution or the Revolution of 1911 gave birth to the Republic of China, whose founding principles outlined a plan to transform China into a modernized republican state. While Ya Ching was her first name, her family affectionately called her "Dandan," which was a homonym for "bomb" as her parents had used her baby carriage to carry explosives during the revolution.¹⁴⁴ In many ways Lee's life symbolized the transitional nature of the Chinese Republic, which negotiated a tenuous balance between tradition and modernity in the pursuit of national development.

Lee Ya-Ching came of age in a period of Chinese history characterized by anti-colonial, nationalist movements. These movements gave birth to organized efforts at improving women's legal and social rights. Understanding changes in the lives of

¹⁴³ Laura Bier, *Revolutionary Womanhood: Feminisms, Modernity, and the State in Nasser's Egypt*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011), 3.

¹⁴⁴ Patty Gully, *Sisters of Heaven: China's Barnstorming Aviatrices*, (San Francisco: Long River Press, 2008), 121.

women during the period serves as important backstory for Lee's life as an aviator. Building on long-term, festering anti-Japanese sentiment, the 1919 May Fourth Movement or "New Culture Movement" began as a reaction to Japanese aggression but resulted in a broader reform movement aimed at modernizing Chinese culture. On January 18, 1919, news of the ongoing negotiations at the Versailles Peace Conference reached China. Word spread of the possibility that Chinese territories controlled by Germany would be handed over to Japan as part of the WWI peace settlement. On May 4, 1919 students responded to what they perceived as a failure of the Chinese government to assert national interests by gathering in Tiananmen Square to protest the treatment of China at the Paris Peace Conference. Brandishing signs that declared, "China belongs to the Chinese," students called for a stronger national presence on the global stage.

The ideological opposition to imperialism, specifically within the context of Japan and the Treaty of Versailles, spread to a rejection of forms of social and cultural imperialism as well. Students of the May Fourth Movement called into question traditional Confucian values. Students asserted that Confucian values such as the "three bonds" which taught "subordination of the subject to ruler, son to father, and wife to husband," were partially responsible for China's weakness in the face of imperial advances.¹⁴⁵ In response to the bending of Chinese social traditions, women seized the opportunity to participate in the political protests of the May Fourth Movement and occupied a new level of public involvement previously denied women. Two days after the May Fourth protests at Tiananmen Square, women students throughout the city of

¹⁴⁵ Reischauer and Fairbank, *China: Tradition and Transformation*, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1989), 436.

Beijing formed the Beijing Women Students' Federation. The women of the organization published a "Declaration to All Women in China" in order to drum up political support among women for the nationalist cause and to spread awareness of women's issues.¹⁴⁶ On June 4, 1919, the group also organized the first demonstration executed solely by women when a group of students marched in front of the president's house in demonstration against imperialism.¹⁴⁷

In the spring of 1919, women students and teachers also began to organize a movement for the establishment of co-education in China. While women had previously been allowed to attend all-women's educational institutions, women realized that breaking down the 'separate but equal' system would undermine the beliefs that women's biological constructions kept them from achieving the same intellectual level as men. As a result of pressure, by the following year Beijing University began enrolling freshman women students along with men. Following suit, primary and secondary schools began to establish co-education as well and in the process greatly improved the educational and social outlook of multitudes of women. The establishment of co-education as part of the May Fourth Movement served as a major catalyst for women's participation in the public realm of Chinese society.¹⁴⁸ It is within this political context that the symbol of the modern Chinese "new woman" emerged.

While Lee benefited from the gains made during the May Fourth Movement for women in Chinese society, her socioeconomic background set her apart from the average

¹⁴⁶ Jiayin Min, Ed. *The Chalice and the Blade in Chinese Culture*, (Beijing: China Social Sciences Publishing House), 1995, 499.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 500.

Chinese woman, and accorded her particular advantages. The daughter of a wealthy businessman, Lee attended a well-known girls school in Hong Kong along with British and American students. Living in a British territory, Lee's exposure to European culture was especially great. After several years of schooling, she petitioned for her father's approval to quit and become an actress in Hong Kong's burgeoning film industry. Lee enjoyed a brief, yet successful film career, before her father who feared for her safety and reputation forced her to quit acting and enroll in a private school in England. After two years in school, at the age of 17, Lee was married through an arranged union to Zheng Baifeng, who worked in the Chinese Foreign Service. In 1929, the couple moved to Geneva to follow Zheng Baifeng's post with the Secretariat of the League of Nations World Court. It was in Geneva that Lee developed an interest in aviation.

Lee quickly grew bored of her life in Geneva. She had given up her acting career and quit her schooling. Not having to worry about money she did not have to work and had a nanny to take care of her two children. In 1933, Lee reportedly attended an air show in Paris and returned to Geneva set on learning to fly. She promptly enrolled in flying lessons at the Cointrin-Ecole d'Aviation in Geneva and just one year later the "charmante chinoise," as she was known around the airport, performed her first solo flight and earned her official pilot's license on August 6, 1934.¹⁴⁹ Lee's personal writings from the period indicate that she greatly enjoyed the experience of flying and the degree of personal liberation it offered. Her fellow pilots at the Geneva airport reportedly found her dedication to flying somewhat puzzling—specifically in light of her status as a Chinese woman. Enquiring about the seemingly obvious contradiction of a Chinese

¹⁴⁹ Gully, 138.

woman learning to fly, one of her flight examiners questioned, “Isn’t it a fact that the feet of your countrywomen are bound?” In recalling the conversation many years after the fact, Lee remembered her response: “I come here to let the world know that, not only can a Chinese woman walk on the ground, she can even fly through the air.”¹⁵⁰



Lee Ya Ching's Flight Training, Geneva circa 1934¹⁵¹

Figure 3.1

While it is unclear how early in Lee's aviation career she began to link her flying to her concerns over China's underdeveloped air power in the face of Japanese imperial incursions, by 1935 the connection became clear when she decided to travel to the United State to enroll in the Boeing School of Aeronautics in Oakland, California. Following the lead of Sun Yat-sen, known as the founder of modern China, who had reportedly

¹⁵⁰ Conversation documented in Patty Gully's *Sisters of Heaven* pg. 138.

¹⁵¹ "Photographs — Flight Training 1933-1935." *Women in Aviation*. Gale, 1933 - 1935. Smithsonian Collections Online. Web. 25 Oct. 2016. URL: <http://tinyurl.galegroup.com/tinyurl/3spES1>. [Figure 3.1]

declared, “Aviation will save the nation,” Lee dedicated her flying career to the Chinese nationalist cause.¹⁵² Lee knew, however, that if she wanted to return to China to advocate for aviation’s development, she needed to develop her knowledge beyond piloting to learn aircraft maintenance and assembly.

A division of United Airlines, the Boeing School of Aeronautics was the most well known aeronautics school in the world and as of 1934, had never admitted a woman. While it is not clear why the school decided to admit a woman for the first time, after some “persuading” the school accepted Lee for the January 1935 term.¹⁵³ Lee reportedly found the rigor and pace of the training at Boeing shocking when compared to her leisurely flying lessons in Geneva. Lee was so petite that the training aircraft had to be specifically outfitted to accommodate her small frame. Instructors stacked cushions on the seat so she could see out of the cockpit and attached blocks to aircraft foot pedals in order to place them within reach of her feet. Despite making such accommodations for her size, instructors relentlessly drilled Lee in training, making sure not to spoil her in any way because she was a woman.¹⁵⁴ Lee was soon able to dismantle and reassemble aircraft engines and mastered instruction in aerodynamics, meteorology, aircraft design and radiotelephony. Lee also trained and completed instruction in difficult blind navigation techniques, successfully completing a 181-mile flight solely with the use of her instruments as the cockpit of her aircraft was completely hooded.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵² Gully, 117.

¹⁵³ Gully, 139.

¹⁵⁴ Gully, 140.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*



Lee Ya-Ching, Boeing School of Aeronautics in Oakland, California, circa 1935¹⁵⁶
Figure 3.2

Lee Ya-Ching became the first woman to graduate from the Boeing School of Aeronautics on November 5, 1935.¹⁵⁷ Diploma in hand, Lee immediately traveled back to China with the conviction to “serve Chinese aviation” for the rest of her life. Declaring her intention to promote aviation in China, Lee explained, “I hope all Chinese will gain some knowledge of aviation and [that] this will help to strengthen national defense.”¹⁵⁸ Returning to China in late 1935, Lee settled in Shanghai, which had recently gained a reputation as a center for aviation activity in China. In 1932, aviation enthusiasts had established the China Aviation League in Shanghai with the hopes of developing Chinese aviation despite the nation’s ban on private flying.

The spread of interest in aviation and its growing recognition as a national project can best be understood within the context of Chiang Kai-shek’s national modernization

¹⁵⁶ "Photographs — Flight Training 1933-1935." Women in Aviation. Gale, 1933 - 1935. Smithsonian Collections Online. Web. 25 Oct. 2016.

URL: <http://tinyurl.galegroup.com/tinyurl/3spES1>. [Figure 3.2]

¹⁵⁷ Gully, 144.

¹⁵⁸ Quoted in Gully, 156.

efforts during the period of his rule (1928-1937). Chiang Kai-shek came to power in 1928 following a period of political instability that characterized the intervening years since the 1911 revolution removed the Qing dynasty from power. Competing factions and warlords set up rival governments throughout China adding to political confusion and civil war. In the face of political competition from the Chinese Communist party, which had essentially established a rival government during the civil war, Chiang Kai-shek embarked on a political agenda to modernize China and create a unified national culture through the New Life Movement in order to bolster the legitimacy of his rule. Efforts to modernize the nation included legal and penal reforms, improvement of public health systems, the construction of railways and highways, and attempted educational reforms and improvements. Where developing a national aviation infrastructure was concerned, Kai-shek struggled to balance modernization with the need to protect against aerial attacks from rival political parties and warlords. In 1934, ultimately convinced that banning private flying for fear of such attacks did more harm than good in retarding the development of aviation within a country facing renewed threats from Japanese imperialism, Kai-shek lifted the ban and granted private flying rights.¹⁵⁹

In response to the lifted ban, the China Aviation League founded the Shanghai Flying Club, the first civil flying organization in China, intended to provide flying lessons and generally promote civil aviation. In 1935, the mayor of Shanghai approved plans to have the aviation league's impressive headquarters building (which was incidentally constructed in the shape of a bi-plane) to be incorporated in the city's new civic center complex. During this period, Lee also helped to organize the league's flying

¹⁵⁹ Gully, 145.

school and became its only female flight instructor. Despite such examples of aviation's growth in particular cities such as Shanghai, Lee was aware that much more needed to be done to convince the average Chinese citizen of the importance of flight. As a pilot, Lee was convinced that she could make the most persuasive argument from the air. Despite holding licenses from Switzerland and the United States, Lee was stymied in the face of the Chinese government's refusal to grant pilots licenses to women. After much protesting, Lee was told that in order to be granted a license she would have to complete a test flight with an examiner of the Chinese Air Force. While it is likely the officials figured she would not be able to pass the rigor of military test flights, Lee threw the full weight of her extensive training at the Boeing School of Aeronautics behind her—passing the exams with full marks. Lee Ya-Ching became the first woman to be awarded a Chinese government pilot license and in a gesture toward her impressive role in the growth of aviation as a modern state project, Chiang Kai-shek himself presented Lee with her license.¹⁶⁰

Lee quickly became the de-facto ambassador of Chinese aviation to the state. With license in hand, Lee was given a government plane and tasked with flying throughout China to inspect the status of all civil and military airfields. Lee flew 30,000 miles in a survey flight of the far reaches of China in order to inspect the state of China's nascent aviation infrastructure and she found it wanting. Not only was the government plane she flew in need of constant repairs, aerial maps were often inaccurate, weather reports were unreliable, and most airfields had no guidance systems such as radio towers.

¹⁶⁰ Gully, 146. It seems that she was awarded the government pilots license either late in 1935 or early in 1936.

In addition to passing along her recommendations for improving China's aviation infrastructure, Lee began writing a book titled "The Romance of Airways in China," in order to publicize the importance of flying in China. The book, she explained, was written, "to further the growth of air mindedness in China. It will describe in popular form the development of civil aviation in China in connection with the great international routes, with special emphasis on its future, and on problems that concern every citizen, such as its commercial possibilities, sporting aviation and gliding, and airport development."¹⁶¹

Having been educated in a girls school in Hong Kong during the years following the May Fourth Movement, and attending a school in Europe before commencing her flying career, once back in China, Lee quickly ran up against the limits of social expectations for women in Chiang Kai-shek's New Life Movement. Kai-Shek disavowed many of the socially progressive elements of the May Fourth Movement, claiming that it represented Western domination of Chinese culture and destroyed the morals of Chinese youth. Kai-Shek's New Life Movement, the cultural counterpart to his economic modernization program, reinforced "traditional" Chinese cultural values such as Confucian notions of obedience to the leader and self-discipline.¹⁶² While much of the more progressive aspects of the women's movement following the revolution of 1911 were dispensed of under Chiang Kai-Shek's rule, certain features aimed at fashioning women into modern subjects of the state persisted in his 1931 civil code. The code

¹⁶¹ Cited in Gully, 154. It is not clear whether Ya-Ching ever finished this book. It seems that the outbreak of the Second Sino-Japanese war might have disrupted her writing.

¹⁶² Jayawardena, 191.

reinforced a ban on foot binding, granted women freedom of choice in marriage and divorce (however, with child custody rights going to the father), and granted women civil and property rights.

Emphasizing the limitations placed on women's acceptable participation in civil society, the leadership of first lady Madame Chiang Kai-Shek encouraged women to occupy "traditional" support roles including participation in welfare activities, hygiene, child care and relief work.¹⁶³ It is within this political context that Lee Ya-Ching situated her own ambitions as a woman pilot being careful to strike a delicate balance between personal liberation and participation in building a modern Chinese state steeped in traditional culture. Throughout the time that Lee studied flying in Geneva then in Oakland, before moving back to China, she remained married yet estranged from her husband and children. Once in China, she decided to take advantage of the new civil code and declared that she and her husband were divorcing. The ability for women to seek divorce was still relatively new to Chinese society and not looked upon very favorably. In fact, Lee was one of the first women to divorce her husband under the new laws of Chiang Kai-shek's government.¹⁶⁴ Aware of the negative attention the divorce might elicit and its potentially damaging effects on Lee's public image, she declared that she sought a divorce from her husband in order to "devote her life to the development of aviation in China."¹⁶⁵

By linking her divorce to her all-consuming dedication to promoting aviation in China, Lee shrewdly laid claim to her independence as a modern woman in a state-

¹⁶³ Jayawardena, 191.

¹⁶⁴ Gully, 148.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

sanctioned way. As a famous female aviator, Lee Ya-Ching represented a particular vision of modern womanhood that was perfectly compatible with Chiang Kai-shek's vision of a technologically modern nation. Further, Lee Ya-Ching, as a woman pilot, served as the perfect symbol to unite Kai-shek's New Life Movement revival of "traditional" Chinese culture with his modernization projects—which were often at cross purposes. The image of Lee Ya-Ching, clad in the qipao—the fashionable dress of the modern Chinese "new woman"—clutching her modern aircraft, visually represented a particularly Chinese version of modernity: a modernity that was at once both Chinese and universal. Lee represented a modern Chinese woman whose personal liberation was deeply bound to a national modernization project aimed at securing China's defense and competitiveness on a global stage.



Lee Ya-Ching, qipao and plane, c.1941¹⁶⁶
Figure 3.3

¹⁶⁶ "5 Photographs - Relief Wings with Ruth Nichols." Women in Aviation. Gale. Smithsonian Collections Online. Web. 25 Oct. 2016. URL: <http://tinyurl.galegroup.com/tinyurl/3sp675>. [Figure 3.3]

On July 7, 1937, fighting broke out near Beijing signaling the beginning of the second Sino-Japanese war. When the war made it to Shanghai on August 13, Lee responded along with numbers of citizens by pledging services and support to Chinese Nationalist troops in the fight against Japanese forces. Lee immediately reported to the office of the aviation commission and volunteered for combat flying. Because she was a woman Lee was barred from flying in combat, despite China's desperate need for combat pilots.¹⁶⁷ In fact, the military refused to accept Lee's flying assistance even in non-combat situations, such as by ferrying planes or transporting material. Lee found this dismissal especially disappointing given that her entire aviation career had been focused on strengthening China's national air defense in case of war. Deeply dismayed, Lee regrouped and channeled her efforts into engaging in relief work—a more acceptable wartime activity for women.¹⁶⁸

Lee Ya-Ching worked in hospitals in Shanghai until the city officially fell under Japanese control, all the while hatching a plan to use her piloting skills to help her country, even if she was barred from combat flying. After escaping the city for Hong Kong, Lee began planning a flight across the United States to raise money for the Chinese Nationalist cause. She first needed to secure official national support for the endeavor. Lee set about to win the approval and backing of longtime supporter of national aviation and former chairman of the National Aeronautics Commission, Madame Chiang Kai-shek, who she believed to be crucial for securing support for her trip.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁷ Gully, 157.

¹⁶⁸ Gully, 157.

¹⁶⁹ Lee credited with Madame Chiang Kai-shek for putting a “feminine stamp on aviation,” while she never became a pilot herself. I don't have much information on how

After much pleading with the Minister of Foreign Affairs who mediated their contact, Madame Chiang Kai-shek granted Lee Ya-Ching her full approval for the trip. With this official backing Lee garnered support from a host of national relief organizations across China, including National Government Relief Commission, the Catholic War Relief Association in China and the China Defense League—which was overseen by Madame Sun Yat-sen, the wife of the revolutionary leader of 1911.¹⁷⁰

With letters of support and introduction designed to help her make connections with war relief and charitable organizations such as the Red Cross in the United States, Lee embarked on planning her fundraising cross-country trip across the United States. First things first, Lee needed to get from China to the United States—which would have been no small feat in 1938 and given that China was in the midst of war with Japan. It was only two years prior on October 21, 1936, that Pan American Airways had inaugurated its first commercial passenger flight from San Francisco to China.¹⁷¹ Lee worked to secure passage on Pan Am's newly minted and highly publicized "China Clipper." As the next chapter will show in greater depth, Pan Am was eager to bolster its public image on the global stage in the years leading up to and during WWII. Lee was able to take advantage of the publicity and goodwill she could offer Pan Am's increasingly self-conscious public orientation, while at the same time benefiting her

Madame Chiang Kai-shek came to occupy a leadership position in Chinese aviation and think this would be fascinating to explore.

¹⁷⁰ "Letter to Madame Sun," 1938, Lee Ya Ching Collection, NASM, Box 4, F10; "Letter to Madame Sun Yat-Sen, 1938, Lee Ya Ching Collection, NASM, Box 4, F10; "Letter from office of Paul Yu-Pin," 1939, Lee Ya Ching Collection, NASM, Box 3, F5; Gully, 160.

¹⁷¹ "Wings over the World," Annual Report for 1944, Pan American World Airways, 4. NASM 9A03831, F1P-167000-04.

nationalist cause. Remarkably, Lee was able to obtain a ticket aboard the China Clipper at a 50% discount. Instead of the regular fare of \$950, Lee would be able to fly to San Francisco for the discounted rate of \$400.¹⁷²

But what was Lee to do after arriving in San Francisco? She had the backing of her nation and had secured her transport to the US, but how was Lee to single-handedly find a plane and organize a cross-country trip complete with fundraising functions at each stop? This would have likely been impossible were it not for the closely associated network of organized American women pilots and aviation companies (the subject of the previous chapter), which worked to facilitate her tour. By linking up with famed American flyers like Jacqueline Cochran and Ruth Nichols, Lee gained entry into the American aviation promotion machine and was soon rubbing shoulders with Olive Ann Beech and being sought after by Beech Aircraft Company and their rival Cessna for publicity purposes. Lee's blend of technological skill and awareness of the valuable publicity a woman flyer could garner for the cause of aviation matched perfectly with the ethos of American women flyers. While their flying was never as much of a national cause as it had been for Lee, the looming clouds of WWII and the humanitarian crisis faced by the Chinese easily convinced American women flyers to support her nationalist cause.

Personal correspondence reveals that famed female flyer Jacqueline Cochran served as Lee's first point of contact with the American aviation community. While it is not clear how they were connected or why Cochran took a particular interest in aiding Lee, Cochran seems to have given her a much-needed introduction to the major American

¹⁷² "Ya-Ching letter to Sir Victor," 1938, Lee Ya-Ching Collection, NASM, Box 4, F10.

aviation players. Jacqueline Cochran was a well-known aviator during the interwar years, setting many women's records, winning several awards, and petitioning for various all-male air races to accept women.¹⁷³ Cochran reportedly assisted Lee in finding a plane that she could use for her cross-country fundraising tour. Cochran also provided Lee with letters of introduction to aviation elites in various cities in which she planned to stop. Cochran's husband and business partner of sorts, Floyd Odlum, also wrote letters soliciting support from his contacts in the US and Canada for Lee's tour.¹⁷⁴

When Cochran decided to reach out to an aircraft company who might be interested in sponsoring Lee's flight, Wichita's Beech Aircraft Company was a natural choice. Thanks in large part to the direction of Olive Ann Beech, co-founder, Secretary, and de-facto company director, Beech Aircraft Company had a demonstrated interest in backing women flyers while promoting its aircraft. Just two years after its sponsorship of Louise Thaden and Blanche Noyes as the first female winners of the Bendix Air Race, in 1938, Beech Aircraft loaned Lee a bright red Stinson SR-9B for her cross-country flight. In its company newsletter, *The Beechcraft Bulletin*, Beech proudly declared its support for Lee's mission. "Miss Lee, a young lady of great personal charm and intelligence, was deeply touched by the unfortunate situation of the thirty million Chinese refugees made homeless and in need of subsistence and medical care..." the article explained. Extolling her bravery and courage, the article recounted her mission to crisscross the United States in order to raise support for her native land, while not missing the opportunity to

¹⁷³ Cochran's interwar aviation activities are documented in Margaret Weitekamp's *Right Stuff, Wrong Sex: America's First Women in Space Program*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004).

¹⁷⁴ "Letter to Victor Odlum," 1939, Lee Ya-Ching Collection, NASM, Box 3, F 4; "Letter to Richard Millar," 1938, Lee Ya-Ching Collection, NASM, Box 4, F10.

emphasize that she did so in the most modern and well-equipped of aircraft.¹⁷⁵ Personal correspondence revealed that Lee developed a friendship with the Beech family, sending gifts to Olive Ann and Walter's children and exchanging occasional notes with Olive Ann.¹⁷⁶

While loaning Lee a plane for her goodwill flight might be seen as an act of altruism on behalf of Beech Aircraft, it was most assuredly a shrewd business move to gain publicity. Lee's tour garnered no end of publicity across the United States. Beech knew that every front-page spread featuring a photograph of the exotic aviatrix would also feature a Beech aircraft. Lee presented the perfect extension of the company's use of women to market aircraft—but this time, their female flyer of choice came with the added allure of exoticism. Beech Aircraft Company was not the only company to recognize the publicity value of Lee's crusade. Head of the China Airmotive Company's New York Office, Samuel Niedelman recognized the potential sales opportunity that Lee presented. China Airmotive Company was just one aviation company working to take advantage of the burgeoning aviation market in China by selling aircraft to the Chinese military. According to the 1939 Aeronautical Chamber of Commerce's *Aircraft Yearbook*, China received \$6,391,713 in "aeronautical exports" from the United States, accounting for around 9.4 percent of the total value of all aeronautical exports for the

¹⁷⁵ "Chinese Girl Pilot..." *Beechcraft Bulletin*, No. 3, April 1940: Wichita, KS, Lee Ya-Ching Collection, NASM, Box 10, F2.

