

Women in International Cooperation during the Interwar Period: the case of Mexican Palma Guillén

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This paper explores the trajectory of Mexican educator and diplomat Palma Guillén (1898-1975) in different organisations focussed on international cooperation during the interwar period. As an educator, Guillén worked at the Ministry of Public Education, the pillar for the establishment of the post-revolutionary educative and cultural project in Mexico which aimed to expand the access to education and generate national identity. She also taught at the National High School and the National University. Besides, from 1926 to 1928, Guillén cooperated with the activities of the Literature Section at the International Institute of Intellectual Cooperation in Paris. Later, from 1930 to 1932, she worked in the Mexican Delegation at the International Institute of Educational Cinematography in Rome. In 1935 Guillén joined the Mexican Foreign Service, she represented Mexico as Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary in Colombia from 1935 to 1936 and in Denmark from 1936 to 1937. Finally, as a diplomat, from 1938 to 1941, Guillén was Technical Advisor at the Mexican Delegation in the League of Nations and was asked to cover topics of social assistance and international cooperation. By working in these organisations, Guillén was able to establish a dialogue between education, culture and politics, and also to promote a positive image of the Mexican educative and cultural postrevolutionary project in the international arena.

Just as other women from the Americas and Europe, Guillén is part of a history that is currently being written: the history of women in international politics (Delaunay and Denéchère 2006, McCarthy 2014, Sluga and James 2015, Aggestam and Towns 2018). After the Great War, some countries in the Americas and Europe opened foreign services for women to become part of diplomatic and consular activities. This led to the presence of women in Foreign Offices, Ambassies, Legations and Consulates. Furthermore, some women worked as part of national delegations at international organisations such as the League of Nations in Geneva (Switzerland), the International Institute of Intellectual Cooperation in Paris (France), the International Institute of Educative Cinematography (Italy) and Inter-American conferences in the Americas. Such was the case of Chilean diplomat, poet and educator Gabriela Mistral who represented her country in consulates in Spain and Portugal and worked at the International Institute of Intellectual Cooperation in Paris and at the International Institute of Educational Cinematography in Rome during the interwar period (Horan 2009, Wilkins 2015). Another example, Russian politician, feminist and diplomat Alexandra Kollontai, who represented the Soviet Union in Norway, Mexico and Sweden during the interwar period and the second world war, and also participated in the Soviet Union's delegation in Geneva during the 1930s (Ortiz Peralta 2017). In different moments and cities, Guillén worked next to Mistral and Kollontai in these international organisations. Hence, the case of Guillén needs to be explored in connection with other women diplomats to understand the role of women in international organisations and in international relations during the interwar period.

It is important to answer the following questions: Which were the conditions that made it possible for women to participate in international organisations during the interwar period? Which were the conditions that led to Guillén to take part in Mexican multilateral activities? Did women face challenges to exercise activities in multilateral spaces and did Guillén face them as well? Which were the topics women focussed on in international cooperation and what was the role of Guillén in them?

While there has been attention put to Guillén's role as a diplomat in Colombia and Denmark (Huck 1999, Adame 2017, Pompa Alcalá 2019), only Alexandra Pita Gonzalez (2014, 2019, 2021) has explored Guillén's contributions to Mexican international cooperation in multilateral organisations and her connection with Mistral. This paper aims to contribute to this bibliography. Based on primary sources from the Historical Archive of the Mexican Ministry of Foreign Affairs as well as the Archive of the League of Nations, this

paper will reconstruct Palma Guillén's career in international organisations focussed on international cooperation during the interwar period. With the use of secondary sources, her case will be connected to that of other women diplomats in international cooperation. The analysis considers the Gender Turn in Diplomacy and New Diplomatic History, approaches that invite us to consider women in international relations as well as institutions, norms and practices of diplomacy (Towns 2017, Aggestam and Towns, 2019).

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