¹⁷⁶ "Dear Ya Ching" Letter from Olive Ann, December 27, 1939, Lee Ya-Ching Collection, NASM, Box 3, F6.

year 1939.¹⁷⁷ China was second only to Japan as the largest recipient of US aircraft and parts during the year (Japan received 16.2 percent of the total value of US exports for 1939).¹⁷⁸ In a letter to Dwane Wallace, the President of Cessna Aircraft Company, Niedelman expressed his concern over Beech's sponsorship of Lee.

Explaining Lee's mission and her upcoming trip to Wichita, Niedelman warned that Cessna was on the cusp of losing out on a valuable publicity opportunity to a competitor. "You might be interested to know that Walter Beech loaned her the Stinson [the aircraft she was flying across country] gratis, and Beech is definitely a competitor of ours in China," he alerted. In order to take advantage of the opportunity, Niedelman suggested that Cessna have Lee set a new altitude record in a Cessna aircraft with their latest engine. "This plan would not only give you the feminine publicity," he boasted, "but also would tie in the Chinese angle and give it much more color."¹⁷⁹ While it is not clear whether Cessna ever actually sponsored Lee in an altitude record attempt, the correspondence illustrates the general clamor for publicity that she ignited throughout the American aircraft industry.

¹⁷⁷ Aeronautical Chamber of Commerce, "Flying Facts and Figures: U.S. Aeronautical Exports," in *1939 Aircraft Yearbook*, (New York: Aeronautical Chamber of Commerce, Inc., 1939,) 508-509.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁹ "Letter to Dwane Wallace" China Airmotive Company, April 28, 1939, Lee Ya-Ching Collection, NASM, Box 3, F6.



Lee Ya-Ching and *Spirit of New China*, c. 1938¹⁸⁰

Figure 3.5

On March 23, 1939, Lee Ya-Ching, the modern Chinese aviatrix who embodied the Chinese national cause to Americans across the country, commenced her fundraising tour from New York in her Beechcraft plane, fittingly named *The Spirit of New China*.¹⁸¹ Much to the tour organizer's relief, Lee Ya-Ching was showered with newspaper headlines and public attention at each of her stops. As she made her way across the country, newspapers chronicled her trip, heralding her variously as "China's Amelia

¹⁸⁰ "Photographs — Trips 1939 - 1941." Women in Aviation. Gale, 1939 - 1941. Smithsonian Collections Online. Web. 31 Oct. 2016. URL: <http://tinyurl.galegroup.com/tinyurl/3uVpN7>. [Figure 3.5]

¹⁸¹ Gully, 166.

Earhart,” and “China’s leading woman flyer.”¹⁸² Articles also pointed out the good looks and fashion of the “beauteous oriental aviatrix.”¹⁸³ At each of the cities where she stopped, Lee attended countless fundraisers organized by various charities in order to collect funds for Chinese refugees. Not surprisingly the media directed a great deal of attention at her appearance, specifically the more exotic aspects of her attire. For most public appearances, Lee dressed in an elegant qipao, the modern dress of the Chinese “new woman,” with flowers tucked delicately in her hair or behind her ear. In a protest against Japanese-imported silk, she either wore cotton stockings or sometimes skipped them altogether, a detail that newspaper reporters eagerly chronicled, describing her skin as “creamy as a rose pedal.”¹⁸⁴

In sum, Lee’s fundraising tour was lauded as a success. She flew for three months crisscrossing the United States and racking up a total of nearly 10,000 miles, while raising \$10,000 for civilian refugees in China.¹⁸⁵ After the tour ended, Lee stayed in the US taking advantage of invitations for public appearances in order to continue raising funds. Her presence in American aviation circles put her in touch with more famed American women flyers such as Louise Thaden and head of the American-based “Relief Wings,” Ruth Nichols, who she briefly joined forces with in war-related fundraising. After leaving the US, Lee organized a flying tour of South America in order to continue spreading the plight of Chinese refugees, where she again met with great

¹⁸² “Chinese Amelia Here,” *The Honolulu Advertiser*, October 19, 1938, Lee Ya-Ching Collection, NASM, Box 11, F7.

¹⁸³ “Ya Ching Lee Loses Her Army Wings...” *San Francisco News*, October 17, 1938, Lee Ya-Ching Collection, NASM, Box 11, F7.

¹⁸⁴ Gully, 168.

¹⁸⁵ Gully, 174

success.

Through her career as an aviator, Lee Ya Ching laid claim to an impressive degree of economic and geographic mobility. As a state project linked to national modernization efforts, aviation offered Lee a “sanctioned” arena in which to assert her independence and equality as a woman. Lee’s American fundraising tour also illustrates the global connections that existed within the interwar aviation community, and the unevenness of power that existed within it. To American aviation companies, Lee represented access to a potentially lucrative economic market in which to sell aircraft. To the American public, Lee represented an alluring contradiction: an “oriental” Chinese woman who had somehow managed to learn to fly in a nation where, in the not too distant past, women’s feet were bound. To the Chinese state, Lee represented a potent symbol of a nation seeking global prominence as a modern state capable of fending off imperial incursions. Lee, as a modern “Chinese girl aviatrix” became the perfect symbol to embody the state’s universalist claims to technological progress while emphasizing its cultural tradition.

Part 3.2: Sabiha Gökçen and the Turkish Republic’s Modern “Woman of Tomorrow”

Born in 1913 in Bursa, Turkey, Sabiha Gökçen’s early years, much like Lee Ya Ching’s, were marked by a national war of independence from dynastic rule and foreign imperialism. At the end of WWI, the Ottoman Empire signed a treaty with the Allied forces that granted Allied occupation of strategic Ottoman territories. Just as the 1919 Paris Peace Treaty angered anti-colonial forces in China, the treaty’s focus on carving up

Ottoman territories between France, Britain, and Greece angered Turkish nationalists who viewed the treaty as giving the green light to Western imperialism. Mustafa Kemal emerged as a nationalist leader working to organize against foreign power grabs of the crumbling Ottoman Empire, at first working under the auspices of the Sultan. Once Allied forces had withdrawn from their occupations of various regions of Turkey, fear mounted within the remaining power structure of the Ottoman Empire concerning the limits of Kemal's nationalist aims. In 1920, Turkish nationalists led by Mustafa Kemal formally dissolved the Ottoman Empire and established the Turkish Grand National Assembly in Ankara. Having fully defeated Western imperial encroachment and thrown off the vestiges of the Ottoman dynastic rule, in 1923 the Republic of Turkey was established and Mustafa Kemal was elected as its first President. Mustafa Kemal became known as Atatürk, father of the Turkish peoples.¹⁸⁶

Gökçen's parents died in the war of Turkish independence and as a result she was placed in an orphanage for the children of army officers.¹⁸⁷ In 1925, just two years after the founding of the Turkish Republic, Atatürk met Gökçen when visiting the city of Bursa. After learning of her plight, Atatürk adopted the 12-year old Gökçen and brought her to live in Istanbul.¹⁸⁸ Gökçen's adoption by Atatürk and subsequent education in Istanbul as well as eventual military pilot training represents a moment in Turkish history in which women were at the center of nationalist state modernization projects. Sabiha Gökçen's global prominence as Turkey's first woman pilot underlines the significance of

¹⁸⁶ Jayawardena, 33.

¹⁸⁷ "'New Turkey's' Girl War Pilot to Organize First Fighting Amazon Flying Corps," *New York Journal-American*, May 1, 1938. NASM, Folder: CG-351000-01

¹⁸⁸ "Sabiha, Gokcen," Rosanne Welch, *Encyclopedia of Women in Aviation and Space*, (New York: ABC-CLIO, 1998), 83.

the intersecting forces of women's reforms and state-led technological modernization in Turkey during the interwar period.

In establishing the Republic of Turkey, Atatürk embarked on a series of state-led reforms aimed at modernizing the Turkish economy and society. In addition to encouraging economic development along capitalist lines, Atatürk's reforms centered on secularizing the state through a series of efforts to remove religion from civic spaces, including promoting European dress in public spaces, introducing the concept of civil marriage and divorce codes, and banning polygamy.¹⁸⁹ Attempting to emphasize the Turkish Republic's place among the modern nations of the world, Atatürk urged that the Turkish alphabet be changed from Arabic to Latin and moved the Turkish capital to Ankara—a city which immediately underwent modernist architectural renovations including the construction of wide boulevards and the subdivision of large buildings into single-family apartment dwellings.¹⁹⁰

As scholars of Turkish history have noted, Atatürk's reforms aimed at crafting a modern Turkish Republic emphasized debates about the place of women within the new social, political, and economic order. Women's emancipation became central to efforts to assert nationalist claims to sovereignty against Western imperialists' delegitimizing assertions of Turkey's cultural backwardness. As such, Kemal Atatürk linked his vision of a modernized Turkey to the "emancipation of women from the rigid shackles of

¹⁸⁹ Jayawardena, 33.

¹⁹⁰ Jenny B. White, "State Feminism, Modernization, and the Turkish Republican Woman," *NWSA Journal*, Vol. 15, No. 3, Gender and Modernism between the Wars, 1918-1939 (Autumn, 2003), 148.

orthodoxy.”¹⁹¹ In a 1923 speech, Atatürk explicitly linked Turkish national progress to women’s equality within Turkish society, stating, “Let us be frank: society is made of women as well as men. If one grants all the rights to progress to the one and no rights at all to the other...Is it possible that [while] one half of the population is in chains for the other half to reach the skies? Progress is possible only through a common effort...”¹⁹² In order to ensure women’s full participation in Turkish society, thus aiding national progress as Atatürk had argued, women were encouraged to attend universities and obtain professional degrees.¹⁹³

As evidence of the Republican woman’s full political participation, women were granted the right to vote in local elections in 1930 and granted full suffrage in national elections in 1934.¹⁹⁴ During the elections of 1935, 18 women were elected to the Turkish National Assembly, comprising 4.5% of total representatives. This became a point of pride for Turkish nationalists who were eager to point out that this was the highest number of nationally elected female officials across Europe. Turkish women’s political participation was heralded as a mark of the progressive dimensions of the Turkish state especially given the fact that, as of 1935, many European countries including France and Italy had not yet granted female suffrage.¹⁹⁵ While women’s education and political participation became important symbols of modern Turkey, historians are careful to point out that the impact of such reforms were class-based and urban in their actual reach. Rural and impoverished women did not benefit as directly from reforms aimed at

¹⁹¹ Jayawardena, 34.

¹⁹² Atatürk quoted in Jayawardena, 36.

¹⁹³ White, 150.

¹⁹⁴ White, 151.

¹⁹⁵ Jayawardena, 38.

improving the lives of women.¹⁹⁶

While Atatürk's political project elevated the status of the "woman question" to national prominence, his efforts did not create women's movements, yet intersected with the efforts of various groups and organizations that were already in place. Organizations such as the Turkish Women's Union (Türk Kadınlar Birliği) had been active throughout the 1920s and developed international connections with feminist organizations around the world.¹⁹⁷ As historians have argued, the TWU intersected with state interests under Atatürk's rule and "provided evidence to the West that Turkey's national transformation deserved recognition," and signaled the "seriousness of Turkish reforms and Turkey's commitment to participation in international institutions and processes."¹⁹⁸ The Turkish Republic's status as progressive supporter of women's rights was confirmed when the International Alliance of Women (IAW) chose to hold its 1935 annual Congress in Istanbul. Atatürk viewed the international feminist organization's decision to hold its meeting in Istanbul as a "sign of the world's endorsement" of Turkey's modernist reforms.¹⁹⁹ IAW leaders reportedly chose Istanbul in order to encourage East-West cooperation within the international feminist movement.

The Twelfth IAW Congress commenced on April 18, 1935 in Istanbul, drawing around 400 delegates and activists from around the world. Atatürk reportedly lent government support to the meeting, a fact that did not go unnoticed by Western delegates. Famed suffragist Carrie Chapman Catt, who attended the Istanbul Congress, offered her

¹⁹⁶ Jayawardena, 37 and White, 155.

¹⁹⁷ Kathryn Libal, "Staging Turkish Women's Emancipation: Istanbul, 1935," *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies*, Vol. 4, No. 1 (Winter 2008), 32.

¹⁹⁸ Libal, 33.

¹⁹⁹ Libal, 37.

approval of the Turkish Republic's gains for women, stating "The fact that the Congress is to assemble in Turkey...is of great significance and is a commentary on the advance that women have made...Not only that—the government has joined the invitation and provided the place of meeting, a thing that has not happened in a Christian country."²⁰⁰ The new Turkish Republic had much more at stake in supporting the International Alliance of Women's meeting than other nations, as it closely linked state-sanctioned advances for women to asserting its national sovereignty as a modern state.

While the meeting fostered unity in bringing together feminists from Europe and America with feminists from across the Middle East and Asia, it also revealed an underlying tension in the aims of women represented at the Congress. The disagreement centered on the place of nationalism and pacifism within the international feminist movement and highlighted the drastically varying national political contexts that framed movements for women's emancipation in different regions of the world. Attendees from colonized or formerly colonized countries in the Middle East and Asia responded with skepticism to the Congress's "Manifesto," which championed international peace, promoted disarmament, and challenged nationalism.²⁰¹

Women from these regions, including representatives from Turkey, argued that nationalist movements had proven essential in the face of Western imperialism and challenged the notion that women were uniquely responsible for championing peace within the international community. One Syrian participant aptly summarized the challenge that feminists in countries working to establish national sovereignty posed to

²⁰⁰ Quoted in Libal, 37.

²⁰¹ Libal, 38.

Western delegates, asserting, “While a single nation is oppressed, all sacrifices for peace will be of no avail. No amount of effort on your part will ever achieve your high aims while imperialism reigns in any corner of the world.”²⁰² Following the meeting, Turkish women continued to question the value of advocating pacifism considering that the newly minted Republic of Turkey would need to protect its existence in the face of growing militarized nationalist movements around the globe.

The tension within Feminist debates at the 1935 IAW Congress in Istanbul reflected the Turkish Republic’s imperative of defending its newly won national sovereignty. As was the case in China, aviation emerged in Turkey during the interwar period as a national technological project aimed at modernizing the state and strengthening national defense. Although it is not clear whether Sabiha Gökçen attended the conference, as Turkey’s first modern woman pilot, she became the ultimate symbol of the combination of the Republic’s efforts to modernize Turkish culture and national defense. In an effort to make Turkey competitive with the industrial nations of Europe and the United States, Atatürk endeavored to encourage civil and military aviation through a variety of state-led efforts. On February 16, 1925, Atatürk founded the Turkish Air Association (Türk Hava Kurumu).²⁰³ Much like the “Aero Clubs” throughout Europe, the United States, and South America during the interwar period, the Turkish Air Association (TAA) worked to popularize flight, especially promoting interest in aviation among Turkish youth. The organization also worked at the behest of the state to set up civil aviation schools and encouraged Turkish citizens to learn to fly.

²⁰² *Ibid.*

²⁰³ Preben Bajlum, “Sabiha Gökçen: A famous Turkish woman pilot,” *Air Britain Digest* (Autumn 1994), 71. NASM CG-351000-01.

In developing Turkish military aviation, Atatürk drew on favorable relationships with Germany and the Soviet Union. During the Turkish war of Independence, Atatürk reportedly obtained two Albatross C.XVs, the German military reconnaissance aircraft that had been developed and was operational during WWI. Turkey also signed an agreement with the Soviet Union that arranged for Soviet flight instructors to train Turkish pilots to fly gliders.²⁰⁴ After establishing the Republic of Turkey, Atatürk also embarked on a series of reforms aimed at reorganizing and strengthening the Turkish Air Force. In 1925, a military aviation school was established so that pilots no longer needed to leave the country for flight training. By 1940, the Turkish Air Force reportedly had 500 aircraft in its arsenal and was considered the most powerful air force in the Balkans.²⁰⁵

Sabiha Gökçen's interest in aviation reportedly began in 1935, while attending the opening celebrations of the Turkish Civil Aviation School with her father. With Atatürk's encouragement, Gökçen joined the school that same year becoming its first female flying student.²⁰⁶ She began her flying lessons with glider training under the instruction of Soviet teachers in Ankara. After obtaining several Turkish gliding certificates, Gökçen traveled to Crimea along with seven male Turkish students for further instruction in July 1935.

²⁰⁴ Sabiha was one of seven Turkish pilots who traveled to Crimea in 1935 to attend a Soviet glider school. Bajlum, 73.

²⁰⁵ "Turkish Air Force, Our History, 1923-1944," *Turkish Air Force*, URL: https://www.hvkk.tsk.tr/en-us/Turkish_Air_Force/Our_History/_1923-1944, (accessed November 2, 2016).

²⁰⁶ Bajlum, 72.



Sabiha Gökçen, Glider Flight School at İnönü Air Camp near Ankara, c.1935²⁰⁷
Figure 3.6

After returning to Turkey from Crimea, Gökçen began flight training with powered aircraft. In 1936, she flew her first solo flight in a Caudron C59 outside of Istanbul with her father Kemal Atatürk watching from the ground.²⁰⁸ The day after her first solo flight, at the behest of her father, Gökçen began military flight training at the Turkish Air Force School that Atatürk had established through his reforms of Turkish military aviation. After around a year of training, she graduated on August 30, 1937, becoming Turkey's first female military pilot.

As Turkey's first military pilot, and adopted daughter of the nation's leader, Sabiha Gökçen symbolized the gender barriers that women could break within the new Turkish Republic. As a woman, she also represented a somewhat sanitized symbol of

²⁰⁷ "Sabiha Gökçen, İnönü hava kampında-2442," Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress. [Figure 3.6]

²⁰⁸ Bajlum, 73.

Turkey's modern military air force. Despite being heralded as the ultimate example of Turkish women's emancipation, however, the limits of the brand of state-sanctioned feminist liberation that Gökçen embodied were cast in stark relief during the Kurdish rebellion of 1937. A newly minted member of the Turkish Air Force, Gökçen was plunged into direct combat as Turkish forces were called to squelch a revolt staged by Kurdish tribes in Eastern Turkey. The Kurds were an ethnic group that operated as a somewhat autonomous political entity under the Ottoman Empire. Kurdish leaders, however, increasingly lost regional power in the face of Atatürk's efforts to create national unity after the establishment of the Republic.

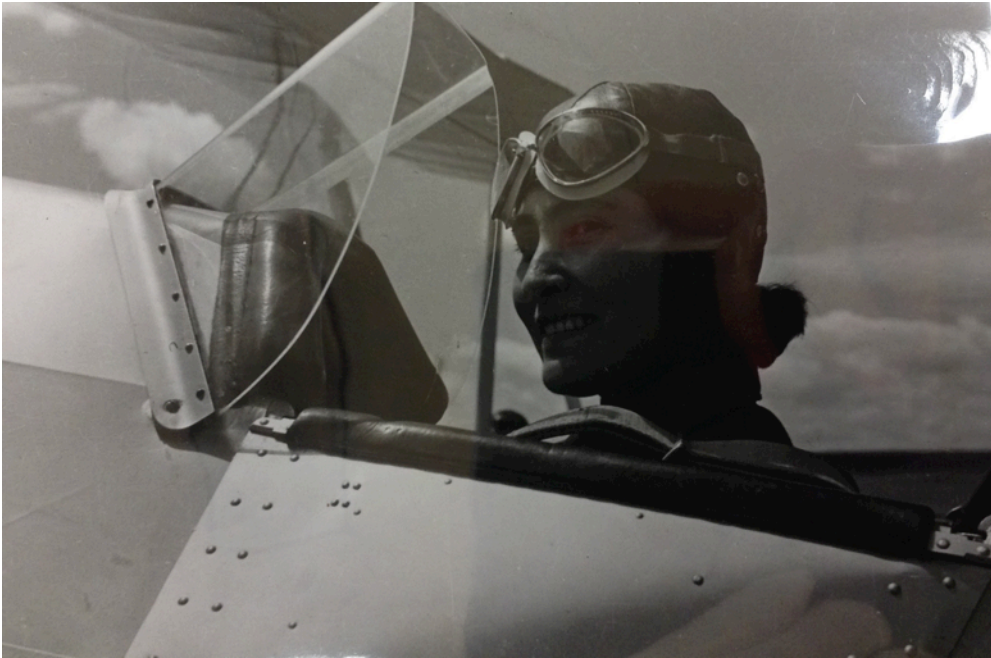
Mounting tensions and isolated conflicts erupted in a 1937 revolt staged by Kurdish Nationalist forces in the Dersim province.²⁰⁹ In conjunction with ground troops, the Turkish Air Force dispatched to squelch the rebellion through a number of bombing runs that resulted in mass casualties. Records indicate that Gökçen herself flew over 30 sorties during the aerial campaign.²¹⁰ At the conclusion of fighting, on May 28, 1937 the Turkish Aeronautical Association awarded Gökçen its highest medal of honor for her role in the operation.²¹¹ Gökçen's participation in the Turkish suppression of the Kurdish revolt demonstrated two things: 1. Women could participate on equal footing with men in aviation as a state project to shore up the bounds of national territorial control, and 2. The modern Turkish Republic's vision of women's emancipation remained highly

²⁰⁹ Robert Olsen, "The Defeat of the Kurdish Revolt at Mt. Arat (1930) and the Role of the Turkish Air Force," *The International Journal of Kurdish Studies*, vol. 7, no. 1-2, 1994; Barkley and Fuller, "Turkey's Kurdish Question: Critical Turning Points and Missed Opportunities," *Middle East Journal*, vol. 51, no. 1 (Winter, 1997), 63.

²¹⁰ Bajlum, 73.

²¹¹ Bajlum, 74.

exclusionary. Modern Turkish women could achieve equality and liberation as long as it did not conflict with Atatürk's nationalist vision. Kurdish women learned this lesson directly and at the hands of a modern Turkish woman no less.



Sabiha Gökçen, Ankara c. 1937²¹²
Figure 3.7

Following the Turkish Air Force's impressive show of force, Kemal Atatürk sought to emphasize that aviation could serve as a positive uniting national force as well. During a 1937 celebration of the 15th anniversary of the Turkish Republic, Atatürk arranged for Gökçen to perform acrobatic stunts for on-looking crowds as a spectacular show of Turkish technological modernity. The following year, Atatürk enlisted Gökçen in a propagandistic "goodwill tour" of neighboring Balkan states. In 1938, she embarked on a solo flight through the Balkans stopping and giving speeches at various locations.

²¹² "Sabiha Gökçen, Basın ve yayın umum müdürlüğü-2442," Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress. [Figure 3.7]

While her trip was officially conducted under the auspices of the military and she wore her military uniform throughout the trip, she assured critical journalists who questioned the purpose of her tour that she came “as the symbol of Turkey’s strong wishes for peace.”²¹³



Sabiha Gökçen in military flight uniform, c. 1938²¹⁴
Figure 3.8

The Western press picked up the story of Gökçen’s 1938 “goodwill tour” and the resulting American news articles provide an interesting glimpse into how her image translated across national borders. Newspapers heralded Gökçen variously as the

²¹³ Bajlum, 75.

²¹⁴ “Sabiha Gökçen, Türk kusu...-2443,” Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress. [Figure 3.8]

“Amazon of the air,” “Turkey’s queen of the skies,” and a “vivacious young beauty.”²¹⁵ Following the trend of American reporting on women pilots in the US (as shown in the previous chapter), newspaper articles attempt to explain Gökçen’s exceptional role in a masculine realm while also emphasizing her femininity. One article reported, “Turkey’s queen of the skies is a severe disciplinarian, but off duty she is a girl of the modern generation. She dresses fashionably in western clothes. She has an effervescent laugh and a love of gayety.”²¹⁶ Despite her feminine characteristics, however, the article documented her reported refusal to engage in typical girlish activities as a child, such as playing with dolls. Another article emphasized that despite being Turkey’s only female military pilot Gökçen made time for feminine pursuits, explaining, “Besides flying she is skilled in embroidery and painting and likes Parisian clothes.”²¹⁷

Given that the United States government barred women from military flying at the time, American journalists portrayed Gökçen’s military status in a remarkably positive light. “One of the world’s foremost military fliers,” one article chronicled, “the fearless girl who tamed fierce Kurdish rebels with bombs and machine guns, believes women can be among the best of combat pilots.”²¹⁸ Rather than casting doubt on her claims of gender equality in the realm of combat flying, the newspaper summarized the “heroism” she portrayed in fighting off the Kurdish revolt in great detail. Another article praised the “emancipated women of Turkey” who followed in Gökçen’s footsteps by joining “home

²¹⁵ “‘New Turkey’s’ Girl War Pilot to Organize First Fighting Amazon Flying Corps,” *New York Journal American*, May 1, 1938. NASM CG-351000-01.

²¹⁶ “‘New Turkey’s’ Girl War Pilot,” May 1, 1938, NASM CG-351000-01.

²¹⁷ “Aerial Amazon,” *New York Times*, Jan. 23, 1940, NASM CG-351000-01.

²¹⁸ “‘New Turkey’s’ Girl War Pilot,” May 1, 1938.

defense preparations.”²¹⁹ Articles also detailed her plans to organize the “world’s first women’s fighting air squadron,” explaining that she endeavored to train 20 Turkish women pilots “for service with her father’s growing air force.”²²⁰

Newspaper coverage emphasized Gökçen’s status as Kemal Atatürk’s daughter and visual symbol of modern Turkish womanhood. As a pilot, Gökçen exemplified the newly emancipated status of Turkish women. Drawing on well-trodden images of the exotic “oriental woman,” newspapers contrasted depictions of Gökçen in modern dress posed next to her aircraft with descriptions of veiled women secluded in dusty harems. One article proclaimed, “Turkish women, once confined to high-walled harems, are proud of a 25-year-old girl who symbolizes their twentieth-century emancipation.”²²¹ Another described Gökçen as representative of the “new Turkey’s” young women “whose mothers wore veils and dwelt in harems.”²²² One striking photograph of Gökçen kneeling before her stark white glider affixing a cable to its nose appeared in an American publication with the caption, “Moslem veils are unknown to glider girls in coveralls.”²²³

Juxtaposing imagery of the modern Turkish woman as represented by Gökçen with the traditional Turkish woman speaks to why the woman pilot became such a useful tool for nationalist projects in the interwar period. For these journalists and for Atatürk himself, Gökçen represented the antithesis of the veiled woman of the Ottoman harem.

²¹⁹ “Emancipated Women of Turkey,” *N.Y. Post*, February 24, 1940, NASM CG-351000-01.

²²⁰ ““New Turkey’s Girl War Pilot,” May 1, 1938, NASM CG-351000-01.

²²¹ “Aerial Amazon,” *New York Times*, Jan. 23, 1940, NASM CG-351000-01.

²²² ““New Turkey’s’ Girl War Pilot,” May 1, 1938, NASM CG-351000-01.

²²³ Article clipping, undated found in Sabiha Gökçen file at NASM, folder CG-351000-01.

Just as the modern Turkish state had purportedly removed the symbolic vestiges of women's historical subjugation by barring religious clothing in public spaces, aviation offered Turkish women a place to assert equal footing with men through access to a modern technology used to assert state sovereignty and military control.

Conclusion:

As this chapter has shown, the interwar woman pilot emerged as a powerful symbol of national development and women's place within state projects. Lee Ya-Ching represented that Chinese women not only had cast off the constraints of their foot bindings obtaining newfound mobility on the ground, but that they had also acquired the ultimate expression of liberation and mobility through flight. Likewise, Sabiha Gökçen symbolized Turkish women's escape from the restrictions of the veil and harem to find freedom in the air. Beyond serving as symbols of freedom for women, this chapter has examined the ways in which these women pilots were situated within particular nationalist projects during the interwar period.

With the outbreak of WWII, opportunities for the woman pilot changed and her reign as a popular and powerful symbol of modernity came to an end. While women pilots made headlines in countries such as Germany and the Soviet Union during WWII, their public existence nearly ceased to exist in countries such as the United States and France—where they perhaps had received the most attention during the interwar period. Unlike Germany and the Soviet Union, the United States and France barred women from military flying during WWII. This policy foreclosed access to flight training and aviation

careers for many women, as scholars have noted.²²⁴ While the woman pilot ceased to be a prolific symbol, women's experience with aviation continued through WWII and into the postwar period. Women occupied interesting roles as employees and imagined consumer markets within the growing commercial airlines.

While the interwar woman pilot embodied the success of national technological development, the woman airline employee facilitated international travel and smoothed the tensions created as increasing numbers of people transgressed those national boundaries. During WWII and beyond, women continued to make flying seem safe and familiar while representing it as a culturally authentic national project that demonstrated technological and economic superiority to the world. The next chapter examines how women as employees of commercial airlines ushered passengers into the jet age of mass commercial air transport.

²²⁴ Debbie Douglas, *American Women and Aviation since 1940*, (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2004).

PART II: GLOBAL EXPANSION—WWII TO 1960

CHAPTER 4

PAN AMERICAN AIRWAYS STRETCHES ITS “WINGS OVER THE WORLD:” GENDER, SERVICE, AND PUBLIC IMAGE DURING WWII

From its founding in 1927 until its bankruptcy and ruin in 1991, Pan American World Airways served as the United States' largest international airline. Strengthened by U.S. government contracts during WWII and bolstered by its successful adoption of early jet aircraft, Pan Am emerged in the “jet age” of the 1950s and 60s as a cultural symbol of U.S. progress and an airline whose name was synonymous with luxury and glamour.²²⁵ Like all companies, however, Pan Am had to work to establish its airline as a recognizable brand with a favorable public image. An examination of the process by which the firm created a corporate notion of service during WWII reveals much about the construction of Pan American World Airways as a brand. Analyzing corporate documents from the 1940s and 50s reveals that Pan Am's massive wartime expansion forced the company to articulate a centralized vision and approach to providing excellent service, as it assumed an increasingly important role in serving national security interests as well as increasing numbers of passengers. Remarkably, these documents also reveal that Pan Am defined corporate notions of service in highly gendered ways by tasking women employees with the job of representing the public face of the company.

²²⁵ The works of Victoria Vantoch and Jennifer Van Vleck have respectively explored Pan American Airways as an important cultural and political symbol. See Victoria Vantoch, *Jet Sex: Airline Stewardesses and the Making of an American Icon*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013); and, Jennifer Van Vleck, *Empire of the Air: Aviation and the American Ascendancy*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013).

Why did Pan Am position women as the public face of the company during the height of what scholars have termed Pan Am's "empire of the air?" This chapter will examine the connections between gender and public relations during Pan Am's vast WWII global expansion, while considering what this case reveals about informal mechanisms of national, economic and political power. This chapter will also consider the gendered aspects of Pan Am's notion of service work and its function within organizational strategy and brand construction.

Pan American Airways goes to war:

By all accounts, WWII was an incredible boon for Pan Am's business. Total plane miles flown jumped from just 17,526,625 in 1940 to 79,818,502 in 1944.²²⁶ Additionally total pounds of freight carried skyrocketed from 6,157,255 in 1940 to 128,793,259 in 1944.²²⁷ With many commercial travel routes suspended due to the war, much of this business came directly from US government contracts. In 1944, Pan Am had received a total of \$8,091,434.37 in the form of contract payments from the United States Government for transporting troops and material along vital supply networks.²²⁸ In a 1944 annual report to stockholders, Pan Am highlighted the service it rendered to the war effort under contract with various branches of the US armed forces. "Up to January 1945," the report chronicled, "Pan American flight crews had flown on a contract basis 31,628,000 plane miles for the Naval Air Transport Service, 30,183,000 for the Air

²²⁶ "Wings over the World," Annual Report for 1944, Pan American World Airways, 7. NASM 9A03831, F1P-167004-07.

²²⁷ *Ibid.*, 22.

²²⁸ *Ibid.*, 24.

Transport Command, and 18,151,000 for the Army in India-China...a total of over 86,800,000 plane miles.”²²⁹ In addition to delivering supplies and material to various war theatres, Pan Am also ferried armed service members to and from conflict. “Through the Africa-Orient Division,” the report detailed, “the Army has returned thousands of wounded veterans to the United States for medical care.”²³⁰ Beyond serving in such support roles, Pan Am employees even found themselves thrust in the middle of actual combat situations, dramatically highlighting the dual-use nature of commercial aircraft.

When the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, Pan Am employees stationed across the Pacific found themselves in grave danger. Barred from flying passenger service on the highly trafficked and profitable North Atlantic routes between the United States and Europe, by the mid-1930s Pan Am began charting routes across the Pacific to China. The Pacific routes, however, posed a technical challenge for the existing aircraft with limited flight range. Flying westward over the Pacific required covering far greater distances than crossing the Atlantic to Europe. Pan Am solved the dilemma by charting a route based on hopping across small islands sprinkled throughout the expansive Pacific Ocean. From San Francisco, Pan Am planes would travel to Hawaii, Midway Island, Wake Island, Guam, and then land in Manila in the Philippines before finally reaching Canton, on the far Eastern coast of China. On November 22, 1935 Pan Am flew the first Pacific airmail flight and on October 21, 1936, Pan Am inaugurated its first commercial passenger flight across the Pacific. Pan Am employees

²²⁹ “Wings over the World,” Annual Report for 1944, Pan American World Airways, 4. NASM 9A03831, F1P-167004-07.

²³⁰ *Ibid.*, 5.

were accordingly sent to various locations across the Pacific to service aircraft and passengers flying from San Francisco to Manila.

Before they had a chance to evacuate the island, on December 8, 1941, Pan Am employees spotted a convoy of 80 Japanese ships off the coast of Manila. As they huddled in a Manila hotel formulating a plan, they were abruptly warned that Japanese forces had already reached the hotel lobby. Japanese forces took control of the city and placed thirty-four Pan Am employees in internment camps, where they remained until American forces were able to re-take the island in 1945. In a pamphlet published by Pan Am in late 1945 titled “Return from Hell,” internees related their experiences of internment—including enduring prolonged periods without food or water. After liberation, Navy ships ferried Pan Am employees to the docks at San Francisco where loved ones gathered to greet them. Also waiting for each employee was a signed letter by Juan Trippe notifying the employees that they had been left on the company payroll during their internment and that they would be entitled to vacation time that had accrued in their absence. In addition to such financial remunerations, Trippe offered a heartfelt thank you to his employees for their wartime service: “Mere words seem pitifully inadequate to express our gratitude. No material consideration can ever recompense you for the suffering or mental torture which you endured during your long years of internment. However, the knowledge that you played your full part in an important war emergency must forever be a solace to you and a source of real satisfaction.”²³¹ Pan Am employees captured by the Japanese and held in internment camps in Manila couldn’t

²³¹ “Return from hell,” Pan American Airways (1945), 5. NASM 9A03831, F1P-167004-07.

have been more aware of the degree to which the company functioned in the service of US interests during WWII.

Company records also contain a host of harrowing stories faced by Pan Am crews who flew through war zones and even encountered enemy fire. Such situations often elicited a surprising degree of direct military engagement for a civilian airline. One Pan Am publication related the actions of Clipper Captain Robert Ford and his crew who gave chase to a Japanese submarine that was spotted while flying over the mid-Pacific. The submarine had reportedly just blown up a United States cargo ship and was readying to attack a flotilla of lifeboats filled with injured survivors. Captain Ford recalled, “We dropped down to 1000 feet and fired a flare. The Jap sub, which had been riding high, submerged.”²³² The Navy reportedly declared the response of the Pan Am crew a “heroic action” that prevented the Japanese submarine from launching an additional attack on survivors.

From transporting war material, troops, and political leaders to pursuing a Japanese submarine in the Pacific, Pan Am’s wartime service garnered the attention of Rear Admiral of the US Navy, A.W. Radford, and Hap Arnold, the Commanding General of the Army Air Forces, who each issued letters thanking Pan Am staff. In a 1944 letter addressed to “the Employees of the Pan American Airways System,” Rear Admiral Radford declared “This is a war that involves serious supply problems, and the service you men and women are rendering the nation in maintaining and operating world-wide

²³² “Wings over the World,” 10.

air supply lines is of the greatest importance to the men at the fighting front.”²³³ In another 1944 letter also addressed to the employees of Pan Am, General Hap Arnold similarly congratulated the company for its war service, stating “You of the Pan-American organizations are giving services of great importance to the operations of our men and women in uniform. May you continue to tackle our mutual problems from day to day with all the skill and vigor at your command and so to hasten the day of victory.”²³⁴

Operations during WWII:

As a result of the war raging in the Pacific, all trans-pacific passenger routes were suspended during the duration of the war. However, Pan Am maintained its regularly scheduled routes across the Atlantic. While passengers were largely flying on government business, civilians were not barred from purchasing tickets to travel across the Atlantic. As one 1943 Pan Am guide to travelers between New York and London reveals, however, such passengers were subject to a bevy of wartime restrictions. The pamphlet explained that all passengers flying on official government business were given “priority bookings.” Such priority passengers would be given “first call on the accommodation of the aircraft,” but the document also warned that sometimes even priority passengers might have to give up their place on an aircraft for passengers with a higher priority ranking. Passengers seeking a priority status were instructed to have the government department or agency that they represented report to the United States Navy

²³³ “Ten Thousand Times Around the World,” Pan American Airways (1944), 26.
NASM 9A03831, F1P-167004-07.

²³⁴ *Ibid.*

office in London, who had the final word on such matters. In an attempt to not only control the circulation of individuals during the war, but also the circulation of potentially sensitive knowledge related to the war-effort passengers were expected to obtain a British Exit Permit before leaving London on a flight back to the United States. The process of applying for an exit permit at the British Passport Office required passengers to submit all letters and papers of any kind that must accompany the passenger on the flight to the London Censorship Office. Once approved by the censorship office, Pan Am supplied an envelope to hold such materials during the duration of the flight. Passengers were also barred from bringing cameras or binoculars on board the aircraft. When deemed necessary baggage, cameras and binoculars were to be “placed in the custody of the Captain during the entire flight.” Passengers stopping over in Lisbon were barred from carrying cameras under any circumstance.²³⁵

While the exigencies of WWII complicated regular passenger travel, they also highlighted an important new business opportunity for Pan Am: shipping air cargo. While Pan Am had been shipping freight and mail before the war, World War II required the company to increase the number of flights made daily in the service of the military. In 1943 alone, Pan Am carried 84,545,010 pounds of air cargo, compared to 6,157,255 in 1940. One Pan Am pamphlet explained that the amount of cargo shipped was actually a secondary concern to the most impressive aspect of the company’s cargo program: its speed. “The quantity, often, is less important than the *speed*,” it declared, “not to mention dependability, because air cargo moves out of the reach of the submarine.

²³⁵ “Information for Passengers: North Atlantic Service,” Pan American Airways, October 1, 1943. NASM, F1P-167004-01.

Serum or penicillin or plasma is needed to save lives...vital radio tubes or a radar part is needed in a hurry!”²³⁶ As soon as the order is delivered, “Send it by Clipper,” the document explained, materials are sent on their way to a range of destinations from Honolulu, England, Alaska, Africa, the Middle East, or India, to the South Pacific.

The massive increase in air cargo shipments of military material served as a proof of concept for the company, which looked to establishing its continued dominance in the postwar market.²³⁷ “Air transport was tried and air transport has succeeded!” another Pan Am report declared. The report projected that the pre-war shipment of lightweight materials and high-value, small package items was sure to increase in the postwar era. The war, however, had added a new classification of material to be shipped by air—perishable items that could never be sent via steamer because of the length of time involved in transit.²³⁸ The report chronicled a series of strange items shipped by Pan Am planes including 50,000 live wasps flown from Cuba to Mexico in order to combat a plague of black fruit flies, half a million fertilized lake trout and whitefish eggs flown from the US to Lake Titicaca, and a shipment of live toads carried from Argentina to Florida in order to destroy a particular sugar cane parasite.²³⁹ “It is in these fields, where international, overseas transport has often hitherto been considered impossible, that the

²³⁶ “Ten Thousand Times around the World,” (1944), 9. NASM 9A03831, F1P-167004-07.

²³⁷ “Ten Thousand Times around the World,” 9.

²³⁸ “Wings over the World,” Annual Report for 1944, Pan American World Airways, 13. NASM 9A03831, F1P-167004-07.

²³⁹ *Ibid.*

tremendous speed of postwar Clippers may create completely new cargo traffic,” the report concluded.²⁴⁰

Balancing expanded cargo transport with regular passenger travel posed a unique challenge for the company. A new system of reservations had to be created in order to streamline the increasingly complex logistical issues brought on by the war. With the wartime growth of priority passengers and cargo, the process by which Pan Am sorted and weighed various urgent requests against one another when filling its planes grew increasingly complicated. Without the aid of modern computer systems, Pan Am pioneered the use of a “revolutionary card control system” to negotiate the complex logistical issues posed by often-competing wartime passenger and cargo priorities.²⁴¹ An article in the Pan Am employee newsletter titled “Girls Guide 125,000 Riders on Pan Am’s Aerial Routes,” noted that thanks to the new card system, “girls have taken over the work of men in Pan American Airways’ central reservations control office in Miami.”²⁴² The system of cards that “do virtually everything but think,” along with wartime labor market demands facilitated the entrance of women into this once male-dominated sphere of work. While the article touted the card system as at least partially de-skilling the complicated process of preparing aircraft reservations, it also highlighted the level of training required to work in the central reservations office as it served as “the clearinghouse for air traffic in and out of 32 countries, colonies, and territorial possessions in the Western hemisphere.”

²⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁴¹ “Girls Guide 125,000 Riders on Pan Am’s Aerial Routes,” *The Clipper*, Vol.1, No. 1, July 1943, 6. NASM 9A03831, F1P-167004-07.

²⁴² *Ibid.*

The article explained that each aircraft traveling on each of Pan Am's routes had a specific allotment of pounds for cargo, mail, and passengers. The reservations department took these allotments and divvied up travel requests accordingly. On some strategically important routes only military priority cargo loads were permitted. Once cargo loads were determined, reservations employees assigned remaining loads to passenger traffic while considering four different classes of priority travel, depending on the route/destination. Negotiating the complexities associated with managing wartime traffic "require[ed] expert handling to prevent snarls" in the movement of passengers and goods across Pan Am's vast aerial routes. Expert handling, the article explained, was entrusted to a growing staff of women in the reservations department. The potential for such "snarls" were depicted in a cartoon featured in one edition of the employee newsletter. The cartoon featured a pilot standing next to a towering pile of paint cans stacked in front of an airplane. Addressing a rotund man clad in a business suit with a cigar dangling from his lips the pilot declared, "I'm sorry I have to put you off the plane, but this paint has a higher priority than you have, sir!" The disgruntled look on the face of the man who was pictured staring wide-eyed at the pilot with hands on hips, represented the uncomfortable situations that could arise from negotiating competing wartime reservation priorities.²⁴³

²⁴³ *Pan Am Clipper*, Vol. 1, No. 4, October 1943. "Printed Material," Pan American World Airways Collection, University of Miami Library, Miami, Florida.

WWII and women employees at Pan Am

The reservations department was not the only department at Pan Am being staffed by women for the first time during the war. The increasing feminization of jobs at Pan Am, that were previously deemed masculine reflected broader changes within the aircraft industry during WWII. As historian Deborah Douglas has documented, “The demands of the war led to a huge expansion in the aircraft industry and enormously enlarged the opportunities in it for female employment.”²⁴⁴ Women filled positions in aircraft companies across the country in increasing numbers, serving as flight attendants, mechanics, sales representatives, public relations employees, and engineers (to name a few). The vast majority of women working in the aviation industry during World War II, however, worked on the production lines of aircraft manufacturing plants.²⁴⁵ By 1943, women represented 21 percent of the 4,000 Eastern Division employees based in Miami. “Women are now engaged in 33 of 116 occupations listed by the Eastern Division of Pan American Airways,” one employee newsletter declared. “But they have by no means reached the end of their sphere of activity in the inter-American transport system, according to John B. Cook, personnel representative in Miami,” it concluded.²⁴⁶ The article reported that while many of Pan Am’s women workers served as clerks,

²⁴⁴ Deborah Douglas, *American Women and Flight Since 1945*, (Lexington, University of Kenture Press, 2204), 30.

²⁴⁵ Total employment of all aircraft manufacturing plants receiving government contracts to build planes jumped from 460,356 in 1942 to 1,027,914 in 1943. In 1942, women represented just 5 percent of the total aircraft-manufacturing workforce. By 1943, that number had risen to 31.3 percent—an increase of nearly 1,300 percent in just one year. Douglas, 44.

²⁴⁶ “Women Workers Vie with Men,” *Pan American Clipper*, Vol.1, No.II, August 1943, 12. “Printed Material,” Pan American World Airways Collection, University of Miami Library, Miami, Florida.

stenographers, and secretaries, 225 women competed directly with men in skilled jobs. These women worked as mechanic's helpers, engineer's apprentices, chemist's apprentices, flight watch officers, map plotters, communications officers, cable room clerks, and baggage clerks.

In January 1943, Carolina native Marie Jones became one of Pan Am's first female mechanic's helpers in the instrument shop, which was responsible for periodically overhauling Pan Am's flying fleet to ensure its safety. "War transformed this soft-spoken, quiet woman into a skilled mechanic," an article in the employee newsletter declared. Jones's experience working in the instrument shop reportedly "instilled in her a strong belief that women make better mechanics than men because they are more conscientious and painstaking in their work."²⁴⁷ Additionally, she explained, while men are often too overconfident, women lack self-assurance when learning a new skill, which makes them work harder. Jones's tasks in the instrument shop included repairing five different gauges, tachometer generators, dual indicators, and flow meters. The article also noted that Jones had no intention of giving up the work after the war came to an end.²⁴⁸

Echoing the personal experience of Marie Jones in Pan Am's instrument shop, R.D. Sundell, Eastern Division engineer remarked with surprise, "Women are working very successfully and we find them keen and adaptable. In many cases they can do the

²⁴⁷ "Feminine Mechanic at Home with Gauges, Gadgets or Fresh Salad Bowls," *Pan American Clipper*, Vol. 3, No. 2, February 1944. "Printed Material," Pan American World Airways Collection, University of Miami Library, Miami, Florida.

²⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

work as well as men, and sometimes perhaps, better.²⁴⁹ Pointing to women's skill in performing repetitious tasks such as those involved in housework with great patience, Sundell argued that women were particularly suited for machine operations requiring repetition. Similar discourses comparing factory work to women's domestic chores were used across various defense industries during the war to encourage women's employment.²⁵⁰ Sundell also stated that Pan Am specifically found that women between the ages of 25 and 35 made the best employees—as women younger than 25 spend too much time thinking about “dancing and dates” and women older than 35 “of course are a little bit slower to learn and tire more quickly.”²⁵¹ While 35 year old women working for Pan Am may have tired more quickly, their exhaustion was more likely caused by men such as those in the instrument shop who “frequently sigh[ed] for the ‘good ole’ days when the white uniformed workers...were all masculine,” not their age.²⁵²

The pages of wartime editions of the employee newsletter featured numerous stories of women making inroads into typically masculine positions at Pan Am. One 1943 article reported, “The manpower shortage has at last caught up with PAA transportation” as women were being assigned to serve as company truck drivers.

²⁴⁹ *Ibid*, 13.

²⁵⁰ Government propaganda films such as those featured in the documentary film *The Life and Times of Rosie the Riveter* exemplify this rhetoric. While wartime propaganda likened women's domestic work to factory production, at the close of the war this rhetoric reversed course in an effort to encourage women to return to the home to avoid an over-crowded labor market as GIs returned home from the war.

²⁵¹ “Women Workers Vie with Men,” *Pan American Clipper*, Vol.1, No.II, August 1943, 13. “Printed Material,” Pan American World Airways Collection, University of Miami Library, Miami, Florida.

²⁵² “Instrument Shop Barriers Stormed by Girl Workers,” *Pan American Clipper*, Vol. 1, No. 1, July 1943, 5. “Printed Material,” Pan American World Airways Collection, University of Miami Library, Miami, Florida.

Another reported on Carrol Bailey who preferred to go by the name “Bill.” The article explained that Bill had worked for six months as a mechanic’s helper in the nacelle construction division before her co-workers discovered that she had a pilot’s license and had spent the early years of the war co-piloting B-17 bombers to England for the Canadian Air Force.²⁵³ In addition to documenting the influx of women across various Pan Am divisions, the employee newsletter was also quick to highlight the potentially humorous situations that might arise from having women in the workplace. One cartoon penned in a 1943 edition of the newsletter, pictured a nerdy young man with oversized glasses perched on the end of his nose being led into an office by a supervisor. Staring slack-jawed at a room full of beautiful women in skirts and shapely blouses, the caption exclaimed, “You mean this is where I’m supposed to work???”²⁵⁴ Another cartoon appearing in the newsletter earlier that year directly addressed the sexual tensions bound to arise from women working in close proximity with men. The eye-catching drawing featured a young woman standing in her lingerie trying in vain to cover herself with a blanket that barely obscured her breasts from view, leaving her delicately ruffled panties completely exposed. Her missing clothing was twisted and knotted in the gears of an adjacent drill press, which she looked to be operating just moments before. Panic-stricken she shouted to two men who stood gawking at the scene with hands in their

²⁵³ “Character in Coveralls,” *Pan American Clipper*, December 1944. “Printed Material,” Pan American World Airways Collection, University of Miami Library, Miami, Florida.

²⁵⁴ “You mean this is where I’m supposed to work???” *Pan American Clipper*, Vol. 1, No. 4, October 1943. “Printed Material,” Pan American World Airways Collection, University of Miami Library, Miami, Florida.

pockets and broad grins plastered on their faces: “Don’t stand there like goofs, get my coveralls out of that drill press!”²⁵⁵

Standardizing service: Women and the creation of the Passenger Services Department

In August of 1942, Pan American Airways issued a set of company-wide documents pertaining to the creation of, what it termed, the “Passenger Services Department.” V. E. Chenea, Vice President and General Traffic Manager at Pan Am, ran the department and authored all of the Passenger Services Department bulletins. Chenea’s initial bulletin carefully outlined the department’s express purpose as well as the specific duties that individuals working within the Passenger Services Department (PSD) should carry out. “In evolving to its present status, first things come first,” the bulletin explained, “Company officials were so occupied with mechanical and geographic problems that refinements involving passenger comfort were subordinated to the first consideration—safety.”²⁵⁶

While companies shared a relatively equal number and quality of aircraft (i.e. technical components), they needed to develop other ways by which to gain a competitive edge. Airlines began to recognize that the type of service they could offer would prove

²⁵⁵ “Don’t just stand there...” *Pan American Clipper*, Vol. 1, No. 2. August 1943, 6. “Printed Material,” Pan American World Airways Collection, University of Miami Library, Miami, Florida.

²⁵⁶ Passenger Services Department Bulletin, No. 1 (August 3, 1942), 1. “Printed Material,” Pan American World Airways Collection, University of Miami Library, Miami, Florida.
(referred to hereafter as PSD bulletin)

essential to attracting customers to fly with their airline versus the competition.²⁵⁷

Historian of marketing and advertising Pamela Laird explains that the creation of brand loyalty—often referred to as goodwill—was developed in other industries as a strategy for distinguishing products within industries that enjoyed relative technological parity. This pattern can certainly be seen in Pan Am’s creation of a brand during the 1940s. By 1941, it was widely acknowledged that Airlines could achieve success and popularity through catering to the passengers every need. While companies often talked about building service onto technological infrastructure—as something separate and of secondary concern—taking the specific growth of passenger services during the 1940s into the context of aviation’s commercialization writ large encourages us to see these two elements as mutually constitutive.

“After considerable study by officials of the System,” a section devoted to personnel began, “It has been decided that, in general, the personnel of the Passenger Service Department (hereafter referred to as PSD) should be staffed with young women of outstanding intelligence, refinement, and tact.”²⁵⁸ From the beginning, therefore, the PSD was imagined as feminine. Women were to be entrusted with the task of being the human face of the airline. The document went on to stipulate the specific qualifications that these women should possess. They were to be well educated and “where possible”

²⁵⁷ For literature looking at the history of corporate brand loyalty and goodwill, see Pamela Laird, *Advertising American Progress: American Business and the Rise of Consumer Marketing*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998); Edward S. Rogers, *Goodwill, Trade Marks, and Unfair Trading*, (Chicago: A.W. Shaw Co., 1914); Richard N. Owens, “Goodwill in the Accounts,” *The University Journal of Business*, Vol. 1, No. 3 (May, 1923), pp. 282-299.

²⁵⁸ Passenger Services Department Bulletin, No. 1 (August 3, 1942), 6. “Printed Material,” Pan American World Airways Collection, University of Miami Library, Miami, Florida.

be able to speak two or more languages—preferably French and Spanish. In addition, “pleasing personalities—social grace—[were] requisites.”²⁵⁹

Pan American Airways placed great importance on notions and standards of service during the 1940s—positioning service as key to the company’s image.²⁶⁰ While service has come to mean various things for various companies across different industries, the Passenger Services Bulletin affords an important insight into the detailed formation of specifically gendered standards of service and corporate image for Pan American Airways. But, why was service gendered in the specific case of commercial aviation firms like Pan Am? Why were these employees largely women?

The answer involves three elements: labor shortages during WWII, the articulation of a gender-based business strategy (as seen through corporate structures and the commercialization process), and the challenge of domesticating the foreign. With the US plunging squarely into the European and Pacific theaters of WWII by 1942, the department was forced to rectify the notion of service and luxury with wartime frugality. Now managers must justify the dedication of company resources to creating and improving upon a seemingly ancillary aspect of airline functioning. The bulletin explained, “There is nothing frivolous or wasteful in giving war passengers a well-rounded service. And there is sound basis for starting NOW on war traffic so that a smooth-running service machine will be in operation when post-war competition makes

²⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁶⁰ Pan Am emphasized the importance of service uniformly before, during, and after WWII.

its bid.”²⁶¹ The increase in wartime traffic posed a challenge: smoothing out the system of dealing with passengers in just as efficient a manner as technological solutions had been sought for infrastructural issues.

With this goal in mind, “The Passenger Service Department was organized to provide in every reasonable manner... special services—conveniences—information, courtesies to our patrons, their families, and friends of the system.”²⁶² Employees of the department were tasked with a wide range of duties: making advance arrangements for the care of the sick, crippled, or wounded; assisting patrons in securing hotel and train reservations; helping passengers locate lost baggage; and providing passengers with food and drinks upon early or late arrivals and departures. In addition, employees were tasked with fulfilling any other duties or providing any additional services and courtesies where appropriate. In essence, the document explained, the PSD was tasked with relieving the “Division Traffic staff with the burden of losing valuable time in dealing with restless, impatient, sick, crippled or wounded passengers, their families, friends, or important visitors.”²⁶³

The bulletin detailed that PSD employees “should not be considered in the same category as stewardesses, hostesses, or other women employees. Actually, they are Public Relations representatives of the Passenger Service Department, of the Traffic Department. The services to be rendered and the responsibilities to be assumed are quite different in many respects and more comprehensive than the services rendered by other

²⁶¹ Passenger Services Department Bulletin, No. 1 (August 3, 1942), 3. “Printed Material,” Pan American World Airways Collection, University of Miami Library, Miami, Florida.

²⁶² *Ibid.*, 4.

²⁶³ *Ibid.*, 5.

employees.”²⁶⁴ These women were set apart and tasked with roles associated with smoothing out the traveling process as a whole. It would clearly not do for confused, sick, crippled, lost passengers to be crowding airport terminals or worse yet, not even purchasing tickets for fear of the potential difficulties they would encounter in their travels.

The list of desired qualifications clearly reveals that PSD women were to possess superior skills in mediating cultural, racial, linguistic, and class-based differences. They were indeed to be the human arm or face of the company—the main point of interaction between Pan Am and its customers. The bulletin explained: “To summarize, the young women of the Passenger Services Department must be so alert, intelligent, well-poised, that they will be capable of rendering appropriate courtesies to persons of every type, race, creed and color. The scale ranges from laborers and ditch diggers, business men, cinema celebrities, officials of the Army, Navy, and Government ambassadors—to the heads of States.”²⁶⁵

“Letters are slow, subject to loss, interception. Radio-telephones can be listened in on by the enemy, cables cut...*But on wings,*” one Pan Am publicity pamphlet declared, “leaders get together fast! They meet, plan and straighten out misunderstandings *face to face*.”²⁶⁶ Highlighting the important role Pan Am played in flying the military leaders of the United Nations, the article featured photographs of various dignitaries on Pan Am aircraft. One Pan Am crew reportedly was assigned to fly General Dwight D. Eisenhower, “Supreme Commander of Allied Expeditionary Forces,” during the war.

²⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶⁶ “Ten Thousand Times Around the World,” 4. Emphasis in original.

Pan Am clipper ships also flew Commander-in-Chief of the US Pacific Fleet, Admiral Chester Nimitz, back and forth from his headquarters in Honolulu to San Francisco.²⁶⁷ Pan Am ships also flew numbers of civilians on war missions, as “diplomacy, politics, economic warfare and the publicizing of facts about the US and the United Nations are all part of the business of winning a war.”²⁶⁸ Accordingly, Pan Am flew the President of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, the Chairman of the War Production Board, and the Director of the Office of War Information back and forth across the Atlantic. The pamphlet also emphasized Pan Am’s service to foreign dignitaries, claiming to have transported the Queen of the Netherlands, the Prince of Norway, King of Yugoslavia, and the Presidents of Liberia, Haiti, and Venezuela.²⁶⁹ Not being able to bridge the gap between these disparate backgrounds could pose a fairly serious problem to the airline, detracting potential customers by the droves. The qualifications required of PSD women were not ambiguous; they were certainly expected to be from a particular class background—being educated, bi-lingual, and up-to-date with current events. However, they were also supposed to be gracious and prepared to transcend class boundaries to relate to working class passengers who would fly, an increasing occurrence given wartime exigencies.

Up to this point, most flight attendants at PAA were male and called “stewards.” In building a comprehensive notion of corporate service, in 1943 the PSD positioned itself as the head of such concerns by incorporating the stewards within its purview. “It is our hope and desire that they [the stewards] will enjoy working as a part of the Service

²⁶⁷ “Ten Thousand Times Around the World,” 5.

²⁶⁸ “Ten Thousand Times Around the World,” 6.

²⁶⁹ “Ten Thousand Times Around the World,” 7.

organization of PAA and make the name of PA synonymous with Service,” the bulletin explained.²⁷⁰ This is interesting given that most analyses of airline service tend to focus exclusively on flight attendants as the bulwarks of airline service, but it is clear in this document that PAA imagines service as something much larger and considers the type of service rendered by stewards to be something very specific, and almost limited by comparison. The bulletin related, “Our stewards are an important phase of the Service Department. They are in contact with the passenger for a greater period of time than any other member of our department so that the manner in which they conduct themselves, whether it is a question, a glass of water, or the serving of a meal, formulates to a great degree the passenger’s reaction toward PA as a whole.”²⁷¹ It is evident that the PSD sees stewards as playing an important role in providing services, but one small part in a much larger context.

As was repeatedly stressed, the conclusion to the first PSD bulletin reinforced the notion that PSD women represented the company:

“The Passenger Service Department is being expanded in order to indoctrinate patrons with the conviction that PAA is not only the most reliable, but also the most convenient, comfortable, and courteous international air transportation system in operation. Therefore, whenever PSD employees are selling PAA to its travelers and friends, either through personal courtesies or accommodations—or through intelligent answers on permissible topics, or merely by charming demeanor and graciousness as PAA representatives—they are fulfilling their responsibilities to the company. Conversely, whenever through an action or failure to act, they miss an opportunity to add to the Company’s prestige, they are failing their responsibilities and are a detriment to the system. The former is a

²⁷⁰ PSD bulletin, No. 5 (May 1, 1943), 4. “Printed Material,” Pan American World Airways Collection, University of Miami Library, Miami, Florida.

²⁷¹ *Ibid.*

goal, which will earn the appreciation of the Company and give the employee a basis for satisfaction and pride.”²⁷²

First, it is important to note the language used in this passage. PSD women were tasked with “selling” PAA to customers. The previously superfluous actions of service are now elevated to the level of key concepts such as sales. In addition, failure to provide service denigrated the company’s prestige and is a “detriment to the system.” This document undoubtedly countered the notion that service is considered a secondary concern for the company, but rather linked it to the success and prestige of the company as a whole.

This transition is also made visible in another excerpt from the PSD bulletin. The bulletin explained that while, “We have a good product, the best in transportation,” having a good product by itself is not sufficient. Rather, as the document emphasized, “it takes the best in service to maintain it. *Let’s give the best* by checking our own stations with the thought in mind, ‘How would I feel if I were a stranger here.’” Again highlighting the separation between the physical infrastructure and notion of service, the bulletin instructed, “We can’t check tires and clean windshields but we can anticipate the needs of our passengers so they won’t have to ask for it.”²⁷³ The notion of service emerged from this discussion as crucial to the functioning and success of the airline.

In fact most of the bulletin was devoted to explicitly defining what is meant by service and the many components that make up good service. These were typically illustrated through V. E. Chenea’s own personal anecdotes or his personal ruminations on the topics. Speaking directly of service, Chenea explained to PSD employees through the

²⁷² PSD bulletin, No.1 (August 3, 1942), 12. “Printed Material,” Pan American World Airways Collection, University of Miami Library, Miami, Florida.

²⁷³ PSD bulletin, No. 4 (April 1, 1943), 4. “Printed Material,” Pan American World Airways Collection, University of Miami Library, Miami, Florida.

bulletin that while “many corporations have been able to manufacture a good product and many transportation companies have the best equipment,” their names don’t necessarily “mean service.”²⁷⁴ “What is service you may ask?” Chenea continued striking a conversational tone. In the description that followed, Chenea outlined the various aspects of PAA operations that fell under the umbrella of service. In fact, he explained, “there is no department in PAA which is not concerned in some way with service to the passenger.”²⁷⁵ Elsewhere Chenea explained, “Most transportation companies spend a lot of money in advertising the features they have to offer but they cannot purchase the one type of advertising you have the power to create through the medium of good service.”²⁷⁶

Emotional labor as the key to providing good service

After only a first look, it might seem curious that Pan Am imagined its most vital means by which to sell itself as a brand—service—as exclusively feminine in nature. The concept of emotional labor, however, is crucial to examining the development of customer and passenger services departments within commercial airlines during the 1940s and the specific way that this work was imagined as “feminine.” The framework of emotional labor helps us to understand the specific connections between gendered patterns of employment and the creation of service-oriented work within corporate structures. Emotional labor, a concept introduced by sociologist Arlie Hochschild in *The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling*, describes the often-gendered

²⁷⁴ PSD bulletin, No. 5 (May 1, 1943), 2. “Printed Material,” Pan American World Airways Collection, University of Miami Library, Miami, Florida.

²⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁷⁶ PSD bulletin, No. 8, (August 1, 1943), 1. “Printed Material,” Pan American World Airways Collection, University of Miami Library, Miami, Florida.

type of labor required and regulated within the growing service-oriented workplace.

Hochschild explains that emotional labor is “a form of emotion regulation that creates a publicly visible facial and bodily display within the workplace.”²⁷⁷ While emotions are widely acknowledged to play a role in consumer choices, they seem to be left out of explanations and analyses of corporate strategy and organization. This appears to be related in part to the separation of scholarship focused on production from that focused on consumption. Individuals are influenced by emotions as both producers and consumers.

Hochschild launched the study of emotional labor with her book and in the years that followed many scholars from various disciplines have picked up her analysis, built on it, and taken it in new directions. Much of the work done in this field has been from sociologists studying the sociology of emotion, feminist scholars examining sociology and labor, as well as organizational behaviorists and those in the management studies field.²⁷⁸ This is an interesting marriage of perspectives. While the sociologists and feminist scholars work to examine and measure the impact of emotional work on job satisfaction and pay, organizational and management studies scholars are concerned with examining emotional labor in terms of efficacy, or how to manage employee emotions more effectively.

Scholars in both fields are largely motivated by the desire to understand the nature of work and skill in a workplace setting. This analysis was heavily influenced by, if not

²⁷⁷ Arlie Hochschild, *The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983)

²⁷⁸ Steinberg and Figart, “Emotional Labor Since *The Managed Heart*,” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, Vol. 561 (January 1999), 15.

partially inaugurated by, historical examinations of changes in work during industrialization such as Harry Braverman's noted work *Labor and Monopoly Capital*, which examines the de-skilling of work in the industrial revolution.²⁷⁹ In addition to removing skill and judgment from the worker and vesting it in machines and hierarchical management structures, industrialization also formalized the separation between the public/work and the private/home spheres. Within this largely false dichotomy (in that a strict separation of the two was always more imagined than in existence), caring work was solidly relegated to the home—the explicit realm of women.²⁸⁰

Feminist scholars, however, began to question this separation as well as the notion of what constitutes skill as well as how it is defined. Rather than being a fixed category, they argued, “what constitutes skill is gendered.”²⁸¹ Writing in the late 1970s and early 80s, feminist scholars explained that the notion of skill advanced in the works of many labor historians and theorists was largely based on outmoded assumptions of work premised on understandings of 19th and early 20th century craft and manufacturing work. Feminist scholars were among the leading thinkers to stress that the expansion of the service sector in terms of relative economic importance necessitated an expansion and re-definition of our understanding of skill to include emotional labor. As the general trend of our economy shifted away from the production of physical things to profit generated by social and sales relations, understanding the historical development of emotional labor and its management within the workplace emerges as crucial.

²⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁸¹ Steinberg and Figart, 14.

Another motivation to examine the contours of emotional work and its importance to our modern economy comes from scholars who are concerned with the gender-based wage disparities currently in existence. They explain that caring work is often naturalized as female and that this naturalization obscures the element of skill and value embedded in this type of work. Also, despite this labor's importance to the company's success, it is difficult to quantify and measure under current standards and therefore is not compensated properly. These two factors, scholars argue, combine to produce a situation where women are crowded in seemingly un-skilled, low-paying service jobs.

While research into emotional labor and the organization of gendered work have had many different motives and goals, my examination of emotional labor is primarily from a historical perspective. I am interested in how airlines sold air transport to the public through careful constructions of corporate image, which were directly dependent on the emotional labor provided by women. As previous chapters have shown, women were essential to popularizing the notion of flying and making flying seem safe in society at large. This chapter examines the ways that women did this work within the paid sphere—through the careful management and construction of emotional labor standards on the job, working for commercial airlines. While many scholars have examined flight attendants as exemplars of this type of work, I am interested in examining the efforts made by airlines to provide services to customers on the ground as well. Also, I want to integrate this work within the broader story of commercial aviation's development. Flight attendants and ground staff members didn't arise out of nowhere. They were part of an ongoing effort to naturalize commercial air travel to the public that began in the 1920s.

In essence, PSD employees were charged with greeting customers as they would a friend entering their home. Employee manuals implored PSD members to “check our desks, lavatories and public places used by the passenger, the same as we do our own homes before receiving our guests,” as “the passenger is the guest of every one of us.”²⁸² This included being cheerful and pleasant but also solving very real problems and logistical challenges that were apt to occur in an era of limited communication. This type of duty was highlighted in the bulletin’s chronicling of Miss Edna Zeuhlke of the Eastern Division’s quick response to encountering a stranded boy. While on duty, Miss Zeuhlke met a ten-year old boy who was traveling alone without a continuing reservation to another airport and without anyone to meet him. Zeuhlke employed a bit of detective work and quick thinking, discovered that his father was a member of the Elks fraternal organization, and responded by calling the local Elks lodge. Miss Z discovered that the organization maintained a benevolent association to help members or their families who found themselves in difficult situations. As a result of her inquiry, a member of the local lodge stepped in to provide money for the young boy’s continued travel to his final destination.²⁸³

Miss Mildred Clevenger of the Eastern Division displayed similar hosting duties when she encountered two Catholic Sisters of Mercy who arrived at the airport “bedraggled, hungry, and in need of rest.”²⁸⁴ Miss Clevenger contacted a local religious institution and arranged for the overnight care of the crippled passengers who were in

²⁸² PSD Bulletin, No. 2 (November 1, 1942), 8. “Printed Material,” Pan American World Airways Collection, University of Miami Library, Miami, Florida.

²⁸³ PSD Bulletin, No. 2 (November 1, 1942), 6. “Printed Material,” Pan American World Airways Collection, University of Miami Library, Miami, Florida.

²⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

need of medical attention and traveling with limited funds. In the meantime, she contacted their destination to inquire about further instructions and money. Money was received and the Sisters were happily sent on their way the next day as new “friends of Pan American” and vowing to “never forget” Miss Clevenger.²⁸⁵

Interestingly, but perhaps not surprisingly, PAA seemed to be keenly aware of the difficulty in determining concrete valuations of service. In discussing the intangibility of service provided by PSD, the bulletin explained, “Service is an item which cannot be carried on the books of a corporation with a fixed value but we must realize that service has more than a fixed value, it is actually the reputation of our company; therefore, it must be absolutely the same wherever a passenger may be.”²⁸⁶ The bulletin continued, “Although it is not written on the ticket, and you will not find it in the tariff, nevertheless courtesy to Pan American is a tangible part of every sale to each passenger.”²⁸⁷

While airline executives recognized the difficulty of quantifying and valuing service rendered to the company by PSD employees, they were keenly aware that this ambiguity should not contribute to a lack of specificity in what was expected of PSD women. The passenger services bulletin very specifically outlined the duties expected of PSD employees; especially emphasizing duties Hochschild identified as emotional work. In addition to outlining what he meant by “service,” Chenea dedicated several editions of the bulletin to the following topics: self-control, courtesy, enthusiasm, and goodwill. PSD employees were instructed to dedicate a great deal of effort and attention to their

²⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁸⁶ PSD Bulletin, No. 7 (July 1, 1943) 2. “Printed Material,” Pan American World Airways Collection, University of Miami Library, Miami, Florida.

²⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

appearances and to “appear fastidiously groomed—to acquire the respect of patrons.”²⁸⁸

In addition, PSD employees were expected to “never lose patience, or to evidence irritation,” when dealing with customers. In fact, they were instructed to “alleviate” the impatience and irritability of others through the course of their “normal line of duty.”²⁸⁹

Beyond interactions with employees, the bulletin explained that employees should also be trained to value “friendly cooperation of associates” within their department and among other departments within the company.

While PSD employees were tasked with a long list of duties ranging from making hotel accommodations to filling out immigration and customs paperwork, a great deal of emphasis was placed on the specific ways in which PSD representatives should perform these duties. Broadly conceived, the bulletin explained, PSD employees should consider their ultimate concern to be “the physical comfort and mental outlook [of the passenger] from the time he evidences a desire to travel at one of our offices until the culmination of his trip at his destination.”²⁹⁰

In addition to their work of cultivating a positive and valuable image for the company, PSD employees were warned that their cheerful and friendly demeanor could also have direct impacts on the war effort. The bulletin explained, “Morale is an important weapon in winning a war. Good service is vital in maintaining a high degree of morale and as such, is one of our many contributions to the successful prosecution of

²⁸⁸ PSD Bulletin, No. 1 (August 3, 1942), 9. “Printed Material,” Pan American World Airways Collection, University of Miami Library, Miami, Florida.

²⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 10.

²⁹⁰ PSD Bulletin, No. 5 (May 1, 1943), 2. “Printed Material,” Pan American World Airways Collection, University of Miami Library, Miami, Florida.

the war.”²⁹¹ A key personal and emotional trait to maintaining pleasant service and high morale was located in PSD employees ‘mastery of self-control.’ In outlining the importance of self-control, the bulletin explained, “It is wise to remember that anger is a weakness and by being loud and abusive a person is merely trying to justify to themselves that weakness. Many people do not have the advantage of being able to control their anger. It is part of our job, irrespective of other duties, to be able to practice self-mastery of emotions. Few people have this as a natural trait and most of us therefore must develop this trait. It is not difficult. It is no secret power, it is merely the ability of refusing to become excited with a situation that becomes somewhat difficult.”²⁹²

Again reflecting the bulletin’s emphasis on demanding good service and its connections to the war effort, the bulletin stressed self-control as a weapon. “Self-control is not only the weapon of the fighting forces,” the bulletin related, “but is the weapon of the home front as well and is a qualification paramount to those involved in the handling of the public. Today, more than ever, our personnel employed in service to the passengers must know and practice self-control.”²⁹³ A key element of practicing self-control was the personal management of one’s emotions. The following passage reveals the level of detail and attention to emotion, which PSD employees were instructed to exhibit when dealing with customers: “One of the greatest advantages of self-control is to permit the other person to finish telling their story without interruption. In answering keep your voice at an even pitch and let the other person do the loud talking. Your calm

²⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 4.

²⁹² PSD Bulletin, Vol. 2, No. 3 (January 1, 1944), 1. “Printed Material,” Pan American World Airways Collection, University of Miami Library, Miami, Florida.

²⁹³ *Ibid.*

attitude will soon become noticeable to the passenger. They will merely hear themselves and usually will be ashamed of the scene they create and will calm down and be extremely easy to handle from that point on—all as a result of your self-control.”²⁹⁴

“By turning Mister Difficult into a satisfied person,” the bulletin explained, “We will have perhaps one of the greatest boosters the company has ever known.”²⁹⁵ One key to dealing with difficult customers was maintaining constant courtesy. Defining courtesy as “genuine and habitual politeness,”²⁹⁶ the bulletin offered explicit justification for why courtesy was a key element in providing good service:

“To secure the greatest utilization of our aircraft constitutes a large share of our contribution to the war effort. In doing so it is necessary that we start our flights early in the morning. We must arouse our passengers, bring them to the airport, and dispatch the plane as quickly as possible. In this respect we have been accused of being arbitrary in our attitude, awakening our passengers too early, ‘rushing’ them to the airport, ‘herding’ and ‘bossing’ them through the departure formalities, and then forcing them to wait a considerable length of time before departing.”²⁹⁷

This reveals an underlying tension. Complete customer satisfaction is often at odds with maximum efficiency and profit from the standpoint of business. For instance, slow troublesome passengers actually pose a threat to the most efficient use of airplanes in order to carry a maximum number of passengers. This is important because it increases the stress and impossibility that emotional work often demands of employees.

²⁹⁴ PSD Bulletin, Vol. 2, No. 3 (January 1, 1944), 2. “Printed Material,” Pan American World Airways Collection, University of Miami Library, Miami, Florida.

²⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁹⁶ PSD Bulletin, Vol. 2, No. 6 (June 1, 1944), 1. PSD Bulletin, Vol. 2, No. 3 (January 1, 1944), 1. “Printed Material,” Pan American World Airways Collection, University of Miami Library, Miami, Florida.

²⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 2.

As anyone who has ever performed an incredibly routinized job based on providing customer service is all too painfully aware, maintaining a high level of enthusiasm in repetitive sales work can be incredibly difficult. Chenea was aware of the difficulty of maintaining enthusiasm and the potential effect a lack of enthusiasm could have on the company's image. Striking an understanding tone, Chenea explained, "Many of you may say we do the same thing day after day and thus it becomes tiresome and when a thing becomes tiresome it is difficult to develop enthusiasm." However as he continued, he cautioned, "Nothing is more contagious than enthusiasm, except the lack of it."²⁹⁸ Instead of getting exasperated by answering the same questions posed by passengers day in and day out, Chenea emphasized that PSD employees should remain enthusiastic about their job. He implored, "In passenger service we are all salesman and our product is service, but before we can hope to enthuse the passenger we must be wholeheartedly sold on our enthusiasm for the job we are trying to do."²⁹⁹

Cultivating "goodwill" abroad

In addition to its goal to provide good service in order to secure brand loyalty in the minds of the traveling public, Pan Am also envisioned service as central to promoting international "goodwill." As a company operating a technology capable of facilitating unprecedented levels of global travel and connections, promoting a favorable image abroad became a key aim of the company. Directly addressing this aim, the PSD bulletin

²⁹⁸ PSD Bulletin, Vol. 2, No. 6 (June 1, 1944), 1. PSD Bulletin, Vol. 2, No. 3 (January 1, 1944), 1. "Printed Material," Pan American World Airways Collection, University of Miami Library, Miami, Florida.

²⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

explained, “Pan American is a global airline serving many, many countries and has always enjoyed an outstanding reputation for furthering goodwill. This goodwill has been earned through consideration and courtesy, respect for and knowledge of the beliefs and ideas of others. Our passengers and our employees are citizens of almost every country in the world, therefore, the impression that a stranger receives as a result of his contact with you at the airport or in the air, forms the basis for his opinion of Pan American.”³⁰⁰

As a privately owned company with close ties to the United States Government’s strategic World War II interests, Pan Am was keenly aware of its need to project a particularly international image. Working to implement “Washington’s strategic and diplomatic objectives,” as historian of US-foreign relations Jennifer Van Vleck wrote, Pan Am worked closely with the US government in exchange for the ability to fly protected routes with virtually no competition from other airlines.³⁰¹ As the “chosen instrument” of the U.S. government during the 1940s—in the sense that Pan American Airways was the nominal international “flag” carrier of the U.S.—Pan Am and its employees essentially represented the nation. Within this political context, it is easy to understand why much of the Passenger Services Bulletin was focused on interactions with foreign cultures and how to best represent the U.S. abroad.

In addition to preaching tolerance of foreign cultures, the bulletin expressed a concern that operating such a vast network of travel presented particular challenges in

³⁰⁰ PSD Bulletin, Vol. 2, No. 6 (June 1, 1944), 2. PSD Bulletin, Vol. 2, No. 3 (January 1, 1944), 1. “Printed Material,” Pan American World Airways Collection, University of Miami Library, Miami, Florida.

³⁰¹ Van Vleck, 65.

providing a standardized notion of service throughout its global offices. Central to creating a successful international airline, PAA identified the importance of standardization. The first Passenger Services Conference was held in June 1944 for four days in New York expressly to address the issue of standardized service. In a special bulletin edition dedicated to highlighting the main themes discussed at the conference, Chenea explained the importance of standardized service: “When [a passenger] buy[s] a ticket on Pan American they expect the same service throughout the world and it is our duty to provide that standard of service.”³⁰² “Services rendered by an international airline,” he continued, “must be similar to a chain in which each unit of service assumes the importance of a link...they must be tied together by definite procedures which will create an inter-relation of service units so complete that a passenger is not aware of his being removed from the influence of one unit and placed under the care of another.”³⁰³

In order to create uniformity in service throughout the world, Passenger Services Department employees were expected to embed themselves within the cultures and practices of the countries where they were stationed. PSD employees were instructed to serve as interlocutors of local culture and customs, pointing passengers toward certain destinations that might enrich their travel experiences. Instructions to employees indicated, “PSD employees should go to great lengths to familiarize themselves with the community in which they are stationed, acquiring all such information as passengers

³⁰² PSD Bulletin, Vol. 2, No. 8 (August 1, 1944), 1. “Printed Material,” Pan American World Airways Collection, University of Miami Library, Miami, Florida.

³⁰³ PSD Bulletin, No. 9, Vol. 2 (September 1, 1944), 1. “Printed Material,” Pan American World Airways Collection, University of Miami Library, Miami, Florida.

might logically inquire about. This would include transportation facilities, local accommodations, entertainments, points of historical interest, etc.”³⁰⁴

Of course creating too much of a standardized corporate image could also be a draw back. Discussion at the Passenger Services Conference centered on how to maintain an appropriate balance: “It must be remembered, however, that we are an international company. Our standardized front should not be such that we will be uncomfortably conspicuous in a foreign city.”³⁰⁵ Citing examples of international branches of “Five and Ten Cent” stores being changed to “Three and Six Pence” stores in Britain, the pilot explained that such attentions should be paid to customizing Pan Am’s international presence to local customs. He implored, “By all means let’s standardize—at least where exposed to the public eye, but let’s do it in such a fashion that we can take our place, gracefully on the main street of any city in the world.”³⁰⁶

Given its international character, commercial aviation presents a truly unique window into the way that businesses have dealt with the race of potential customers throughout the twentieth century. PSD women were instructed to disavow themselves of racist notions when dealing with passengers. Because diplomats and businessmen from around the world would be traveling via Pan Am routes, PSD employees were to recognize that different rules applied to them. One edition of the bulletin dated November 1, 1942 explained, “Special attention must be paid to avoiding discrimination against color, race, etc., when dealing with Pan American passengers. In these very

³⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁰⁵ PSD Bulletin, Vol. 3, No. 5 (July 1, 1945), 3. “Printed Material,” Pan American World Airways Collection, University of Miami Library, Miami, Florida.

³⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 4.

active times, there are ever increasing numbers of passengers travelling our routes who are extremely influential in their own countries and the fact that they are not Caucasian in appearance is not to affect the treatment they receive in any way.”³⁰⁷ Perhaps it was seen as less of an affront to the Caucasian race for women to invert or ignore racial hierarchies in the facility of providing corporate service.

While much attention has been paid to the topic of stewardesses and the role of beauty and sex in marketing, an analysis of PSD women encourages us to examine deeper meanings of gender in terms of corporate strategy and service work. When you stop to think that interstate bus travel was still segregated in some parts of the country, steamship travel still had separate cabins for non-whites, and railway cars also segregated passengers, it’s rather remarkable that Pan Am explicitly discouraged discrimination in employee manuals. And even more interesting, the individuals selected to head up complex racial and class negotiations that were largely out of step with broader cultural standards, were women.

In keeping with facing the challenges of an international corporation, PSD bulletins also made it clear that employees needed to be especially aware of the international political relations that were involved in international travel. In a section of the bulletin titled “Everyday Diplomats,” PSD employees are reminded that they are not just providing a service to a customer as a representative of PAA, but as a representative of his country. The bulletin instructed PSD employees, “Every employee whose duties

³⁰⁷ PSD Bulletin, No. 2 (November 1, 1942), 5. “Printed Material,” Pan American World Airways Collection, University of Miami Library, Miami, Florida.

bring him in contact with our passengers, whether at the airport, in our offices or on board the aircraft, must constantly remember that he is an EVERYDAY DIPLOMAT.”³⁰⁸

Employees were also tasked with handling diplomatic issues brought about by international travel, as exemplified by the story of Miss Jane McCreary, who encountered a passenger leaving Miami on a plane to Barranquilla, Colombia. Customs, however, discovered that the passenger did not have a passport with a valid date and was refused travel. The passenger who was in fear of missing his flight became quite disgruntled. Miss McCreary responded by telephoning various Customs officials before locating the correct person and then securing permission for this passenger to continue his journey with the appropriate travel documents. Essentially, a PSD employee had been tasked with negotiating political/official travel restrictions and permissions on behalf of passengers.³⁰⁹

PSD employees also strove to maintain a positive relationship between the airline and immigration offices through expressing courtesy and graciousness in their interactions with the office. PSD employees were instructed to “maintain the closest possible cooperation between immigration officials and Pan American.” Instructions to employees explained that if members of the PSD could make these officials feel pleasantly toward PAA and its customers a “big step has been taken in the direction of making travel by PAA the most convenient possible.”³¹⁰

³⁰⁸ PSD Bulletin, Vol. 2, No. 2 (December 1, 1943), 1 (Emphasis in original). “Printed Material,” Pan American World Airways Collection, University of Miami Library, Miami, Florida.

³⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 7.

³¹⁰ PSD Bulletin, Vol. 2, No. 2 (December 1, 1943), 5. “Printed Material,” Pan American World Airways Collection, University of Miami Library, Miami, Florida.

The political/official role of PSD employees was also couched in terms of the war effort. Instructions were given to take great care in dealing with important Government and Military officials of the US as well as foreign governments. As the bulletin explained, “we [PAA] owe every attention possible that might assist them in their activities in the War Effort.”³¹¹ PSD employees were even tasked with special assignments to cater to royal passengers: “Recently King George of Greece and his entourage were delayed six hours in departing from North Beach, and a Passenger Service representative with a knowledge of the Greek language stayed with the royal party and assisted them the whole time. This was the same representative who had met them at Baltimore upon their arrival in this country and the King was delighted and amazed that Pan American would go to such trouble in his behalf, as to have this representative travel all this distance.”³¹²

But lest the wrong idea be discerned, PSD employees were strictly forbidden from fraternizing socially with foreign dignitaries. In a section of the employee bulletin titled “Security Measures,” PSD personnel were warned to be wary of engaging in conversations with all un-naturalized foreigners. The bulletin explained, “In wartime the security of our operations can be affected by thoughtless statements on any function made unnecessarily to anyone.” Of particular concern was the release of information regarding arrival and departure times, passenger identity information as well as “a long list of prohibited topics which will be provided for personnel and which must be

³¹¹ *Ibid.*

³¹² *Ibid.*, 8.

studied.”³¹³ Undergirding such warnings was a clear fear that PSD employees could serve as potential sexual objects open to foreign manipulation. The bulletin implored, “For the duration the young women of the PSD should avoid social engagements of any nature with un-naturalized foreigners.” Employees were instructed to report any person asking suspicious questions “regardless of any pressure from the seeker of such information.” Which, again, seems to imply that as women, PSD employees might be subject to particular pressures of a social, or perhaps, sexual nature.³¹⁴

In addition to negotiating sensitive relations between international travelers, PSD employees were also tasked with representing US culture. Numerous examples highlight this important role employees could play as veritable cultural ambassadors. The 1942 bulletin related the story of Miss Aurelia Jordon of the Eastern Division who took it upon herself to assist a young woman who was traveling with her six-month old baby. It became apparent to Miss Jordan that this passenger had never before in her life traveled away from the Island of St. Thomas and “was quite bewildered, at a loss to know what to do, and was under the impression that the people of the United States would be rather cold towards her.”³¹⁵ In addition to figuring out the best route for the lady to travel in order to reach her destination, Miss Jordan allowed the passenger to rest on a couch while taking care of her baby for several hours. The report indicated that upon departing the passenger expressed her gratitude and “admitted that the people of the United States were

³¹³ PSD Bulletin, No. 1 (August 3, 1942), 7. “Printed Material,” Pan American World Airways Collection, University of Miami Library, Miami, Florida.

³¹⁴ *Ibid.*

³¹⁵ PSD Bulletin, No. 2 (November 1, 1942), 7. “Printed Material,” Pan American World Airways Collection, University of Miami Library, Miami, Florida.

really quite friendly.”³¹⁶ While the report never directly mentioned the race of the passenger, which is interesting in itself, I think it can be reasonably inferred from the fact that the passenger assumed that the people of the US would be “cold” to her might indicate that she was non-white or mixed-race. The bulletin clearly praised Miss Jordon for altering this woman’s perception of how she would be treated in the US through exhibiting exceptional service.

Scholars have noted that airlines during this period maintained strict hiring practices in regards to projecting an image of “whiteness,” especially when hiring flight attendants who were expected to represent the physical standards of white, middle-class femininity.³¹⁷ In contrast to strict guidelines instituted by other airlines regarding the racial appearances of airhostesses, PSD employees were celebrated for their diversity. A congratulatory description of PSD employees related, “It is not unusual to hear one of our representatives speaking in Spanish, French, Portuguese, Dutch, Flemish, Greek, Italian, German or some Chinese and Japanese.”³¹⁸ Rather than seeking a white homogeneous staff to represent the face of the airline, PSD employees were touted as having “originated in the four corners of the world” and constituting “a United Nations group, united by PAA and working successfully and cooperatively as one.” After all, the bulletin explained, Pan American Airways was an international airline and its employees should be equally as international.³¹⁹

³¹⁶ *Ibid.*

³¹⁷ See Kathleen Berry, *Femininity in Flight: A History of Flight Attendants*, (Duke University Press, 2007), 7-9.

³¹⁸ PSD Bulletin, No. 4 (April 1, 1943), 2. “Printed Material,” Pan American World Airways Collection, University of Miami Library, Miami, Florida.

³¹⁹ *Ibid.*

In addition to expectations that PSD employees be individually diverse and representative of the many countries PAA serviced, PSD employees were expected to maintain the upmost respect for the diversity of its passengers. In a time when America was still solidly in the grips of segregation, this stands out as a very passionate and curious proviso, but also as evidence of the way WWII and the United State's increasing global presence strained the status quo of domestic race relations. The bulletin engaged in an in-depth discussion of the importance of tolerance in PSD employees; explaining, "In dealing with people of other nations and in order for you to retain their respect for your country, it is obligatory that you show respect for their customs, language and ideals."³²⁰ It continued "It is most irksome to have some individual from whom you are entitled to receive service or information, adopt an attitude plainly indicating that he or she is not the least bit interested in doing anything to win or retain your goodwill."³²¹

In an exposition on providing personalized services to passengers, the bulletin explained that PSD employees should address passengers as individuals, to make them feel like honored guests, by using their name—emphasizing "its proper use and above all the proper pronunciation of it."³²² After all, the document explained, "Your name, and what it means to you, is the most important name in the world—to *you*."³²³ Again pointing to the international character of business necessitated by international air transport, the bulletin stresses that PSD employees dealt with people of many different

³²⁰ PSD Bulletin, Vol. 2, No. 7 (July 1, 1944), 1. "Printed Material," Pan American World Airways Collection, University of Miami Library, Miami, Florida.

³²¹ *Ibid.*

³²² PSD Bulletin, Vol. 3, No. 6 (December 1, 1945), 1. "Printed Material," Pan American World Airways Collection, University of Miami Library, Miami, Florida.

³²³ *Ibid.* (Emphasis in original)

nations. It was up to PSD employees to “dignify the passenger through the use of his name, bind him closer to your organization and thus increase your own value.” In closing, the document pleaded: names, “get it right—respect it—use it correctly.”³²⁴ “There is an old saying,” the PSD bulletin confessed, “that a person is judged by the company he keeps. This is also true in the reverse. The company is judged by the employees they have.”³²⁵ The message was clear: PSD employees shouldn’t ruin Pan American Airways’ image of goodwill with narrow-minded racist behaviors. This passage revealed that nothing less than the entire company’s reputation was at stake in how they dealt with passengers of all races on an individual basis.

From Stewards to Stewardesses

While only women staffed the Passenger Services Department, Pan Am primarily imagined the job of flight steward—or flight attendant, in modern parlance—to be occupied by men. As early as 1930, American airlines such as Boeing Air Transport began hiring female stewardesses to serve passengers in the air because of women’s perceived abilities to allay public fears of flying.³²⁶ Pan Am, however, hired only men for the position into the early 1940s. The female flight attendant grew to such a visible symbol of glamour and sex during the pinnacle of the “jet age,” it is hard for most of us to imagine that men initially occupied the position. However, an examination of Pan

³²⁴ PSD Bulletin, Vol. 3, No. 6 (December 1, 1945), 1. “Printed Material,” Pan American World Airways Collection, University of Miami Library, Miami, Florida.

³²⁵ *Ibid.*

³²⁶ BAT hired Ellen Church as a stewardess in 1930.

Am's late adoption of women as stewardesses provides an interesting look into how the definitions of the position changed with its feminization.

Drawing on the model of steamship and railway porters, Pan Am initially hired men to serve as stewards on its flights. A 1943 article in the employee newsletter titled "Pan American Stewards Undergo Hard Training for Their Jobs," offers a glimpse into the type of preparation and training stewards received. Highlighting their skill and the breadth of knowledge required for the position, the article declared, "Pan American Airways stewards must know all the answers—in two languages, and it's not so easy as might at first appear."³²⁷ Steward training consisted of from four to six weeks of classes that lasted around ten hours each day. Courses instructed potential stewards in knot tying, swimming, boating, first aid, and in handling all of the company paperwork involved in an average international Clipper trip.³²⁸

The article revealed that stewards underwent a course in "regular seamanship" that took place in large part at the Dinner Key Marine Base in Miami. In addition to seafaring, however, stewards were also expected to know how to "placate a crying baby, prepare special food for such an infant, see that all the passengers, are seated correctly, serve them meals, and if necessary, provide special food for persons who are ill, and in case of illness be prepared to administer first aid."³²⁹ While training courses were designed to ready stewards to serve in the air, their training remarkably focused more on the skills needed for seafaring. This can partially be explained by the fact that Clipper

³²⁷ "Pan Am Stewards Undergo Hard Training for Their Jobs," *Pan American Clipper*, Vol. 1, No.1 July 1943. "Printed Material," Pan American World Airways Collection, University of Miami Library, Miami, Florida.

³²⁸ *Ibid.*

³²⁹ *Ibid.*

ships, which were equipped to takeoff and land in water, flew many of Pan Am's long-haul routes. It makes sense in this context that a steward might need to know a degree of seamanship. Just as likely, however, was that Pan Am based steward requirements on the precedents set by the jobs of porters stationed on steamships—a far more widespread form of transportation during the period. It wouldn't be until the mid-1950s that airline travel would eclipse steamship travel as the main form of trans-Atlantic transportation.³³⁰

By 1944, Pan Am had started hiring its first female stewardesses. In June of 1944, the employee newsletter announced that 19 women currently worked as stewardesses in the Latin American Division. Pan Am's delay in hiring women to fill these roles suggests that wartime labor markets certainly hastened the company's decision. As one article explained, "While the inroads of the war upon Pan American's band of stewards is in a large measure responsible for the increasing utilization of women on board the Clippers, the blue-uniformed girls are here to stay."³³¹ Even as the war wound down and men returned home to fill their jobs, Pan Am kept stewardesses on the payroll, deciding to place remaining stewards on shorter trips. The first women to serve as stewardesses for the Latin American division arrived in Miami for training from across the country. These women left work as secretaries, nurses, salesgirls, and students to "stand shoulder to shoulder...sisters of the sky, ready to take their places on planes to

³³⁰ Christopher Endy, *Cold War Holidays: American Tourism in France*, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 204).

³³¹ "The Women Take Over—Twelve New Stewardesses Join PAA Ranks; Ten More Start Training Today," *Pan American Clipper*, Vol. 2, No. 2, June 1944, 5. "Printed Material," Pan American World Airways Collection, University of Miami Library, Miami, Florida.

Havana, Nassau, and Mexico,” the employee newsletter waxed poetic.³³² Unlike the stewards, stewardesses did not receive “seaman’s training.” Instead of learning to tie knots, the stewardesses “studied the history of Pan Am and the functions of its various departments, such as traffic, meteorology, [and] district sales...”

Additionally stewardesses were expected to study the reservation process, since they were required to supervise the loading of mail and cargo before takeoff. This task demanded that stewardesses be familiar with coded radio messages relating to reservations as well as be able to decipher complex airway regulations, government bills of landing, aircraft manifests, consular invoices, certificates of origin, and priority ratings. Head of the traffic training section, Donald McCorquodale reported, “They are taking men’s places in the clouds and doing a man-sized job yet in a truly feminine way.” McCorquodale warned, however, that stewardesses were going to be held to the same standards as the male stewards and that they shouldn’t use their “sex as an excuse for failure to deliver.”³³³ In what seems a particular warning against doing their job in *too* feminine a way, McCorquodale offered this bit of advice to stewardesses in training: “Keep neat, use common sense at all times and try to hold your tongues. Be good listeners. Don’t argue, don’t express opinions on controversial subjects and don’t wisecrack with the passengers.”³³⁴ A comparison of the training and advice offered to male stewards and female stewardesses reveals that Pan Am expected stewardesses to carefully manage their emotions and presentation to passengers.

³³² *Ibid.*

³³³ *Ibid.*

³³⁴ *Ibid.*

Conclusion

As the United States' largest international air carrier, Pan American Airways succeeded during the jet-age as an American firm negotiating the challenges of doing business in an international context. Most recently, Jennifer Van Vleck has examined the important role Pan Am played in extending US economic and political power abroad, in what she called "The empire of the air." Van Vleck explained, "The 'empire of the air' was, in significant ways, deeply grounded: rooted in human interaction (often in the context of highly unequal relations of socioeconomic and geopolitical power) and implanted on the earth... Yet the airplane was also an inherently globalizing technology that appeared to reduce the significance of territorial boundaries, creating a world with 'no distant places.'"³³⁵ By examining a selection of corporate documents dedicated to developing a particular notion of service and way to relate to an increasingly globalized customer base, this chapter has specifically examined the gendered nature of Pan Am's "empire of the air." As we've seen, Pan Am carefully positioned women as the public face of the company. Exploring the gendered nature of Pan Am's notion of service invites us to consider the, often obscured, emotional labor that went into creating a successful international brand. Additionally, this analysis has considered how airlines sold air transport to the public through careful constructions of corporate image, which were directly dependent on the service-work provided by women.

³³⁵ Van Vleck, 13.

CHAPTER 5

“THE WORLD’S LARGEST AIRLINE:” GENDER AND THE MARKETING OF AIR FRANCE AS A NEW TECHNOLOGY FOR LATE-COLONIAL DEVELOPMENT IN WEST AFRICA

In 1957, Air France laid claim to the title of “World’s Largest Airline.” Serving 236 cities in 73 countries, Air France boasted a worldwide network that totaled 188,000 miles of routes, along which 8,000,000 passengers had flown between 1952-1957.³³⁶ One publicity pamphlet explained that the phrase “world’s largest” was undoubtedly an American expression that had been appropriated by Air France as a way of drawing attention to its extraordinary achievements. With France coming out of WWII with a damaged national infrastructure and facing growing independence movements that threatened the French empire, the French state relied on Air France as an important tool for reconsolidating power in its overseas territories.³³⁷ In particular, French colonial Africa became a key strategic orientation for Air France, as France maintained colonial control over the region until the early 1960s. This chapter examines Air France’s role in the larger French post-war project of industrialization and economic development at home and in French colonial Africa during the period of the Fourth Republic. Through an examination of corporate travel guides, employee newsletters, and published marketing material, this chapter examines Air France’s efforts to encourage business and economic development in French colonial Africa. Air transport emerged during this period as a

³³⁶ “The World’s Largest Airline,” Air France Public Relations Department North, Central and Caribbean Division (U.S.A.: September 1957), 12. NASM, F1A-300050-02.

³³⁷ Jenifer Van Vleck has also recently explored connections between aviation and national spheres of influence in *Empire of the Air: Aviation and the American Ascendancy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013).

new technology for negotiating a particular moment in French colonial rule. Air France served as both a practical tool with which to exercise colonial control and as a symbol of national prestige. An analysis of its growth reveals the persistence of technology as a symbolic yardstick within imperial discourses of development, race, and nationalism.

Air France not only provided physical linkages between the colonies and the metropole, but also promoted the ideological notion of unity and “Frenchness” throughout its overseas territories. Air France created the air hostess during this period to represent French culture in the world. To overcome perceived fears of traveling to colonial Africa, Air France charged airhostesses with the task of domesticating foreign destinations and representing French culture and national prestige within the empire. This chapter will examine the role of gender in Air France’s marketing of travel to African colonies through an analysis of the creation of the “hôtesse de l’air.”

Presenting both a challenge and opportunity for my work, scholarship in English on Air France is fairly scant. Scholars such as Martin Staniland and Nicolas Neiertz have published works that engage with Air France’s history to examine how state regulations impacted the commercial development of the airline—alongside of other major airlines in Europe.³³⁸ My work builds off of their detailed examinations of the state in Air France’s history, paying particular attention to the way France positioned its national airline as a key tool to re-assert colonial control after WWII. By way of a roadmap, this chapter will begin with a brief history of Air France while considering the political and economic

³³⁸ Martin Staniland, *Government Birds: Air Transport and the State in Western Europe* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003); Nicolas Neiertz, “Air France: An Elephant in an Evening Suit?” In *Flying the Flag. European Commercial Air Transport Since 1945*, edited by Hans-Liudger Dienel and Peter Lyth, (New York: St. Martin’s, 1998), 18-49.

context of France in the immediate post-war period. Second, the chapter will examine Air France's marketing strategies to increase business investment in French colonial Africa specifically highlighting a major tension that emerges from the documents—to present Africa simultaneously as underdeveloped and in need of investment, but also just modern enough to satisfy European tastes and standards of living and conducting business. Third, the chapter will examine the gendered aspects of Air France's marketing of services in colonial Africa through an analysis of the recruitment and work of the company's first airhostesses.

Air France: Public or Private?

In August of 1933, the French government issued a decree, which formed Air France out of numerous existing airlines. At this point, the firm officially constituted a “mixed company,” operating under the same provisions as a mixed economy, where private and public sources of funding joined together. The state officially held a 25% percent equity stake in the firm. The remaining 75% of equity was transferred to individual shareholders in exchange for their companies' assets as a condition of merging with Air France.³³⁹ In addition to owning a 25% stake in the company, the French government also retained the privilege of appointing at least two government representatives to Air France's sixteen-person board of directors. In 1945, the Provisional Government of the French Republic (GPRF), which maintained power from 1944 to 1946, nationalized Air France during the immediate aftermath of WWII. This

³³⁹ Staniland, 31.

was the only time in Air France's history in which the airline was officially a nationalized company.

Three years later, in 1948, socialist economic policies lost favor with the coming of the French Fourth Republic. As a result, a June 16, 1948 law reestablished Air France as a mixed company with 30% of capital reserved for non-governmental public and private organizations and the majority 70% being vested in the state. The company was conceived of as a limited liability company and was thus subject to statutes governing such corporate configurations, yet maintained a very distinct management and oversight structure with close ties to the state. The majority of Air France leadership was related in some way to the French government. The 1948 law established a board of 16 members to form the company's formal leadership body, referred to as the "Conseil d'Administration." The government directly appointed half of the conseil's members. The remaining seats were split evenly between private stockholders and employee representatives (typically union interests).³⁴⁰ While half of the leadership council was represented by non-state interests, as Martin Staniland argues, the conseil was a relatively weak body which rarely challenged the company's management. This meant that the main decision-making power was vested in the company's president (a politically appointed position) and the Transport and Finance Ministries, which were charged with general oversight of Air France operations. Despite being a limited liability company, therefore, Air France's daily affairs remained under the direct control of the French state. The Transport Minister held the legal right to exercise "general supervision" of the company, which involved approving annual Air France financial reviews detailing

³⁴⁰ Staniland, 73.

projected revenues and expenses, as well as approving its investments, purchases, route modifications, personnel decisions, and shareholdings in other companies.³⁴¹ The state's involvement in the daily operations of the company was rather remarkable and did not go unnoticed by Air France's domestic rivals who were irritated by what they viewed as preferential treatment. The relationship also led some politicians to "question whether airline and government were too close for the independence of either."³⁴²

Beyond general oversight, the French state provided a great deal of financial support to Air France in the post-war period. While railway companies and other national industries received much larger sums of funding, Air France benefited from French post-war economic planning, which included air transport in its development program. Between 1947 and 1952, Air France received around 50.8 billion francs (close to 147 million USD) in state investments.³⁴³ A large portion of this financial assistance came in the form of low interest loans intended for the purchase of new aircraft—a huge expense for the company attempting to re-build its fleet in the post-war context. Between 1946 and 1951, the state issued Air France 15.3 billion francs in loans for new aircraft. Aircraft procurement, however, became a complicated issue for Air France—one that often brought to the fore tensions between state and commercial interests. American companies such as Boeing and Lockheed were producing the most modern airliners of the period. These planes quickly became the standard sought after by all of the major European airlines, including Air France. The French state, however, was reluctant to dedicate its funds for the purchase of American aircraft, as its main concern was

³⁴¹ Staniland, 78.

³⁴² Staniland, 79.

³⁴³ Staniland, 94.

subsidizing domestic industrial development.³⁴⁴ While the 1946 law did not compel Air France to buy planes produced in France, it did require the company to seek approval from the Ministry of Finance to purchase planes abroad. In practice, the ministry seldom objected to such requests and in the late 1940s alone, Air France spent close to 34 million dollars on Douglas and Lockheed airliners.³⁴⁵

In case the reputations of American airliners for comfort and luxury weren't motivation enough, the US government also provided financial assistance to European nations considering the purchase of US commercial aircraft. Increased purchases served as a much-needed boost to the US aircraft industry, which desperately sought to fill the hole left by the termination of wartime production contracts. The US government provided money to France through the Economic Cooperation Administration (ECA) for the purchase of American civil aircraft and material. Created in 1948, ECA administered funds for European post-war reconstruction under the Marshall Plan. By 1951, the agency had transferred 51,957,000 USD to France in what was essentially a series of loans.³⁴⁶ One corporate report from 1955 indicated that in 1951 alone, Air France received 7,100,000 USD from the US Marshall plan, which it used to buy a number of Lockheed Constellations.³⁴⁷ Thanks to US incentives and money from the French state, between 1951 and 1953, 80 planes of Air France's 118-plane fleet were US-built.³⁴⁸

³⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁴⁵ Staniland, 142.

³⁴⁶ Staniland, 95.

³⁴⁷ "25 Années De Vol Transatlantique: 1930-190 Air France," Air France, Paris: 1955. NASM, F1A-300050-02.

³⁴⁸ Staniland, 139.

Air France's recognition that providing passengers with comfort and luxury could provide an important competitive edge over other airlines drove its desire to purchase American-made Boeing and Lockheed airliners. In a few notable instances, however, the French state did attempt to compel Air France to "buy French." Concerned with the state of the French aircraft industry, in the late 1940s the government urged Air France to buy at least four French-built airline models. In the absence of a clear legal mechanism mandating the purchase, Air France only ended up buying two models—the Languedoc and the Bréguet 763.³⁴⁹ In both cases, the purchases were made extremely reluctantly. The Languedoc was so unpopular that it was called a "burden on the company," and as Staniland reported, it was rumored that in the face of protest from the company the government finally agreed to purchase Air France forty Languedocs in 1946, before transferring the planes to the company for a whopping total of 1 franc per plane.³⁵⁰

One can see the company grappling with the tensions presented by linking French national prestige to its airline that was largely reliant on American technological prowess. Marketing materials revealed somewhat awkward attempts at justifying Air France's use of American aircraft. In a marketing pamphlet with the not-so-subtle title "The World's Largest Airline," the company explained that the success of Air France was owed in large part to the historic position France held in the development of aviation. "The forward march of transportation in our century may well be remembered in a word: aviation...a French word that has traveled so quickly over the world that it is now part of the vocabulary of every continent," the document explained, arguing that French innovation

³⁴⁹ Staniland, 142.

³⁵⁰ Ibid.

helped transform aviation into an industry.³⁵¹ After stressing the legacy of French aviation, the brochure continued, explaining that Air France executives have carefully assembled its fleet of aircraft by following the principle: “*Purchase the most modern and efficient equipment available on the world market.*”³⁵² The pamphlet skirted the issue of its American-dominated fleet by emphasizing the supposed collaborative nature of aircraft manufacturing. “As in the field of flight itself, the aircraft manufacturing industry has neither historically nor is it presently the province of a single nation. Air transport and aircraft manufacture have gone hand in hand as world-wide human endeavors beyond national frontiers, and the wisdom of the world market purchasing has been proved by efficient operation over the world by Air France,” the pamphlet eagerly assured.³⁵³ While Air France couldn’t praise French prominence in aircraft manufacturing—it could (and did!) at least refrain from praising the US’s place within the industry, defusing its importance by emphasizing the cooperative nature of aircraft production.

Another pamphlet aimed at marketing Air France travel to Americans, decided to avoid the issue altogether by simply referring to all of its aircraft euphemistically as “comets,” regardless of model or national origin.³⁵⁴ “This is the Comet you board in New York for your flight to Paris...” the brochure declared, referencing an aircraft pictured on the same page. The aircraft featured in the photo was the American-made

³⁵¹ “The World’s Largest Airline,” Air France Public Relations Department North, Central and Caribbean Division (U.S.A.: September 1957), 10. NASM F1A-300050-04.

³⁵² “The World’s Largest Airline,” Air France Public Relations Department North, Central and Caribbean Division (U.S.A.: September 1957), 39. Emphasis in original.

³⁵³ Ibid.

³⁵⁴ “Into the Arms of the Spring,” Travel Air France Catalogue, Winter and Spring 1954, No. 1. NASM F1A-300050-04.

Lockheed 749 Constellation—considered to be the epitome of luxury in trans-Atlantic travel during the period. “Enter this door and you’re in France,” the pamphlet boasted. After obscuring its American origin with the use of a clever nickname, the company even went so far as to re-construct the airplane as a decidedly French space. “Step aboard a Comet—and in one step you have entered another world,” the brochure explained, “Truly, France itself lies about you...in the décor...the atmosphere...and in the welcoming courtesy of hostesses and stewards.”³⁵⁵ Perhaps France did lie in the accouterments, but of course, not in the plane itself. The attempts made by Air France to present its aircraft to passengers as a miniature slice of France itself represented an important marketing strategy and will be discussed in more depth later.

As this brief overview of Air France’s organization and leadership during the postwar period has shown, Air France heavily relied on the state for funds and managerial direction. As such, the aims and policies of the company closely followed the political projects and rhetoric of the post-war French government. Coming out of WWII, the government of the Fourth Republic sought to re-establish French prestige and strength on the global stage through domestic economic modernization projects and the reassertion of its economic and cultural influence over its overseas empire. As Staniland argued, “re-establishing authority in overseas colonies was a major reason for investing quickly and heavily in the national carrier immediately after WWII...”³⁵⁶ Understanding this political context provides essential insight into the ways in which the French state

³⁵⁵ Ibid. The use of the term “Comet” should not be confused with the de Havilland Comet—a British aircraft first flown by BOAC in 1952.

³⁵⁶ Staniland, 127.

enlisted Air France in its colonial project and tasked the company with representing French national vigor abroad.

The Fourth Republic and the creation of the French Union

At the close of WWII France faced a national crisis. The war had decimated national infrastructure, greatly hampering the nation's productive capacity and economic vitality. Political divisions likewise created turmoil, as many political leaders were pushed from office for having collaborated with the Vichy government during the war. National existential anxieties over France's place in the new post-war world also abounded and were manifested in renewed debates about France's overseas empire. Military and political leader Charles de Gaulle, head of the GPRF (the provisional government that took power in the immediate wake of WWII) captured the precariousness of the French crisis when he wrote to FDR about the place of France in the postwar world. He wrote,

“I know you are preparing to aid France materially, and that aid will be invaluable to her. But it is in the political realm that she must recover her vigor, her self-reliance and, consequently, her role. How can she do this if she is excluded from the organization of the great world powers and their decisions, if she loses her African and Asian territories—in short, if the settlement of the war definitively imposes upon her the psychology of the vanquished?”³⁵⁷

As de Gaulle's message to FDR highlights, rebuilding the national economy was only one part of France's post-war aim. In order to assert its place in the world, French

³⁵⁷ Charles de Gaulle, *The Complete War Memoires of Charles de Gaulle* (New York, 1977) Cited in Tony Smith, “A Comparative Study of French and British Decolonization,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 20, No. 1 (January 1978), 243.

political policy in the post-war years centered on shoring up the bounds of the French empire. French efforts to reassert colonial control in the midst of widespread post-war, anti-colonial sentiment became a central concern of the French Fourth Republic and would ultimately prove its undoing. Founded in October of 1946, the government of the Fourth Republic faced growing resistance to its efforts to tighten colonial control, first in Vietnam (Battle of Dien Bien Phu in 1954) and then Algeria in 1958.

French inability to squelch the anti-colonial uprising in Algeria and the ensuing civil war ultimately led to the dissolution of the Fourth Republic and the founding of the Fifth Republic under the leadership of Charles de Gaulle. While it can be debated whether France's attempts to maintain an overseas empire actually hampered or aided its fragile post-war economic condition, it is clear that France viewed its colonial possessions as symbolic projections of its national power. Scholars of French political history such as Tony Smith have emphasized the importance of the colonial question in France's post-war reconstruction. Smith wrote, "Time and time again throughout the history of the Fourth Republic, beneath the invective of political division, one finds a shared anguish at the passing of national greatness, a shared humiliation at a century of defeats, a shared nationalistic determination that France must retain her independence in a hostile world—all brought to rest on the conviction that the colonies, and especially Algeria, would remain French."³⁵⁸ It is within this project to restore French national greatness and an overseas empire that Air France was situated—both as a practical tool with which to exercise colonial control and as a symbol of national prestige. Air France

³⁵⁸ Tony Smith, "The French Colonial Consensus and the People's War, 1946-1958," *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 9, No. 4 (October 1974), 221.

was to provide the physical linkages to an increasingly de-centralized empire as well as the ideological notion of unity and “Frenchness” throughout its overseas territories.

The task of reasserting colonial control in the midst of a global political climate that had grown openly critical of colonialism proved tricky for France and resulted in a revision of its colonial policy. Writing in 1952, French politician and member of the National Assembly, Alan Savary, described the factors that led France to amend its policy in dealing with the colonies. “The circumstances of the war and the essential part played by the overseas countries in the resistance movement, led Free France to revise its traditional colonial policy. This change was inspired on one hand by the exigencies of international agreements (Atlantic Charter, August 1941; Charter of the United Nations, June 16, 1945), and on the other hand, by the necessity of responding to the aspirations of the colonial peoples on whom the resistance movement had depended,” Savary explained.³⁵⁹ As such, the constitution of the Fourth Republic triumphantly declared the end of the French empire and the birth of the French Union. The creation of the French Union represented a clever re-branding to introduce at least a nominal separation from the French empire of the past, which had begun to fall out of favor in the current political climate. With the French Union, France attempted to soften its colonial image by vesting political power in the territories themselves. As explained by Savary, “the most important innovation” of the French Union was the establishment of elected assemblies in

³⁵⁹ Alan Savary, “The French Union: Centralism or Federalism?” *International Journal*, Vol. 7, No. 4 (Autumn 1952), 259.

each of France's overseas territories that were designed to "give the indigenous population a growing responsibility in the democratic management of their affairs..."³⁶⁰

While the constitution of the Fourth Republic waxed poetic about extending the rights of French citizenship to all of its colonies, it was much more evasive when it came to describing the actual parameters of the French Union and how political power was to be shared with colonial territories. In *Human Rights and the End of Empire*, A.W. Brian Simpson summarized the inherent limitations of France's revised colonial policy. Simpson explained, "Out of metropolitan France, the overseas departments, and the overseas territories there was to emerge a French Union, in which all people would be citizens, enjoying the same rights as French citizens did in metropolitan France."³⁶¹ As Simpson argued, however, this rhetoric was largely unsupported, as the constitution outlining the French Union included no description of the legal mechanisms by which such rights would be protected or enforced. While the new colonial policy included the creation of elected assemblies in each territory, Simpson explained, "Legislative power was not vested in the institutions of the Union, but in the French Parliament in Paris, comprised of the Council of the Republic and the National Assembly, which actually voted for laws; legislative power over the French empire was thus centralized."³⁶² Barred from effecting legislative action, local assemblies operated more as colonial functionaries tasked with administrative duties in their respective territories. A class of native local elites emerged to fill these administrative positions and function as representatives to the

³⁶⁰ Ibid, 261.

³⁶¹ A.W. Brian Simpson, *Human Rights and the End of Empire*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001, 285.

³⁶² Ibid, 286.

legislative process in the metropole. These elites would eventually come to lead the national governments of Africa after independence and elicit criticism for their roles in preserving colonial relations.

Beyond the softening of colonial rhetoric, another characteristic of France's revised colonial policy was its focus on economic development within its overseas territories. One historian of colonial French Africa, Frederick Cooper, explained that the turn toward development represented a major shift in France's colonial policy, as prior to 1940 France had "committed little in the way of metropolitan investment."³⁶³ As part of the Fourth Republic's new colonial policy, however, France began investing tax revenues from the metropole into a range of development projects "aimed at reaching rural as well as urban Africa, and at bringing the range of services characteristic of a modern state, from schools to piped water, to the colonies."³⁶⁴ The context of the French Fourth Republic and its attendant economic and technological development policies, together with reformist colonial policy, heavily influenced the period of Air France's most explosive growth.

Air France's Colonial Mission

Reflecting the company's colonial mission, a 1946 employee magazine explained, "It is only through work and the spirit of production that the French aviation market will take its place in the world, a place which has entitled it of importance to the French

³⁶³ Cooper, 17.

³⁶⁴ Cooper, 44.

Empire and the glorious history of commercial aviation.”³⁶⁵ Air France officials were at great pains to justify Air France’s service to French imperial interests. Of course, this isn’t too surprising considering the massive economic stake that the government had in the company. In justifying its colonial mission, numerous articles explained that the company facilitated vital contact between France and its colonies. One article explained, “Colonial communication is rare, the plane is almost the only link between the metropole and the empire. Inside of Africa, the airplane has become indispensable for the services it provides.”³⁶⁶ Air France was undoubtedly eager to provide this vital service to the nation from a financial standpoint as well. In addition to issuing loans to acquire new aircraft, the French government subsidized particular routes to colonial destinations in the “interest of the public.”³⁶⁷

In addition to strengthening communication links between colonial Africa and the metropole, Air France marketed its services as essential to increasing economic development in Africa. Highlighting the company’s dedication to assisting colonial development projects, marketing materials hailed the advent of regular Air France flights and freight transport in Africa as an almost cure-all solution to the problems faced in the colonies. Railroad maps from the period detail the limited transport infrastructure existing in Africa and highlight the significance of the claims to colonial service being made by Air France. A 1948 annual corporate route highlighted the growth of air routes

³⁶⁵ *Terre et Ciel: Revue Personnel de La Compagnie Air France*, No. 1 (February 1946): 17, Musée Air France, Paris, France.

³⁶⁶ *Terre et Ciel: Revue Personnel de La Compagnie Air France*, No. 2 (March 1946): 2, Musée Air France.

³⁶⁷ Staniland, 94. Between 1946 and 1951, the French government authorized a total of 15.3 billion francs in loans to Air France for the purchase of new aircraft.

in colonial Africa emanating “from Dakar to Brazzaville along the coast and into the interior, interconnected by several cross-cutting links.”³⁶⁸ The report touted that such local routes operating within the French Union served as an “essential economic and administrative instrument” for the metropole.³⁶⁹

Because of the airplane’s unprecedented ability to move goods quickly across such vast territories, publicity materials professed that “Illness far from a hospital no longer provides a dramatic situation [as] medications [and] perishable goods...” are delivered punctually by Air France planes.³⁷⁰ To substantiate these claims, it was certainly not by accident that Air France chose for its 1 millionth parcel delivered by Air to be a box of medicine shipped to a French doctor, Albert Schweitzer, working in a hospital in Lambarene (in the modern day nation of Gabon). The pamphlet also declared that Air France services had even managed to eliminate famines in colonial Africa: “The distribution of agricultural products and livestock is ensured in the best conditions; traditional famines of Africa are just a memory.”³⁷¹ In spite of such lofty claims, it is all too clear from today’s vantage point that Air France did not end the problems of illness and famine in Africa. Such proclamations about the wonders Air France could bring to Africa, irrespective of their plausibility, nevertheless remained a central aspect of Air France’s marketing strategy—which hinged on striking a delicate balance between

³⁶⁸ “Rapport Sur L’Activité d’Air France en 1948,” July 1949, Paris: Air France Informations, NASM F1A-300050-30

³⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁷⁰ *L’Afrique Noire: Économique, Touristique, et Documentaire*, édité par Air France (Paris: July, 1956), 26, Musée Air France.

³⁷¹ *Ibid.*

presenting colonial Africa as modern enough, yet underdeveloped and in need of business investment.

Addressing the “African market,” one 1956 Air France Travel Guide waxed optimistic about African development already underway: “No impartial observer circulating today in Black Africa could fail to be struck by the grand scope of work already undertaken. Populations once decimated by poverty, hunger and disease are now experiencing conditions of an entirely new existence...New roads have been traced, welcoming residents in the countryside, and luxury hotels now stand in perfectly developed cities.”³⁷² Yet in an effort to emphasize the opportunity for further development, another section of the travel guide highlighted the existence of towns “which count several thousands of Europeans, and are deprived of certain industries and lucrative businesses.”³⁷³ Connecting French business investors with these “deprived” locales formed the cornerstone of Air France’s business strategy in colonial Africa.

Alongside of passenger services, Air France marketed its ability to move freight rapidly and regularly as an essential feature to increase business and economic development in Africa. One 1956 Guide to Black Africa confidently declared, “The exploitation of airways has greatly stimulated the economy of Black Africa, simplifying the extreme problems posed by the difficulty of links with the metropole, by the penetration of the interior territories, and through the importation and exportation of diverse products.”³⁷⁴ Air France solidly positioned its air freight services as a solution to two major problems standing in the way of French business investment in Africa: 1. The

³⁷² *L’Afrique Noire*, 7.

³⁷³ *L’Afrique Noire*, 17-18.

³⁷⁴ *L’Afrique Noire*, 22.

challenge posed by investing large amounts of fixed capital in a foreign territory that was anything but stable; and, 2. The costs associated with a reliance on a reportedly “un-modern” and increasingly labor-conscious local workforce. By offering freight services as an alternative to investing in capital on the ground in Africa and lowering labor costs for business investors, Air France perpetuated a long-established extractive colonial economic relationship under the guise of a modern and purportedly democratizing technological solution: air transport.

As histories of global airfreight explain, Air France was not alone in its discovery of the potential profits that shipping cargo by air had to offer. The technological improvements in aviation brought about by WWII not only served direct combat purposes (in the form of new bombers and attack aircraft) but also in the realm of cargo transport. The transportation of goods by air experienced an unprecedented era of expansion in the years following the war. The innovations made in the production of military aircraft during wartime helped the civilian sector develop and led to the creation of “Newly emerging quick-change or combi versions of aircraft,” which “allowed airlines to offer passengers and shippers the flexibility with which to operate at full capacity and profitability.”³⁷⁵ With the new technological capability of post-war aircraft and a burgeoning air route infrastructure, Air France needed to develop a marketing strategy to procure a steady stream of clients that were eager to ship their cargo by air.

Attempting to woo private investors, Air France publications praised air-freight transportation as the key to a successful business strategy in Africa, explaining, “Air

³⁷⁵ Michael Sales, *The Air Logistics Handbook: Air Freight and the Global Supply Chain*, (London: Routledge, 2013), 29.

transport provides great benefits to those who use it as it removes the cost of storage and insurance, immobilization for long months of significant capital, and the risk of price collapse or damage to products.”³⁷⁶ No longer would businesses need to build up stockpiles of essential items or spare tools in distant lands. Such investments, the pamphlet declared, would be an unnecessary investment of funds in the new age of airfreight. “A piece of an engine motor, requested by telegram,” the document boasts, “is delivered to the heart of Africa in the shortest possible time...the moment the need arises.”³⁷⁷

Additionally, high labor costs posed a potential problem to French business investors as in colonial Africa, according to Air France, “it usually takes two, three, four, or even more [workers] to produce work that, in Europe, would only take one employee.”³⁷⁸ Relying on well-established tropes of native colonial populations, Air France publications largely presented colonial Africans as being ill-suited for the requirements of technology and modern life. “It is too easy to say that the black man is reluctant to manual labor” the publication rationalized, “for an African, working expressions, regular work finished at fixed times, and notions of welfare or savings do not make sense.” Native populations “do not allow themselves to turn into producers of a standard type overnight,” citing the harsh climate and physical disabilities.³⁷⁹ Labor in the African colonies was of particular concern in the post-war period due to growing labor uprisings. As Cooper explains, after WWII, demand for labor in urban areas was

³⁷⁶ *L’Afrique Noire*, 26.

³⁷⁷ *L’Afrique Noire*, 26.

³⁷⁸ *L’Afrique Noire*, 10.

³⁷⁹ *L’Afrique Noire*, 10.

high. Post-war inflation, however, fueled growing discontent with working conditions that culminated in a strike organized in December of 1945 by laborers working in the seaport of Dakar. By January, the strike had “spread throughout the city, embracing unskilled laborers, literate clerks in banks and businesses, skilled workers in the metal trade and civil servants.”³⁸⁰ The entire city of Dakar was effectively shut down for twelve days during the general strike that also spread to other cities in the region.

Strikes such as those in Dakar—a central hub for Air France’s routes in the region—would have certainly made investing in business development in the region seem like an increasingly risky proposition. Additionally, the “long railway strike of 1947-1948” that crippled French West Africa’s already severely limited rail infrastructure served as both an opportunity for Air France’s airfreight marketing and a cautionary tale for business investors. Shipping products from the metropole to Africa and vice-versa was one strategy by which Air France assured business investors that they could rely less on the infrastructure and labor of local populations, limiting even further the direct economic benefits to be gained by average Africans.

Air France’s efforts to market its airfreight services were largely successful, as the quantity of freight transported across its vast air routes skyrocketed in the years following WWII. An annual corporate report from 1948 reveals that in 1947 Air France shipped 6,347 tons of freight and by 1948, that number had risen to 14,150 tons—an increase of 116%. In addition to a rise in gross tons transported, Air France also saw a rise in ton-kilometers of freight between 1947 and 1948. The ton-kilometer, a common unit of measurement in calculating freight shipments by various methods of transportation, is

³⁸⁰ Cooper, 42.

calculated by multiplying the total load carried (in tons) by the total distance covered (in kilometers). From 1947 to 1948, Air France's total ton-kilometers transported rose 141%, jumping from 7,838,801 to 18,905,596.³⁸¹ Commenting on the staggering rise of freight transported in 1948, the company credited its marketing efforts explaining, "The significant increase in freight traffic reflects the effort made by the Company to promote the transport of air cargo."³⁸² While the figures in the annual report do not provide a breakdown of freight transported across specific routes, the report does indicate that the greatest increase in freight traffic occurred on the main lines connecting the metropole and French Union.³⁸³ Airfreight transport continued to grow in the ensuing years. In 1950, sales garnered from airfreight shipments totaled 7 million francs; and in 1954, Air France transported 43,652 tons of cargo—a 29,502-ton increase over 1948.³⁸⁴

While shipping material throughout its domestic and overseas routes provided an important area of growth in the postwar period, airfreight on its own was not a viable business strategy: Air France needed passengers. Operating in a relatively small country (when compared to the US) with a nationalized railway industry possessing extensive domestic routes, Air France faced stiff competition for passengers traveling within France. As a 1948 Air France report explained, the company could barely compete with the railway on domestic routes for several reasons. First, Air France did not offer nighttime services on domestic routes, while the railways offered night services that

³⁸¹ "Rapport Sur L'Activité d'Air France en 1948," July 1949, Paris: Air France Informations, NASM F1A-300050-30

³⁸² Ibid.

³⁸³ Ibid.

³⁸⁴ "25 Années De Vol Transatlantique: 1930-190 Air France," Air France, Paris: 1955. F1A-300050-02.

allowed passengers to conveniently travel while sleeping in order to minimize the inconvenience of travel time. Second, while train stations pre-dated airports and were located in the center of French towns, airports were constructed on the outskirts of towns and were typically not easily accessible. Passengers often preferred to take the train for trips between French towns because they did not lose hours of time traveling to and from the airport. Domestic air travel allowed 20kg of baggage substantially less than rail travel, further deterring potential airline passengers. Finally, the report explained that Air France's domestic fares were around 20% higher than rail tariffs.³⁸⁵

On "Long-haul" routes between the metropole and the French Union as well as inter-colonial lines, however, Air France could offer much more competitive fares. "The time gained by the airplane thanks to its speed and thanks to the utilization of more direct routes than the boat, reduces the importance of competition between Air France and maritime companies," the report concluded.³⁸⁶ According to its calculations, Air France's ticket costs were comparable to first class passage on a ship plus the costs incurred during the travel. Facing stiff competition from railways on domestic routes, Air France faced the challenge of encouraging passengers to travel to colonial destinations, where it could offer a much more attractive and competitive service.

L'Hôtesse de L'Air and Marketing Travel to West Africa

While packages could be loaded onto planes in France and dispensed of in remote locations throughout West Africa with relative ease, passengers required a great deal

³⁸⁵ "Rapport Sur L'Activité d'Air France en 1948," July 1949, Paris: Air France Informations, NASM F1A-300050-30.

³⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

more attention and care. In order to encourage passenger traffic to colonial West Africa for business and pleasure, Air France attempted to convince the traveling public that they could do so without ever leaving the safety and comfort of modern France. In 1946, Air France recruited its first class of stewardesses, which the company termed *Hôtesse de l'Air* or Air Hostesses. A full 10 years after the first stewardess was hired by United Airlines in the United States in 1936, Air France recognized the benefits that female cabin crewmembers could offer from a marketing standpoint, self-consciously drawing from the model of their American competitors. Air France executives realized that the placement of a woman in a commercial airline cabin could evoke feelings of safety, comfort, and familiarity in the minds of the traveling public—an association sure to boost ticket sales. Additionally, the French air hostess was an important symbol in Air France's attempts to present colonial destinations as exotic and interesting while also safe and French. Beyond symbolic value, air hostesses also provided an array of services ranging from in-flight pampering and chatting to handling customs forms and recommending local accommodations, which were intended to provide travelers with a seamless experience that left them questioning whether they'd ever left France.

In encouraging travel to colonial West Africa, Air France drew on a legacy of French commercial travel in the colonies dating to the early decades of the twentieth century. In her essay “Une leçon des choses: Tourism, Empire, and the Nation in Interwar France,” French historian Ellen Furlough recounted the evolution of travel within the French Empire and its significance within popularizing the French colonial project. Furlough examined the largest private tourist association in France, the French Touring Club, and its organization of tours to the French colonies. In the early 1900s the

group began organizing tours to North African colonies and by the early 1930s had begun to organize more ambitious voyages to colonial West Africa. While Furlough didn't examine these trips in great detail, she did argue that they served as an important ideological tool of the state, as the voyages "exposed French subjects to firsthand experiences of multiple imperial sites and explicitly linked tourism with the ideological, cultural, and hierarchical assumptions of Greater France."³⁸⁷

It is within this tradition that Air France marketed air travel to colonial West Africa, but with an updated post-war spin. Rather than giving French citizens the opportunity to merely see the colonies and receive "une leçon des choses," Air France offered French tourists the opportunity to directly participate in France's economic and cultural development project by spending French money on vacations and business investments in the colonies while spreading French culture. This section examines Air France's air hostesses and their efforts to make commercial flight seem safe and accessible in the minds of the French public. Beyond making flight seem safe and familiar, Air France's air hostesses also played a central role in Air France's efforts to market colonial locales as non-threatening and attractive business and tourist destinations. Through an analysis of Air France marketing pamphlets, travel guides, and employee newsletters and manuals, I argue that gender was a crucial element in the growth and expansion of commercial aviation in France and its waning empire during the immediate post-WWII period.

³⁸⁷ Ellen Furlough, "Une Leçon des Choses: Tourism, Empire, and the Nation in Interwar France," *French Historical Studies*, Volume 25, Number 3, Summer 2002, 460.

Constructing “France aloft”

As soon as word hit the papers in February of 1946 that Air France was recruiting applicants for the newly created position of air hostess, a stream of “respectable ladies and charming girls” invaded the third floor of the Air France office on Rue Marbeuf in Paris. An article in Air France’s employee magazine devoted to the initial class of air hostesses detailed the process that applicants faced as well as the type of training they received.³⁸⁸ Faced with an overflowing office of women interested in becoming one of Air France’s first air hostesses, the personnel at the Rue Marbeuf office were quickly overwhelmed. Fortunately, the article explained, “the admission conditions were extremely severe: one must be pretty, smart, have a good presentation, know perfectly another language, and be single.”³⁸⁹ The author of the article couldn’t help pointing out that one could imagine that any woman possessing all of these “rare” qualities would certainly not manage to stay single for very long! Anyone not meeting these basic requirements were eliminated immediately. Indeed, the article related, some circumstances of rejecting candidates at this juncture were very difficult: “How, in fact, do you tell a candidate—‘Miss, we can not admit you because your legs are too fat...’ These cases had to be handled very diplomatically.”³⁹⁰

Around 30 candidates (all with acceptably-sized legs) made it through this first step. After additional medical evaluations and administrative formalities, around 20 women remained. These fortunate women earned the opportunity to attend Air France’s

³⁸⁸ “À Maligny avec nos futures hôteses,” *Terre et Ciel: Revue Personnel de La Compagnie Air France*, Numéro (4 Mai-Juin 1946) 3. Musée Air France Archives, Paris, France.

³⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

air hostess training class, which commenced on April 2, 1946 in a small town called Maligny, located around two and a half hours southeast of Paris. The women gathered on the idyllic grounds of an 18th century chateau for a week of information sessions, training, and exercises.



First class of Air France Air Hostesses 1946³⁹¹
Figure 5.1

But while these young hopefuls attracted by the promise of world travel basked in the beauty of their surroundings, the article was quick to point out that air hostess training was to be nothing of a vacation. A typical morning began with cleaning and physical education, followed by three meetings and lunch. Classes continued into the evening, covering subjects ranging from poetry to the history of aviation—“both the heroic period

³⁹¹ “L’Hôtess de l’Air, 1946” Musée Air France Archives, Paris, France.

and commercial period.” Training was to be difficult, as the job of air hostess was sure to be demanding. “In reality,” the article explained, “the stewardesses will need to be tough and their physical and moral resilience will be put to the test, just think of the obligation of standing in the aircraft for hours on ends...they must not hesitate to get their hands dirty.”³⁹² An experienced Air France steward (the male position that the female air hostesses were to supplement) named Epper was present at the training to expound on the “various disadvantages” that might occur during flight. Trainees were not left guessing, as Epper covered tasks relating to everything from childcare and first aid to administrative functions. Industry professionals also joined training meetings to instruct trainees on various aspects of the tourism and luxury industries. “Finally,” the article reported, “French and geography lessons completed the candidate training.”³⁹³

Beyond serving as a pretty face, successful air hostess candidates had to demonstrate advanced knowledge of flight, be able to discuss matters ranging from politics to the arts, and handle various medical situations that were sure to arise mid-flight. The company set high standards for these women—and for good reason. Air France tasked its air hostesses with representing both the company and the nation. One article explained, “The difficult selection process imposed on the candidates is a serious guarantee they will succeed, in the present, both abroad and in the empire, the portrait of all of the physical and moral qualities which constitute French elegance...The hostesses

³⁹² “À Maligny avec nos futures hôtes,” *Terre et Ciel: Revue Personnel de La Compagnie Air France*, Numéro (4 Mai-Juin 1946) 3. Musée Air France Archives, Paris, France.

³⁹³ *Ibid.*

will represent to the eyes of the stranger, the charm, the good taste and French kindness; these are the qualities we value the most.”³⁹⁴

Through their interactions with passengers and the public, Air France intended for its air hostesses to win over wary passengers by making flying seem more safe and accessible, while embodying the comfort and refinement of the modern French state. For many who had never stepped foot on a plane, these women were the first point of contact and responsible for instructing passengers on how to do everything from fastening their seatbelts and easing air sickness, to finding hotels at their destinations. Marketing pamphlets and employee manuals provided ample evidence of the ways in which air hostesses were trained to instruct passengers on the intricacies of commercial air travel.³⁹⁵ One illustrated Air France brochure addressed passengers in the voice of the flight attendant, who is drawn with a broad smile and neat suit. In a jovial tone the pamphlet walked passengers through the steps of a flight from boarding the craft, to smoking during a flight, filling out customs paperwork, to disembarkment. It also clued passengers in on helpful tips that might not be obvious to a first time flyer, including the sensation of your ears experiencing changes in atmospheric pressure, what types of engine noises you might hear during flight, as well as the fact that your fountain pen might leak during flight due to pressure changes. The pamphlet made clear that the air hostess’s main concern was the comfort of the passengers. A section detailing the benefits of breathing cold air when feeling airsick implored passengers that if they didn’t feel better to “please call me by pressing the button just below the baggage rack. There is

³⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 4.

³⁹⁵ “L’art de faire un bon voyage,” Air France Brochure, 1954. Musée Air France Archives

nothing like an air hostess for sympathy and effective help at times like this. And please don't feel shy. I'd like to help."³⁹⁶ Women airhostesses performed the social work necessary to normalize the new revolutionary mode of commercial travel.

In addition to making familiar the concept of commercial flight to first time passengers, air hostesses occupied a central role in Air France's efforts to create a particularly "French" flying experience. In marketing pamphlets, employee newsletters, and training manuals Air France repeatedly emphasized that the service to be rendered to customers was deeply rooted in the French tradition of hospitality and culture. The air hostesses, carefully selected to represent the "physical and moral qualities...charm and good taste" that constituted "French elegance," formed the cornerstone of this French experience. In a speech welcoming a new class of air hostesses, Air France executive M. Jean Henry summarized the role of the air hostess in representing French culture. "What is the goal of Air France? In spite of the fierce aerial competition between great nations: be the premier airline of the world. France possesses a tradition of welcoming cuisine, and unparalleled wines. And regarding you..." he declared, "you will make a hotel industry in the air. It will be a hard job, thankless, and difficult, which does not tolerate mediocrity. A profession of welcoming and service."³⁹⁷

While Pan Am constructed its notion of service aloft from the model provided by steamship travel (as was discussed in Chapter 4), Air France drew from its historic legacy

³⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁹⁷ "Non...La Guerre des Sexes N'aura pas Lieu A Air France," *L'Illustration*, July, 1953. Musée Air France Archives, Paris, France.

of luxury hotels and restaurants as a basis for in-flight service.³⁹⁸ In a marketing pamphlet directed at American travelers, Air France explicitly articulated this connection while emphasizing the French legacy of service that only its airline could provide. Speaking of the seasoned American traveller, the pamphlet declared “He knows there are no finer hotels than in France...no finer conception of what the word ‘service’ can mean. He knows French hospitality...the superb meals that may be had...and he will realize at once that Air France is part of this French tradition. For Air France is ‘France aloft’...offering air travelers the finest in modern transportation...together with the atmosphere, the spirit, and the cordiality that is unmistakably French.”³⁹⁹

The air hostess, along with the steward, was entrusted with creating this decidedly French atmosphere. Interestingly, while American stewardesses served airline passengers drinks and food, on Air France flights, the steward (who trained as a *hôtelière*) was primarily entrusted with the elaborate in-flight food and beverage service.⁴⁰⁰ Commenting on this seeming role reversal of the American stewardess and the French steward, one 1953 article from a French magazine explained, “It is difficult in America to find the male equivalent of the servers, waiters, and stewards from Europe, so the great masters of commercial aviation in the US decided the transformation of the object of

³⁹⁸ Christopher Endy discusses the French legacy of hotels and notions of service in his book *Cold War Holidays*. Endy specifically examines how French notions of hospitality were encountered negatively by American tourists in the cold war period and were the targets of Marshall Plan efforts to modernize the French hotel industry. See “Chapter Four” of Christopher Endy, *Cold War Holiday: American Tourism in France*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004).

³⁹⁹ “28 Years of Over Water Flying...Air France,” August 1948, NASM, F1A-300040-01.

⁴⁰⁰ “Le Personnel du Commissariat,” *Terre et Ciel*, No. 18, January 1948, 5. Musée Air France Archives, Paris, France.

luxury would be the hostess, a stewardess, whose main function was to ensure service.”⁴⁰¹ The presentation of French food and beverage was taken very seriously on Air France flights and occupied several sections in a 1948 personnel manual. One section devoted to explaining the fundamental philosophical principles of French cuisine and how to pair various wines with different main courses explained, “Food, drink, and lodging are extremely important elements of providing comfort to passengers...”⁴⁰² The section detailed the vast array of aperitifs, hors d’oeuvres, plats principaux, desserts, cheeses, wines, and digestifs that were to be served on board and match in “every measure possible the high class French hotels and restaurants.”⁴⁰³ One marketing pamphlet ensured passengers that regardless of whether you were flying to Africa or the Far East, onboard an Air France plane “the fine cuisine, accompanied by vintage wines and champagne...emphasizes the feeling that this is what you’ve planned all year...your French vacation.”⁴⁰⁴

Marketing Colonial West Africa

Building off of their concept of creating “France aloft,” Air France executives realized that passengers would also expect the experiences of French culture to transfer to the ground once the plane had landed—especially when traveling to colonial destinations. Coinciding temporally with Air France’s recruitment of female flight attendants, Air

⁴⁰¹ “Non...La Guerre des Sexes N’aura pas Lieu A Air France,” *L’Illustration*, July, 1953. Musée Air France Archives, Paris, France.

⁴⁰² “1948 Manuel de Compagnie Air France,” Air France, 1948 Musée Air France Archives, Paris, France.

⁴⁰³ Ibid, 3.01.07 (2)

⁴⁰⁴ “28 Years of Over Water Flying...Air France,” August 1948, NASM, F1A-300040-01.

France occupied a vital role in France's effort to reconsolidate its colonial holdings in West Africa. Fostering tourism in colonial Africa came to represent a key element of Air France's colonial mission to spread economic and cultural development. One 1946 company publication discussed Air France's expansion and consolidation of services into Africa, remarking that for many individuals, Air France offered their first contact with "a real colony."⁴⁰⁵ The article explained that when coming into contact with the empire for the first time, passengers and employees were commonly amazed by their surroundings, including the climate, wildlife, and native populations. Aware of the potential detraction such new aspects of colonial life could pose for Air France passengers and employees, the magazine highlighted Air France's efforts to develop infrastructure in African colonies that was suitable to European tastes. An article on the topic of "hospitality" that appeared in a 1948 edition of the employee newsletter expressed the importance of extending the hospitality offered to the passenger on the aircraft to the ground as well: "This matter is essential and you can easily imagine how detrimental it would be to our good name that the passenger, pampered inside our aircraft, would be abandoned to himself when at the stopover."⁴⁰⁶

In an article titled, "Pavilions for the colonial stops," appearing in a 1946 edition of the company newsletter, a building plan was announced for the coming year. The article explained that several different factors were taken into account when developing

⁴⁰⁵ *Terre et Ciel: Revue Personnel de La Compagnie Air France*, No. 2 (March 1946): 6, Musée Air France Archives, Paris, France.

⁴⁰⁶ *Terre et Ciel: Revue Personnel de La Compagnie Air France*, No. 19 (January 1948): 13, Musée Air France.

the plan, especially “the prestige of the French colonial policy” in Africa.⁴⁰⁷ The plan outlined a number of facilities to be constructed specific to Air France’s local operations as well as general colonial oversight including customs, police offices, postal offices, and health facilities. Remarking on the plans, the article detailed, “These projects have been designed to offer maximum comfort, though relative, including ventilation and an insulation capacity, in both senses of the word.”⁴⁰⁸ In an effort to make colonial Africa more palatable for employees and passengers, this passage reflects that Air France hoped to maintain a very strict separation between peoples and cultures through facility construction.

A particularly important stopover location for Air France, Dakar, became an early target of modernization efforts. Rather than committing the company to construction projects in this city, Air France invested in the African Hotel Society, whose purpose was the construction of a large hotel in Dakar. While it is not clear whether the African Hotel Society was a French organization or local enterprise, according to a 1948 corporate report, Air France “took a 1,000,000 FR share of capital in the company.”⁴⁰⁹ The report cited the fact that Air France had many routes to and from colonial West Africa that terminated or stopped over in Dakar, making the construction of a modern hotel capable of hosting French and other foreign visitors “particularly urgent.”⁴¹⁰ Air France saw its involvement in hotel construction in Dakar as a model that would spread throughout the

⁴⁰⁷ *Terre et Ciel: Revue Personnel de La Compagnie Air France*, No. 2 (March 1946): 7, Musée Air France.

⁴⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰⁹ “Rapport Sur L’Activité d’Air France en 1948,” July 1949, Paris: Air France Informations, NASM F1A-300050-30

⁴¹⁰ *Ibid.*

region, bringing increased foreign investment. One company article explained, “It is likely that further development of airfields will encourage managers of the hospitality industry to examine closely the new development opportunities that the growth of commercial aviation provides tourism...it is certain that the future crowds brought by air travel will bring a significant increase in the hotel industry.”⁴¹¹

Cartoons such as the following highlighted the potential problems that could arise when the proper level of modern hospitality had not been achieved in colonial locations. [See Figure 1: “These travel agents, no one else thinks of all the little details.”]⁴¹² This cartoon can be read as a European couples’ brush with cannibals in the wilds of a generically inhospitable African nation. Clearly it would not be good for business were this scenario to become a reality from the perspective of the company.

⁴¹¹ *Terre et Ciel: Revue Personnel de La Compagnie Air France*, No. 19 (January 1948): 13, Musée Air France.

⁴¹² This cartoon was found in a collection of undated cartoons in the Musée Air France archives. It is not clear whether it was published or, if so, where. I believe it was produced circa the late 1950s. It is signed “GAD” and I’m currently working to track down more information on the illustrator.



“These travel agents, no one else thinks of all the little details”
Figure 5.2

Throughout Air France’s marketing of travel to colonial West Africa, one can see what Frederick Cooper and Anne Stoler have referred to as one of the “tensions of empire”—a tension increasingly apparent in the context of the late-colonial French Union and its modest nods to African self-government. In the introduction to their edited volume *Tensions of Empire*, Cooper and Stoler argued:

“The most basic tension of empire...that the otherness of colonized persons was neither inherent nor stable; his or her difference had to be defined and maintained...In pursuing a ‘civilizing mission’ designed to

make colonized populations into disciplined agriculturists or workers and obedient subjects of a bureaucratic state, colonial states open up a discourse on the question of just how much ‘civilizing’ would promote their projects and what sorts of political consequences ‘too much civilizing’ would have in store.”⁴¹³

As the previously cited Air France guidebooks to West Africa demonstrated, it was important for the company to present the region as underdeveloped and in need of French economic and technological intervention, but at the same time developed enough to attract French business and tourist travel along with their money. As industrialists engaged in development projects in colonial West Africa had already begun to discover, local populations would form their own political ideas around development projects, as evidenced by the labor strikes of the late 1940s. Additionally, Air France advertisements worked to carefully construct the “otherness of colonized persons” in West Africa in ways that served the interests of the company. While travel guides assured passengers they could find modern facilities on par with those in France wherever Air France landed, they consciously depicted local African populations as decidedly un-modern, which further underscored their need for French cultural uplift.

Numerous marketing pamphlets from the 1940s and 50s deployed the visual image of the modern, white, French airhostess as a contrast against the images of colonized Africans depicted in traditional dress. One 1954 brochure promoting travel to Afrique Noire features the smiling face of a neatly appointed Air France hostess declaring: “It is so much nicer to travel to Afrique Noire by Air France!”⁴¹⁴ Another

⁴¹³ Frederick Cooper and Anne Stoler, eds, *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 7.

⁴¹⁴ Air France Brochure, “Il faut si peu de temps pour aller en Afrique Noire,” September 1954. Musée Air France Archives, Paris, France.

brochure declared, “The time is over when traveling in the ‘black continent’ required several weeks long arduous journey where visitors had to settle for the most basic hotel facilities. The aircraft changed this, like it has changed the face of the African economy. From now on, a flight lasting a few hours, sometimes even a few minutes, separates the main centers of the African land.”⁴¹⁵

To substantiate these claims and demonstrate the utility of the airline in Africa, one travel guide to Afrique Noire reported that 76,000 passengers flew on its African routes in the year 1956. And as if answering the question on everyone’s mind, the guide continued, “The white population of Africa is far from being the only clientele of the air routes. The proportion of African passengers traveling by air is instead increasingly important and their number is growing steadily.”⁴¹⁶ While it is hard to gauge the veracity of such a claim, images such as this cartoon certainly invite an appropriate amount of skepticism over assertions regarding who stands to benefit from air travel. The juxtaposition of the modern air hostess, who is about to fly off to Paris to get her hair done with the generic African woman drawn in a grass skirt, I think, speaks volumes about who’s mobility was of primary concern. [See Figure 2: “If I don’t have to wait too long at my hairdresser’s in Paris, I’ll be back in a few hours.”]⁴¹⁷

⁴¹⁵ Air France Brochure, “Grandes chasses en Afrique,” December 1957. Musée Air France Archives, Paris, France.

⁴¹⁶ *L’Afrique Noire*, 24.

⁴¹⁷ This cartoon was found in a collection of undated cartoons in the Musée Air France archives. It is not clear whether it was published or, if so, where. I believe it was produced circa the late 1950s. It is signed “GAD” and I’m currently working to track down more information on the illustrator.



“If I don’t have to wait too long at my hairdresser’s in Paris, I’ll be back in a few hours”
Figure 5.3

Conclusion

“Listen to me kind sir...” read the caption of a photograph depicting a smiling air hostess whose head tilts toward the camera and fingers delicately cup around her lips in order to confer on readers a highly anticipated word of advice. “It is *because* you’re in the middle of the rush season, because you are tired, overworked, because you’re flirting with colds, grippe and bronchitis that you owe yourself a rest and a change this WINTER,” the advice of the air hostess implored from the cover of a 1954 Air France marketing pamphlet. “A short cruise in the Southern sun and you will come back in top form: you’ll be another man altogether,” she assured. As this chapter has demonstrated, the plea of the air hostess represents one of Air France’s many carefully constructed messages aimed at enticing businessmen and tourists to travel South—to colonial West

Africa—during the postwar period. Air France’s postwar innovation, the air hostess, was entrusted with representing the modern French state aloft. Because of the company’s heavy reliance on French government oversight and funding, Air France became a tool for the French government to wield in its efforts to reestablish French national prestige on the post-war global stage. Specifically, commercial air transport provided by Air France became deeply imbedded in French colonial policy aimed at bringing economic and technological development to West Africa. Air France freight and passenger services encouraged business investment and the development of a tourist industry in the region. Despite investing in local infrastructure, however, Air France’s colonial services ultimately served to perpetuate long-established extractive economic relationships under the guise of a modern and purportedly democratizing technological solution: air transport.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION: COMMERCIAL AVIATION AND THE POST-WAR WOMAN

“There’s something sexy anyway about being sequestered 20,000 feet above the earth almost as close to a strange man as a banana to its skin, motors humming (yours and the plane’s) and nothing to do but get to know each other.”

-- Helen Gurley Brown, *Sex and the Single Girl*⁴¹⁸

Through an analysis of interwar women pilots, Pan American Airways, and Air France, my dissertation examined questions of power and difference in the gendered and racial dynamics of marketing strategies, public relations, and employment within the aviation industry, from 1920-1960. My work has argued that gendered and racial business strategies and views of technology did not develop separately from the aviation industry. Rather, my work showed that understanding modern meanings and patterns of commercial air travel required an examination of how notions of gender, race, and international development determined the course of commercial aviation’s development.

In examining women pilots and companies from across the globe, this dissertation employed a case study approach to explore particular moments in time during which state, commercial, and individual women’s interests coalesced at crucial junctures in commercial aviation’s development. This study’s global approach also demonstrated that aviation emerged as an important state project serving various

⁴¹⁸ Helen Gurley Brown, *Sex and the Single Girl*, (New York: Bernard Geis Associates, 1962), 57.

national interests as it simultaneously fostered global and national connections.⁴¹⁹ In identifying trends in aviation's development across different national contexts, my work argued that universalizing concepts such as modernity and feminism were rooted in specific national contexts, yet also linked by global economic, political, and technological networks. Thus, this examination of commercial aviation's emergence as a global transportation network centered on the tension posed between national interests and global interconnectedness.

In looking at commercial aviation as a lens through which to examine women's experience with modernity, this dissertation demonstrated that women's relationship to aviation and the type of symbolic and physical work they performed within the industry changed over the course of the twentieth century. I plan to conclude by summarizing the key moments of this change while also adding a few new observations gained from the perspective of reflecting back on the completed work.

Chapter one examined women who flew as private pilots in the United States during the interwar period and demonstrated their importance in making commercial aviation seem safe and reliable. Moving beyond the American context, chapter two charted how women pilots in countries such as China and Turkey became symbols of aviation as a national project in an increasingly globalized world. Regardless of their

⁴¹⁹ Historians such as Frederick Cooper have cautioned against global histories that do not adequately address asymmetrical power relations when considering the supposed global interconnectedness of the modern world. In an effort to avoid this potential misstep, my work aims to show that aviation did not operate as a universal globalizing technology that facilitated movement in an even way for everyone around the world. Rather, that companies and states acting in accordance with economic and political interests developed networks of air travel that facilitated exclusive access to particular regions. Frederick Cooper, "What is the Concept of Globalization Good for? An African Historian's Perspective," *African Affairs*, Vol. 100, No. 399 (April 2001) pp. 180-213.

national origin, interwar women pilots all used their highly public positions to advance their professional aims in exceptional ways. That these women were very exceptional is perhaps a fact that I did not consider as thoroughly as I should have within chapters two and three. In fact, it is only after considering interwar women pilots in relation to the WWII/postwar woman airline employee that followed, did I begin to better understand the nature of their exceptional positions, and more importantly, the dual nature of that exceptionalism—its inherent privilege and limitation.

Interwar women pilots were on average well educated and from politically and economically privileged family backgrounds. Their careers within aviation were undoubtedly made possible by their unique access to financial resources. When considered together the interwar women pilots discussed in part one of this dissertation, possess impressive backgrounds. Anne Morrow Lindbergh graduated from Smith College, was the daughter of a United States diplomat, and married famed pilot Charles Lindbergh. Olive Ann Beech began her career as a secretary, but after marrying Walter Beech she co-founded the Beech Aircraft Company and became the first woman to direct an aviation firm. Lee Ya-Ching was the daughter of a wealthy businessman and moved to Geneva (where she learned to fly) with her husband who served as a diplomatic secretary for the United Nations. Sabiha Gökçen was rescued from an orphanage and adopted by the President of Turkey, who petitioned the Turkish Air Force training school to accept her as a pupil. As a result of their exceptional positions, all of these women gained unprecedented access to travel, money, and institutional support. Such support undoubtedly made it possible for them to lead such remarkable lives as pilots and representatives of national progress and technological development.

Beyond their exceptionality, however, these women also shared something else in common: their privileged access to the resources which made their flying careers possible was dependent on the powerful men in their lives. That observation is not made to detract from their agency or accomplishments. Rather, pointing out the contingency of their access highlights the restrictive nature of their positions of privilege. Despite working to establish themselves as pilots and professionals in their own right, these women were unable to fully escape the reality that their entrance into the world of aviation was entirely contingent and, thus, could be just as easily taken away. Interwar women operated within a gender-based hierarchical system that still largely placed women in the private rather than public sphere, even as they fought to change such perceptions.

The outbreak of WWII, however, served as a pivotal point of change. Women entered the aviation industry as employees in unprecedented numbers.⁴²⁰ With middle class women, mothers, and wives being employed outside of the home in larger numbers than ever before, changes came about in societal expectations about women's working patterns and their place in the public realm more generally. Part two of my dissertation demonstrated the rise of women working within commercial airlines during WWII and into the postwar period. This section examined how women as employees of commercial airlines shaped corporate strategy and organization. In many ways, women employed by commercial airlines during this period performed the same symbolic work for the aviation industry as women pilots in the interwar period. Both groups promoted commercial air travel by symbolizing safety and comfort. As both private pilots and

⁴²⁰ This was certainly the case in the US and France at least.

employees, they were also tasked with representing national prestige and progress within aviation's global expansion.

Although interwar women pilots possessed impressive levels of technological authority, women employed in large numbers as stewardesses and passenger services representatives by commercial airlines during WWII possessed no technological expertise in relation to aviation. Rather, they laid claim to a different type of skill—one that depended more on negotiating human emotions and easing the cultural tensions associated with global air travel. Chapters four and five argued that WWII-era women airline employees acted as “everyday diplomats” and navigated the complex terrain of racial hierarchies and language barriers brought about by the jet-age expansion and democratization of flight. During the postwar period, more people were traveling by air than ever before. As employees of Pan Am and Air France, women possessed expert knowledge relating to the process of commercial air travel. Airlines charged women with acculturating passengers to this new travel experience as well as preparing them for the new cultures, peoples, and places they would find on their journeys.

As employees of commercial aviation firms, women's access to work within the aviation industry during WWII and the postwar period depended less on the good graces of the men in their lives or the fortunate family conditions into which they were born. True, they weren't pilots, but they came to experience a new relationship with flight and the world around them as wage earners who increasingly articulated their identities as women in terms of their economic and geographic freedom. It is also important to note that the women who continued to work for airlines in the postwar period possessed their own exceptionality. These women resisted the postwar cultural backlash that urged

women to return to the home and in fact became seen as outliers and symbols of women's independence and sexual liberation.

Areas for further exploration:

Moving forward, I would like to add more national contexts to this analysis. Examinations of interwar women pilots in the Soviet Union, Germany, Brazil, and France would strengthen my claims about the symbolic importance women pilots achieved during the period. Broadening my scope would provide additional evidence of the ways in which ideas about gender, technological development, and nationalism have intersected across varying national contexts.

Although my study ranged from the interwar to the postwar period, my analysis did not adequately address the economic, social, and geopolitical changes that shaped the postwar era as a distinct historical period. My only serious engagement with the postwar period came in chapter five, with my discussion of Air France as a vector of French national power within the declining French empire. In contrast, my examination of Pan Am largely focused on its development of gendered business strategies during WWII and its preparations and strategizing for the imagined future of postwar markets. Although chapter four examined the beginnings of important corporate strategies that shaped the airline after WWII, it did not trace these concepts as they moved through the postwar period. In future iterations of this project, I would like to extend my analysis into the postwar period.

The postwar woman

Just as I have examined closely the transition from the interwar period to WWII, I would like to examine commercial aviation as a window into women's experience with modernity during the postwar period as well. As Helen Gurley Brown's treatise on the modern single woman's sexual power in *Sex and the Single Girl* highlights, "the modern woman" of the interwar period came to represent different ideas about womanhood in the postwar period. Published in 1962, *Sex and the Single Girl* was a modern woman's guide to finding professional fulfillment and sexual liberation that became an instant best seller. Brown described her book as a self-help guide for the average girl "who's not pretty, who maybe didn't go to college and may not even have a decent family background."⁴²¹ Brown partly based the how-to love-guide on her personal experience of being a single professional woman (Brown worked her way up from a secretary to advertising copywriter) until her late marriage at the age of 37.⁴²² *Sex and the Single girl* not only presages the coming of a women's movement that made sexual liberation and equality in the workplace its goals, but Brown's text also alludes to the new and, potentially sexually charged, place that commercial aviation would have in the lives of postwar women.

In future research, I would like to consider "modern women" of the postwar period and their relationship to commercial aviation as employees and an increasingly growing consumer market. In what ways did the modern woman of the postwar period differ from her interwar counterpart? How did understandings of what it meant to be

⁴²¹ Laurie Oullette, "Inventing the Cosmo Girl," *Media, Culture, & Society* (May 1999, 21.3), 361.

⁴²² *Ibid.*

modern change in the postwar period? All of these questions must be considered carefully and thoroughly in future work before I can begin to make claims about commercial aviation as a lens through which to understand women's experience with modernity during the postwar period.

Analyzing the place of women in postwar airline marketing represents a potential direction for future research looking at women's relationship to commercial aviation during the second half of the twentieth century. The process of decolonization in West Africa and Air France's loss of its colonial markets represents an important point of rupture in the postwar period that could reveal important insights into changes in women's lives during the period. A brief discussion of my preliminary research into Air France and decolonization in West Africa provides an example of the type of analysis future research on gender and commercial aviation in the postwar period could yield.

With the coming of decolonization in West Africa during the early 1960s, Air France lost a substantial market that had been subsidized and relatively protected under French imperial interests. After declaring their independence, twelve French speaking African states joined together in 1961 to create an African airline, known as Air Afrique. A true testament to the degree to which Air France had been aligned with the aims of French colonialism in Africa, African leaders as well as the French state decided that a private French airline (UTA) should serve as the commercial partner and technical adviser to the newly minted Air Afrique. In their eyes, retaining Air France as an advising partner would have risked perpetuating the "stigma of French colonialism."⁴²³

⁴²³ Staniland, 130.

Having done very little research into the founding of Air Afrique, at this point it is impossible to make substantial claims regarding the place of women within the corporation. However, photographs and advertising posters from Air Afrique reveal that the new airline certainly imagined and depicted West African women in very different ways than Air France. Air France advertisements that marketed travel to West Africa in the late 1950s largely depicted African women as unclothed representatives of an exotic, underdeveloped foreign culture. Just a few years later, Air Afrique produced advertising posters that featured African women as clothed travelers and participants in a modern consumer economy.



“Vacances au Sénégal,” c. 1965

Figure 6.1

In addition to marketing travel to West African women, Air Afrique also imagined African women as employees. Undoubtedly following in the model of the French airlines that provided support for the founding of the new company, Air Afrique hired air hostesses to service its passengers. Again, while I have little information about the type of work Air Afrique assigned to its air hostesses or the symbolic importance of air hostesses to the company, the following photo of Air Afrique's first group of air hostesses presents a stark contrast to the whiteness of the Air France's air hostess and her assigned task of sanitizing African destinations for French travelers.⁴²⁴



Air Afrique's first Air Hostesses, 1963⁴²⁵
Figure 6.2

⁴²⁴ Christine Yano's work on Pan Am's employment of Japanese stewardesses in the postwar period could serve as a useful model for exploring race and employment within commercial airlines after WWII.

⁴²⁵ Air Afrique's first Air Hostesses, 1963. <http://www.airafrique.eu/les-uniformes-des-hotesses/>. (accessed: 11/1/2016)

How did Air Afrique's air hostesses view themselves in relation to Air France's air hostesses? What types of rhetoric surrounded the establishment of air hostesses at Air Afrique? Did Air Afrique charge its air hostesses with representing national sovereignty and challenging French colonial rule? Are there any comparisons that can be drawn between the place of Air Afrique's air hostesses in the postwar decolonization process and the place of women pilots in China and Turkey during an earlier period of decolonization and nationalist movements? What do the differences reveal? As of now, I have no answers, only questions. But I believe these questions present a fruitful line of inquiry for future research and the extension of my analysis of gender, technological development, and nationalism into the postwar period.

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